

Organics Management Guide Submission

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Select the Primary Entity Type Please identify the category that best represents your project: Food Rescue Organizations

Questions:

- 1. Background: Provide context for the program, project, or policy — why it was developed, when it began, and the problem or opportunity it addresses.**

Cascadia Produce is a small produce distributor that has been active in food security and large scale waste aversion since 2020. With just seven employees, our business works alongside more than 50 food security organizations across Washington to source healthy, respectful food for people in need. We specialize in sourcing food from Washington producers, along with low-cost surplus produce and wholesale food that has been rejected from retail markets due to cosmetic or logistical reasons.

Cascadia is able to receive the food in our cooler, and then contact the title holder to work out the path of this food to a plate. We enter into an agreement with seller to find a buyer for whatever food it is possible to sell within our large network, and remit back as much as possible to the grower/title holder to mitigate financial losses due to the rejection. Our first goal is to make sure farmers are paid for their work, the second goal is to make sure no food is wasted.

Each year, Cascadia moves approximately 10 million pounds of food through our warehouse—while generating less than one cubic yard of compost per week. Our model prioritizes food recovery at every stage. All food passes through value layers: first we attempt to sell it near market rate, then at a discount, then we donate everything we can while still edible, and finally we work with animal farms to ensure that anything inedible for humans is still put to productive use. Nothing is landfilled.

In 2022, we were awarded an Industrial Symbiosis Grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce to expand this work. Through the grant, we opened our warehouse to receive food rejected from regional retail distribution centers 24/7 and began posting availability on a shared platform called The Good Food Forum, in partnership with the Good Business Network of Washington and Cedar Grove Composting.

This was a new approach: creating a transparent, aggregated marketplace where organizations could see what food was available in their region and purchase it in quantities as small as five cases. Under the grant we were able to offer delivery. Our original goal under the grant was to divert 800,000 pounds of food from potential landfill.

In just nine months, we recovered more than 3.5 million pounds of retail-rejected food—far exceeding our goal and helping all understand the size of the opportunity. Post-grant we continued this work. Sales of this product covered minimal storage and handling costs while increasing access to fresh, affordable food for food security partners and small businesses.

Importantly, by helping organizations stretch their budgets through access to surplus and recovered food, many were also able to purchase more Washington-grown products from our local farm partners—strengthening our regional food system while reducing waste.

2. Summary: Briefly describe the initiative, including its goals, location, and primary outcomes.

Our goal is to increase food access for Washingtonians by utilizing surplus and recovered food to create space in the market for higher-priced, locally grown products purchased by food security organizations.

Owner Jeremy Vrablik brings 25 years of experience in the produce industry and understands that the food system often functions like a colander—perfectly good food can be pushed out of standard markets for reasons that sometimes defy common sense. That industry knowledge allows Cascadia to create a streamlined system that makes delivering retail-rejected and anomalous food to our warehouse the easiest and most cost-effective option for farmers managing stranded product in the region.

Retail rejections happen for many reasons: cosmetic standards, shifting market conditions, labeling issues, or sudden changes in demand. Cascadia evaluates the food's quality, current market dynamics, and resale potential. With that information, the farmer or title holder can make an informed decision about the best path forward. If donation is the right solution, we help identify a nonprofit partner that is well suited to receive the

product based on type and format, and we facilitate both logistics and required donation documentation.

In addition to regional retail recoveries, Cascadia partners with a large California farm to bring surplus produce to Washington using sub-optimized trucking routes to reduce both cost and environmental impact. This surplus is posted—alongside retail rejections—on The Good Food Forum, a transparent platform open to anyone interested in viewing availability and coordinating purchases. Buyers may arrange pickup or delivery.

Unlike retail rejections, which remain “open” inventory and are paid to the farmer after sale, surplus produce is pre-purchased by Cascadia at a deeply discounted rate—still five times more than the farm had previously received for unsold product. This model benefits the farm, expands access to affordable fresh food for Washington food security organizations, and generates substantial donations when surplus cannot be sold.

