

Executive Summary

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April 25, 2019

Engaging with Food Recovery at Devour Culinary Classic

Local First Arizona

The American food system creates a significant amount of waste and relies on significant energy, land, and freshwater inputs, accounting for a large amount of the United States GHG emissions. Across the supply chain, a total of 40-50% of all food is not consumed. Reducing food waste is a way to decrease the impacts of the food system across the supply chain. At present, restaurants do not know of options available to them to mitigate their food waste and decrease their impact on climate change. For this project I partnered with Local First Arizona to use food recovery, or donating unused food to organizations that serve food insecure people, as an attempt to close the loop between the food that is being wasted and those who struggle to meet their caloric needs.

Devour Culinary Classic (DCC) is an annual weekend long food festival in Phoenix, AZ, taking place each February. Local First Arizona organizes the “Towards Zero Waste” efforts for the event. Their Green Team is in charge of all waste management including composting, recycling, and back of house waste sorting. In order to increase waste diversion rates, Local First Arizona was interested in adding food recovery into their Towards Zero Waste efforts. This would allow usable leftover food to be donated instead of being composted or thrown out.

For this project I acted as one of Local First Arizona’s project leads and organized the food recovery effort that took place at DCC. Using lessons learned from subject matter experts and existing project management knowledge, I crafted a plan to educate restaurants about food recovery at the beginning of the event and collect food to donate at the end of the event.

The restaurants at received information about food donation and were prompted to donate at the end of the event. In total, 24 restaurants donated food, diverting 500 pounds of food, or 7% of all diverted waste, from the event’s waste stream. Donations were given to refugees recently released from ICE custody through a partnership with Arizona Jews for Justice. Following the event, recommendations on how to improve the project in future years were given to Local First Arizona in the categories of organization & logistics, marketing, communication, financial, and sustainability.

A diffusion of innovation framework was used to identify the barriers faced by restaurants and analyzed how food festivals are a way to overcome those barriers. Barriers that were identified included a lack of education about food recovery and how it can be applied to restaurants and lack of knowledge about the restaurant’s liability or lack thereof when donating food. The food festival was used as an opportunity to educate restaurants in an attempt to overcome those barriers through direct communication. Future research and projects can find a way to integrate all of these barriers, using festivals as an entry point to follow up with

restaurants and work with them directly to overcome additional barriers as they present themselves.