

Food Recovery Network Continues to Prosper at University

Friday, March 16, 2018, *By Keone Weigl*

This year's National Nutrition Month theme is "Go Further with Food." This theme focuses on how our food choices can impact our bodies and our world. This article observes this theme by sharing one way Syracuse University Food Services works with a student group help to reduce food waste.

Do you ever wonder what happens to the leftover food in Syracuse University's dining centers? Food Services does its best to reduce food waste by carefully planning each day's production and composting. But even so, it's impossible to end up with zero leftovers at the end of each day. That's why the Food Recovery Network (FRN) is so important.



Food Recovery Network volunteers are, front row left to right: Becky Stromfeld, Shewa Shwani, Regina Northouse, Haley Gladitsch and Luella Bond; back row left to right: Molly Suba, Zoë Klobus, Angie Espino and Harris Eisenhardt

The FRN is a national organization that donates unused food from the University's dining centers, cafes and student centers. Locally, the food collected from the dining centers is distributed to social wellness agencies such as homeless shelters, transitional housing organizations, refugee programs, children's programs and more.

In 2014, an FRN student group was formed at Syracuse University and SUNY ESF. At the time, donations were collected two days a week from one SU dining center and the Trailhead Cafe on the SUNY ESF campus. The first year, the group packaged and delivered over 5,000 pounds of food.

Since then, the program has grown substantially. The Food Recovery Network now collects from all five of Syracuse University's dining centers and Schine Dining in addition to the Trailhead Café at SUNY ESF.

They pick up and deliver food five days a week, up to four times a day. Additional support from several student organizations has helped keep up with the extra pick-up and deliveries. The Syracuse University chapters of New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Alpha Phi Omega (APO) and Students for Sustainability have all offered their time. Volunteers must go through basic food safety training given by University staff managers before participating in the program.

Each recovery requires a team of three to five students. A typical recovery takes just over an hour. Food Services staff assist the volunteers with food retrieval and packaging.

When the program started in 2014, the FRN delivered to two organizations. Today, they deliver to seven. Shewa Kamaran Shwani, president of the Syracuse Food Recovery Network, keeps all the deliveries and volunteers on track. She and Mark Tewksbury, Food Services Director of Residential Dining, surveyed all the charities last spring to get an idea of their individual needs in order to organize deliveries. Shwani admits that keeping all the volunteers and recoveries organized and on schedule is challenging. “We are fortunate to have a nine-person student executive board that helps keep the FRN working like a well-oiled machine!” she says.

The FRN board members who work together to manage the volunteers, pick-up and deliveries, and client needs are: Angie Espino, Harris Eisenhardt, Becky Stromfeld, Tucker Schnaars, Haley Gladitsch, Luella Bond, Jemila Smith and Lexi Chipules.

The charitable organizations have benefited in many ways. They all face budget constraints, so the food donations help relieve some of the food budget pressure. This enables them to focus on their organization’s primary mission. It also gives their guests access to a wide variety of foods.

A manager from one of the local charities says, “With the rising costs of food, the FRN has really helped stretch our food budget. The student volunteers also make a difference in our community and the lives of our guests.”

As a result of the FRN’s hard work and their partnership with SU Food Services, over 61,000 pounds of food has been donated since October 2014. Future plans for the FRN are to add additional organizations, continue the positive relationship with SU Food Services and recruit more student organizations to help keep the project on track.