This program has resulted in millions of pounds of fresh food donated across Washington State, with costs offset by sales within the same category. In our system, farmers are paid, people are fed, and nothing is wasted.

3. Percent of Overall Diverted Material: If available, include data or estimates on the portion of the community or organization’s total diverted material no longer associated with the waste stream that this program or policy addresses.

Our Industrial Symbiosis grant ended in July 2023 (where we were funded for this work). Since then we have continued the program without subsidy, receiving 5,944,476 lbs of retail rejected, of which 3,288,033 lbs were sold (and title holders were paid) and went to feeding people, 291,894 lbs were donated to animal feed (pig farm), and just 16,536 lbs were composted. Nothing went to landfill. Retail rejections are at particular risk of waste because of tight trucking schedules and limited cold storage accessible 24/7 without appointment.

At the same time, Cascadia has purchased 3,713, 958 lbs of CA surplus produce from a large farm partner (overgrown as part of business model to serve broadliners consistent quality and volume). All of this is sold or donated or goes to pig farm as well.

4. Key Program Elements or Policy Provisions: Describe the structure and main components of your program or policy. Explain the investments origins (who, how much). Please include as many of the following elements as applicable:

What types of materials are being managed? (e.g., surplus recoverable foods, food scraps, wasted food. How are these materials managed? Who is responsible for managing them? (Organizations, agencies, businesses, or other entities) What products are generated, and how are they utilized or managed? (e.g., compost, animal feed, energy products) Who funds the management of these materials? (Funding sources, grants, partnerships) Who generates these materials? (Identify the origin: households, institutions, businesses, etc.)

We manage retail rejected foods, surplus foods, and local foods.

We manage them as a business - leveraging large farm surplus to pay our overhead so we can offer affordable storage and distribution to our local, WA farmers of all backgrounds and sizes.

We manage this internally with a very small team. We have a large cooler and a small fleet of trucks purchased with profits from a federal foodbox program. Experience in produce, a large network of buyers funded by various grants and community donations, and a platform that makes this anomalous food visible is the recipe for this success.

We don't generate products (except maybe pig food of product that isn't fit for humans), but we make them visible and accessible at a low cost. We avert food from landfill by giving it a cost effective place to be received along with a path to a plate. This also gives non profits choice of available products, while also offering them free food that hasn't been claimed in the initial choice-offering.

Cascadia is often grant funded to source and distribute food, but have not been for this particular program since July 2023. Everything we do requires radical partnership as we help smaller and non-status-quo organizations access fresh food.

Materials are generated initially by farms, but secondarily by retailers who reject them as they arrive for delivery in the region. Surplus is grown in case of a retail rejection, so when the first round is received, the back up produce becomes food without a market, generating potential waste of perfectly good food.

- 5. Regulatory Impact: Describe how laws, policies, regulations, and/or code have affected your program or project. This may include positive, negative, or neutral impacts. Consider noting which regulations apply, how they influenced implementation or operations, any challenges or barriers encountered, and how compliance requirements shaped program decisions.**

We are sometimes misunderstood for purchasing food that some believe should be donated directly to food security organizations. However, the reality is that these systems do not always align as neatly as they might appear.

Immediate donation can overlook the real costs already incurred in growing, harvesting, packaging, and transporting that food. When those costs are not recovered at any point in the chain, they must be absorbed elsewhere—often rolled into future pricing—contributing to inflation and higher costs across the system. Farmers and businesses should have the opportunity to recoup at least a portion of their investment before donation occurs.

There are also practical considerations. Donation appointments are not always available, and most food banks are not equipped to receive full truckloads of a single rejected commodity. A centralized hub that works closely with farms, buyers, and donation-only nonprofits provides a critical layer of coordination and equity in the system. That intermediary layer ensures food is evaluated, right-sized, and directed to the most appropriate outlet—whether sale or donation.

Under our program, grant-funded organizations are able to purchase food at well below retail—and often below full wholesale—pricing. This allows them greater choice, cultural relevance, and the ability to select right-sized quantities for their communities. When need exceeds funding, additional product can be directed into donation channels. The result is a balanced, resilient system that supports growers, stretches nonprofit budgets, and maximizes food access.

