

We're excited you're thinking about starting a program to recover food and help your community.



INSPIRE OTHERS

Organizational
Overview



Introduction

Food Forward recovers fruits and vegetables from backyard fruit trees, orchards, farmers markets, the downtown Los Angeles Wholesale Produce Market district, and occasionally farms. This produce is donated to hundreds of direct-service hunger relief agencies across Southern California.

From 2009 to 2020, Food Forward's programs have rescued over 120 million pounds — or more than 480 million servings — of fresh produce, preventing over 33,700 metric tons of carbon equivalent from polluting the atmosphere.

With a small staff, hundreds of community partners, and the power of thousands of volunteers, we helped over 2 million Southern Californians experiencing food insecurity in 2020 alone.

To learn more about our journey, check out our [timeline](#).



Mission

Food Forward **fights hunger** and **prevents food waste** by rescuing fresh surplus produce, connecting this abundance with people experiencing food insecurity and inspiring others to do the same.

Why we do it

According to the USDA in 2018, approximately 11% of the U.S. population experiences food insecurity. Individuals experiencing homelessness, seniors, college students, veterans, LGBTQ+ folks, single-parent households, and Black- and Latino-headed households experience higher rates of food insecurity. Meanwhile, the National Resources Defense Council estimates that up to 40% of food in the U.S. is wasted.

Head to our website to learn more about [food waste](#) and [food insecurity](#), the challenges that drive our work.

How we do it

Food Forward has three programs: **Backyard Harvest**, **Farmers Market Recovery**, and **Wholesale Recovery**.

We started in 2009 with a grassroots group of volunteers through Backyard Harvest and expanded over time, becoming a 501(c)(3) in 2011.

As we continued working to rescue food and donate it in our community, we saw more opportunities to address the issue of food waste, found more willing collaborators, and added programs. Our Backyard Harvest and Farmers Market Recovery programs are primarily volunteer-powered. We train volunteers to become Event Leaders, and those Event Leaders then lead volunteers at our produce recovery events. Volunteers sign up for events through our website.

Backyard Harvest:

This program sends teams of volunteers to harvest fruit from trees, primarily at people's homes or in large orchards. Each outing includes trained volunteer Pick Leaders, who oversee the harvesting. Pick Leaders can harvest on their own or lead events with volunteers who come to harvest and receive training at the event.

Each Pick Leader brings along a "Pick Leader Box," which has equipment, first-aid supplies, volunteer release forms, and more. They also bring along harvesting equipment and the appropriate number of boxes for the harvest.

After the fruit has been harvested (usually taking around two hours), a hunger relief agency assigned to that harvest comes to collect the boxes. Alternatively, sometimes the Pick Leader delivers the boxes to the organization.

As of 2020, this program has three full-time staff in Los Angeles County and one full-time staff and one part-time staff in Ventura County.





Farmers Market Recovery:

The Farmers Market Recovery program began in 2012 at the Santa Monica Wednesday Farmers Market. We established a relationship with the market manager, who agreed to let us “glean” the market. As the benefits to the farmers and greater community became evident, we added markets based on two criteria:

- Their capacity to provide enough boxes of produce for at least one hunger relief agency to benefit from.
- The presence of enough vendors who aren't already donating to us at one or more other markets.

After establishing a relationship with the manager of a potential new market, we ask vendors of varying sizes whether they have leftover produce most weeks that they would want to donate.

At Farmers Market Recovery events, teams of volunteers, led by a trained Glean Team Leader, walk through the market near closing time and ask vendors if they would like to donate any produce. If they do, the vendors tell us the appropriate number of boxes needed and begin to fill them. Once the market has ended, our volunteers round up the boxes. The boxes are then weighed according to the vendor and distributed among the agencies that come to collect the produce.

Events usually last between one and three hours.

As of 2020, this program has two full-time staff in Los Angeles County and one part-time staff in Ventura County.

As of 2020, we receive over 50 types of produce from 270+ vendors each year.

We receive the most boxes of greens, and the most pounds of root vegetables.

Wholesale Recovery:

The Wholesale Recovery program began in 2014 and is our only entirely staff-run program. The program employs over ten full-time staff to recover, organize, and track produce.

This program involves large-scale recovery of single varieties of produce, by the pallet, at the Los Angeles Wholesale Market and surrounding area.

Our staff communicates with wholesalers who have surplus produce they aren't able to sell due to cosmetic imperfections, oversupply, or other reasons.

Once the type and amount of produce to be donated has been established, our drivers head out with large box trucks to inspect and collect it. (Each of our trucks can fit about 15,000 pounds of produce.) The trucks then either directly deliver the pallets to a regional food bank or other large hunger relief agency or transport them to Food Forward's wholesale warehouse, the Produce Pit Stop.

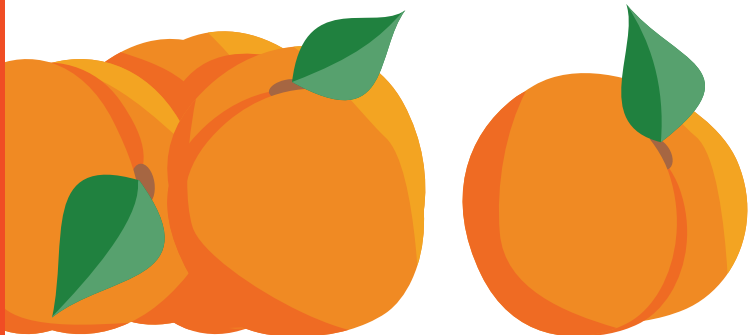
At the Produce Pit Stop, pallets of produce are sorted and placed in dry storage or our large walk-in refrigerator.

Things to consider

Larger agencies with box trucks receive between 10 and 24 pallets of produce. Smaller agencies with vans, cars, or small trucks receive customized mixed pallets of produce; our staff unpacks and repacks these pallets to ensure several produce varieties.

We have also organized several Produce Pick-Up events with our community partners, in which volunteers sort out any bad produce from pallets and distribute it directly to community members.

- Start small. Our three programs are the result of over a decade of growth as an organization, many staff members, and a robust fundraising department. We recommend starting with one type of recovery and building a program around that. Only expand if it feels right and you have the resources to do so.
- Your programs are where the work of your organization gets done. They are also the most outward-facing part of your organization, and the success of your programs drives donations, volunteering and other engagement, and growth.
- Be flexible and adaptable. The world of produce recovery requires you to take fast action and be nimble and creative. The way your programs look and work may change over time, and that's OK.



For more booklets visit
foodforward.org