

# Food Waste in the Midst of COVID-19

May 21, 2020



**ReFED**

Rethink Food Waste  
*Through Economics and Data*



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## About ReFED

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ReFED is a national nonprofit with a holistic view of the food system, working to advance solutions to reduce the amount of food wasted in the US.

We leverage data, insights, and innovation to identify inefficiencies throughout the food supply chain and highlight economic opportunities to reduce food waste.

*Advancing  
data-driven  
solutions*



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## Our Mission

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We motivate and mobilize a diverse set of stakeholders across the food system to activate solutions to reduce the amount of food that goes to waste in the U.S.

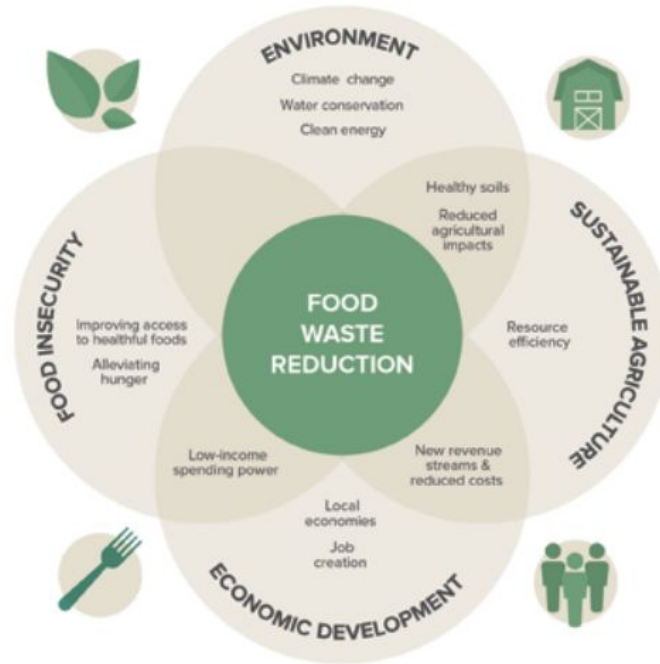
## Our Vision

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A thriving food system that optimizes resources, minimizes climate impacts, and enhances food security.

*Advancing  
data-driven  
solutions*

Food waste has critical implications for food security, economic development, and climate change.



# COVID-19: Unprecedented times for the food system

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# What We've Done

## Stakeholder Engagement

20+ meetings and webinars  
spanning our networks

## COVID-19 Qualitative Survey

80+ respondents from  
across stakeholder groups



# Highest-level themes related to food waste

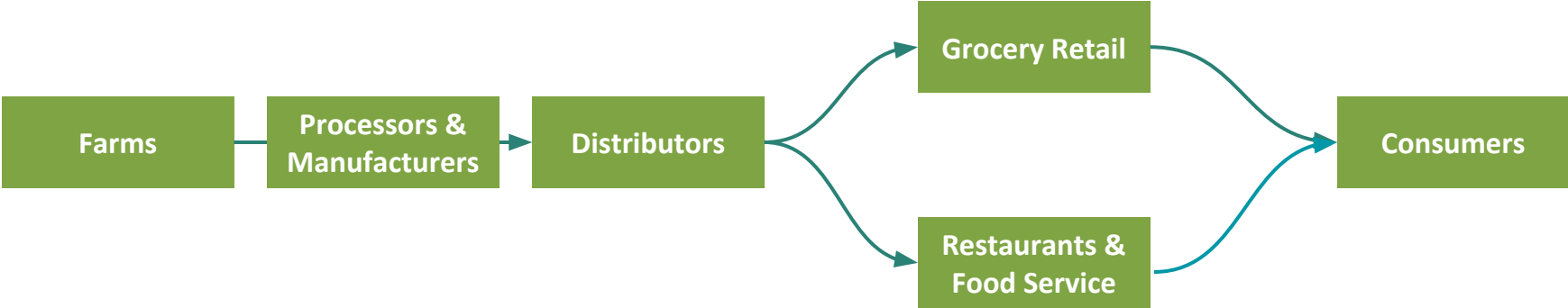
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- Abrupt closure of food service, restaurants, and hospitality has led to an excess of food up the supply chain, much of which may go to waste.
- E-commerce has seen exponential growth. This could have interesting long-term implications for waste reduction.
- The food assistance organizations will need more food than will be donated, meaning they will need money to buy it (in addition to pack, transport, etc..)
- Food is high priority right now, but waste is low. This could have implications for packaging for years to come.



# COVID-19's Effect on the Food System

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# COVID-19's Effect: Farms

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- **Waste increases** as demand drops due to restaurant closures, flight / cruise cancellations, etc.
- **Rise of e-commerce** as farmers and consumers look for alternative channels.
- **Potential supply risk** due to farm labor shortage from immigration restrictions, COVID-19 itself, or both.
- ~~Closure of Farmer's Markets~~ difficult for smaller farmers.