From the outside, this approach can appear counterintuitive. In practice, it creates a virtuous cycle—one in which farmers are partially compensated, food security partners gain affordable access and flexibility, and more food ultimately reaches people instead of landfills.

At this time, we have not identified specific laws, policies, or codes that have significantly impeded or directly enabled this particular program.

6. Measurable Increase in Supply: Include data or qualitative outcomes showing growth in collection, diversion, or reuse volumes if available.

Because our customers (food security) are often grant funded and it's been a hard year for federal and state funding, we anticipated a sharp dip in sales in 2025. While it was hard and required higher effort and hustle as our customers became more budget constrained, we have managed to bring in the same amount of surplus food (we control amount) and retail rejected food (we don't control, but always say yes). Our numbers have been steady

in a year of challenging economics for food security. In fact, though we lost some customers who lost funding entirely, others started shopping with us because they needed a higher volume for less and were willing to try new avenues.

7. Behavior Change: Describe whether the initiative resulted in measurable behavior change and explain how you determined this. If behavior change occurred, outline the strategies that proved most effective. Please include any available data or evidence that supports your findings.

Our whole program has been behavior change. We believe that making a process repeatable is all about solving a problem for someone else - aka, the farm or the trucker or the foodbank. Everytime we make something easier or less expensive, we win loyalty and understanding from our network. We are in the business of solving food problems and creating a new system that has equity of access, payment for work, and is solves for volume, quality, and food safety. We work with small farmers from different backgrounds and food security organizations who have never worked within the food system. Everything we do is behavior change. We often host warehouse tours so people can better visualize how food moves around and our role in redirecting food without a market.

8. Benefits and Impacts (Economic, Environmental, and Social): Describe the economic, environmental, and social sustainability impacts of the program, policy, or initiative. This may include both positive and negative outcomes. You may address impacts such as costs or savings, job creation, waste reduction, emissions, resource conservation, community engagement, equity, or public health. Please include data or qualitative observations where available and note any trade-offs or challenges.

We have seen huge increases on how far funding can go for food security organizations buying in bulk. Cascadia has maintained our employees, full time with benefits, during a downturn. We have averted millions of pounds of good food from potential waste at the landfill, which may even be wasted by disappearing invisibly into larger scale wholesale more concerned about food that they have bought and sold rather than anomalous loads of orphaned food.

9. How Stakeholder Buy-In Was Achieved: Explain how the program gained support from key stakeholders (e.g., government agencies, businesses, residents, nonprofits).

Our stakeholder buy in was reached with industry experience (for people working in the status quo food system) and with demonstrated creativing, agility, and professionalism in emergency food. Under federal, state, county, and other programs we worked closely with food security partners to get them to understand how retail rejections and surplus food fit in with their distributions methods, and how it can benefit them to work with small business who can react rapidly to their needs. We stood up an access platform that not only anyone can join and see, anyone can post there. The Good Food Forum is open to other posters as well as Cascadia Produce, though we are the anchor poster. This makes it an open sources resource for anyone that has or is seeking food that is below regular wholesale value and available in the region.

10. Stakeholders' Perspectives and Dynamics at Play: Highlight collaboration dynamics, challenges, or differing stakeholder interests and how they were addressed.

Our system is not like others and getting people to understand our unique access to food and how it can work for them has been a slow and steady job over years. Cascadia shows up everywhere we can - conferences, auctions, community event, so that our food security clients can understand we are in this with them and for them, but utilizing our knowledge of the regular wholesale system to bring new value and opportunity to the nonprofit food sector.

11. Lessons Learned: Share what worked well, what didn't, and recommendations for others seeking to replicate your approach.

What worked well was showing up in person, over and over again, with one pager print outs to describe our complex process in simple terms and visuals. What didn't work well was having different places ppl had to look for the different types of food we offer (rejections, suplus, local, regular wholesale). Soon we are launching another site where all that can be viewed and purchased together.