

Case Study

Food Rescue Program Serves Needy In Jackson County

DEQ solid waste grants & food waste

DEQ's Solid Waste and Recycling Grant Program enables local governments, food banks and local businesses to develop new ways to get edible food to needy Oregon families instead of having the food go into landfills.

DEQ awards grants each year to local governments for recycling and solid waste prevention and reduction projects. Grant funds come from part of fees paid to dispose of municipal waste.

In Oregon, food waste makes up more than 16 percent (448,200 tons) of the materials going to landfills and continues to grow every year. It is difficult to determine how much of the food is edible. However, even if only 1 percent was donated rather than thrown away, nine million pounds of food could be available to help agencies that feed the needy.

DEQ, Jackson County, ACCESS team up

In 2002, Jackson County applied for and received a DEQ solid waste grant. The county in turn passed the funds on to ACCESS Inc., a non-profit community action program that provides services to low-income residents in the county. The grant funds an innovative Food Rescue Program that links social service agencies with businesses to help provide food to needy Jackson County families and individuals.

Staff from the county's Environmental Health Division helped create stringent safety standards to ensure that any salvageable food was safe to eat. A number of other grants and funding sources were used including a corporate in-kind contribution of a refrigerated truck.

Once the funds were available, ACCESS's coordinator for the new Food Rescue Program began to contact area grocery stores, restaurants, institutions, caterers and farms to coordinate the logistics of getting edible food to the people who need it.

Rogue Valley Manor

Rogue Valley Manor, a continuing care retirement community in Medford, Oregon, provides independent and special care. Three separate kitchens with more than 30 staff prepare up to 52,000 meals a month, served in large formal dining rooms.

Rogue Valley Manor Chef Richard Pool worked with ACCESS to set up a system that would run

smoothly in the retirement community's busy kitchens. "My initial reaction was very positive and I felt pretty confident that ACCESS could do this," recalls Chef Pool. "Two things were key for us. First, the food is collected on a daily basis. Second, the logistics of pickup are well laid out with little inconvenience for the staff. After each meal, our staff inventories the food that has not been served and determines what can be donated. That food is then covered and placed in a quick-cooling unit in existing containers. The next morning the food is transferred to ACCESS containers, labeled, dated and placed in a designated area of the cooler to be picked up later in the day for distribution.

"Before we began working with ACCESS we didn't have many options for our leftovers," Chef Pool continues. "We could reformulate some items to be used in soups; however, a substantial amount of food ended up in the garbage. The system we've developed in our kitchen doesn't significantly increase staff work load, and everyone feels good about having the food go to those in need and not wasted.



Chef Richard Pool of Rogue Valley Manor

"Working with this large volume of food in a facility this size means there's always going to be leftovers," he adds. "We donate a small portion of what we produce, but now there is a way to utilize all of it."

Rooster'S Restaurant

"When ACCESS Food Rescue Coordinator first approached me I thought: 'Great idea, but in a society where fast-food restaurants are getting sued because people are claiming they're getting fat, it can't work,'" says Rooster'S Restaurant owner Jim Potter. Rooster'S is an American



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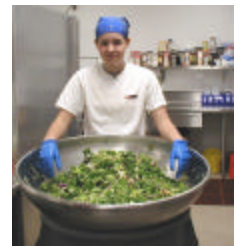
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*Salad prepared in the
ACCESS kitchen to be
served at a soup kitchen*

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home-style restaurant that serves more than 300 meals a day of fried chicken, fresh fruit and cream pies. “To be honest, the idea scared me, but then the coordinator gave me information about the law that protects donors, and I gave it a second thought,” recalls Potter. The Oregon Good Samaritan laws (ORS Chapter 30.890 and 30.892) and the Federal Good Samaritan laws (The Bill Emerson Food Donation Act) state that you cannot be held liable if you have donated food you believe to be safe and edible. (See side panel on this page for laws.)

Once Potter began donating, he found plenty of advantages. Trying to gauge the number of chickens needed daily is tricky and, for a restaurant specializing in chicken dinners, it’s not good to run out. In addition, pies are made up to three times a day to make sure they’re fresh. Now, the kitchen staff makes extras that usually get served, but if some are untouched, they get picked up by ACCESS the next day.

“Why wouldn’t a business want to do this?” says Potter. “With this program I meet my demand and help my community.”



Jim Potter, owner, Rooster 'S Restaurant

ACCESS: emergency food provider

ACCESS has been providing emergency food and nutrition programs in Jackson County for more than 25 years. In recent years, the economy and jobs have declined in the area. As the demand for food has grown, the amount of food available has decreased. ACCESS is one of 20 regional distribution members of the Oregon Food Bank that helps distribute food statewide to more than 780 food pantries, residential shelters, day care centers and senior programs .

An ACCESS Food Rescue driver makes daily rounds. Chicken and pies from Rooster’S will be delivered directly to one of ACCESS’s 15 food pantries. The rest of the food will go to ACCESS’s new state-of-the-art kitchen. The already prepared food will be repackaged, weighed, dated and quickly refrigerated. “Our goal is 72 hours. That’s when we want to see the already prepared food pass from donation point

to the emergency food site,” says Philip Yates, ACCESS Nutrition Programs Director.

Sites that serve hot meals may also receive food that has been prepared with some of the raw ingredients by ACCESS’s on-site chef, staff and volunteers. At other sites, the labeled food is placed in an on-site refrigerator that will hold the food for distribution by volunteers. Clients are able to choose from the prepared foods along with fresh fruits and vegetables. During the summer months some of the vegetables come from the agency’s own garden. “Often we post the list of donors so clients know where the good food is coming from. For working families who arrive home late, the prepared food is a great supplement for traditional food bank supplies of dried beans, pasta and potatoes.” says Yates.



Repackaged food in ACCESS’s refrigerated storage

Reaching Oregon waste reduction goals

The 100,000 pounds of food that ACCESS captures out of the waste stream may not seem like a lot, knowing that more than 448,000 tons of food goes to Oregon landfills annually. “But that’s not the only measurement,” says Martine Roberts-Pillon, DEQ project coordinator who works with food rescue grant recipients. “This program meets two very important solid waste management goals : Oregon law states that the best way to reduce waste is not to create it in the first place, and this promotes using materials at their highest and best value. When you look at it this way, you’re not wasting food when you’re feeding people, and it is even a better choice than composting.”

This food recovery program also helps the environment by reducing the amount of edible food that fills landfills. It also saves tipping and hauling costs. The 100,000 pounds of edible food this program recovers provides 100,000 meals. At a value to food banks of \$1.67 per pound, the food ACCESS collects is worth \$167,000.

“Citizens and the environment both win with this program,” says DEQ’s Roberts-Pillon.

References

Oregon Food Bank Website:
<http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/index.html>

USDA Good Samaritan Food Donation Act
<http://www.usda.gov/news/pubs/gleaning/appc.htm>

Oregon Good Samaritan Law ORS Chapter 30.890
<http://landru.leg.state.or.us/ors/030.html>