# COVID-19's Effect: Processors & Manufacturers

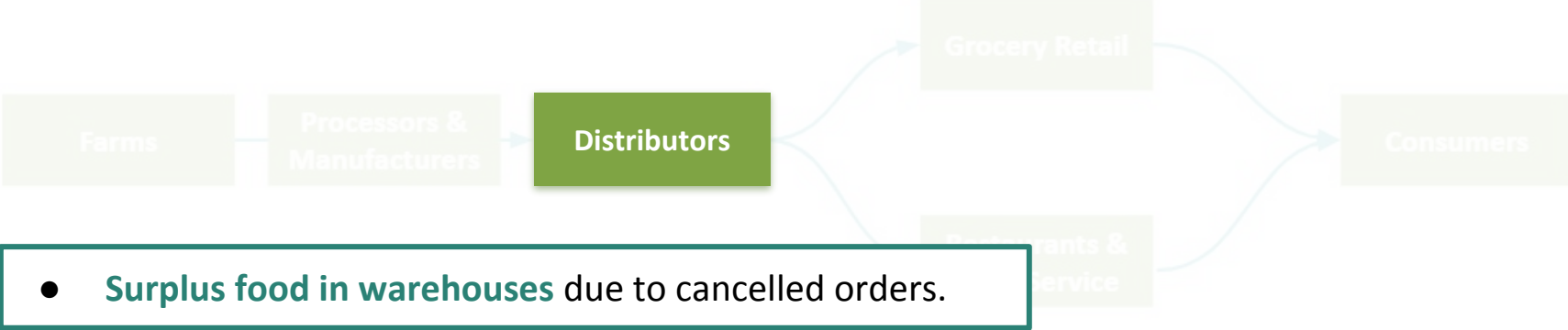
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- **2-3 times normal demand** from grocery retailers.
- **Social distancing and employee illness** could affect production.
- **Shifting production to fight pandemic** (e.g., beverage alcohol makers making hand sanitizer).
- **Upcyclers experiencing input shortages** if/when processors stop or change production lines.

# COVID-19's Effect: Distributors

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# COVID-19's Effect: Grocery Retail

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- **Demand surge** means fewer donations to food banks.
- **E-commerce has spiked** as consumers stay home.
- **Struggling to fulfill orders** for curbside pickup and delivery.
- **Volumes shifting** from foodservice to retail.
- **Volatility in sales expected**, which makes forecasting very difficult and could lead to surplus and waste.
- **Potential long-term shift** toward eating more at home.



# COVID-19's Effect: Restaurants and Food Service

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- **One-time food surpluses** from shelter-in-place orders. where food is donated, preserved, or wasted.
- **Operations shifts** to dine-out.
- **Mass closures** are likely.
- **Changeovers to community kitchens** making meals. for the food insecure and health workers.

# COVID-19's Effect: Consumers

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- **Waste increases likely** due to bulk buying behaviors (e.g., spoilage, past date product) and in-home cooking (e.g., inedible parts, unconsumed leftovers).
- **More cooking** could lead to increase grocery demand, improved skills and ideally, less waste in future.

# Challenges We're Hearing from Front-Line Operators...

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“We don't have the *proper storage* if we were to get the amount of *perishable food needed to feed the communities*. We need *money to support our staff* who is on the front-lines distributing food.”

“Our borrowed *warehouse space has stopped access* to the building for our program for the time being.”

“Our *regular streams of food are down* while we are *receiving large and unpredictable donations from restaurants and institutions* that are closing.”

“Once we identify a location that has surplus, *the challenge is connecting to a recipient and ensuring there is transportation* from point A to B, and food is *refrigerated* if perishable.”

“I need *funding for developers* to build, release, and then *scale our application* to connect food surplus supply and demand *across the country*.”

“Our *distributions have at least tripled* as of today. We are *running out of food*. We *need immediate funds* to replenish our shelves.”



# Key Challenges Affecting Stakeholders

## Food Donors

*Restaurants, corporate cafeterias, schools, etc.*

Food Transport

Cold Storage

Labor

Coordination

## Donation Recipients

*Food banks and food pantries across the nation*

Food Transport

Funding

Food Shortages

Labor

Cold Storage

## Other Stakeholders

*Food recovery and waste prevention, nonprofits, etc.*

Funding

Labor

Food Shortages

Food Transport

More Common  
↑  
↓  
Less Common

# COVID Response Snapshot

## Data, Insights & Communications

ReFED continues to serve as the leading source of data and insights on food waste throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Completed 5-part webinar series covering labor, logistics, food safety, government, and finance.
- Media features on FOX News; Interviews with TIME Magazine, Grist, Bloomberg, and Waste360; Highlighted in publications by Food Tank and GreenBiz.

## The ReFED COVID-19 Food Waste Solutions Fund

ReFED regrants 100% of contributions directly to for-profit and nonprofit solution providers working to reduce food waste and address food insecurity on farms, through logistics and B2C solutions, all with a focus on fresh, healthy foods.

- Raised nearly \$1M from 11 major donors and 50+ smaller donors.
- \$390,000 issued in grants to 11 organizations with plans to disburse the remaining funds in the coming weeks.
- Estimated 90-day impact (11 org portfolio): 14,619,000 lbs of rescued food.

## Food Systems Projects

ReFED is looking to the future, both near and long term, to ensure we reset and rebuild the food system in a sustainable way that mitigates waste.

- Harvest Rescue Project collaboration with Marriott, Hyatt, Hilton, Unilever, Ameripen, WWF, and more to leverage idle assets to move food from farms to consumers with an initial focus on the Southeast US.
- Food business reopenings for the restaurant and foodservice sectors.

# Beyond COVID-19: Advancing data-driven solutions

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# The ReFED Insights Engine

In 2020 ReFED will release the Insights Engine will produce the new insights to inspire collaborative efforts to reach our food waste reduction goals. The tool combines over 50 public and proprietary datasets to quantify the amount and cost of year-over-year food surplus happening in the U.S. The platform will fuel an actionable and data-driven path to achieve our national goal to cut food waste in half by 2030.

## THE USER JOURNEY



### RESEARCH

U.S. FOOD WASTE TRACKER

Shows users the amount of food waste by sector, state, cause, destination, and food type.



### COMPARE

U.S. FOOD WASTE SOLUTIONS TOOL

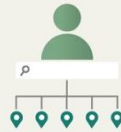
Helps users compare the impacts of feasible solutions based on their unique situation.



### DISCOVER

U.S. FOOD WASTE SOLUTIONS FACT SHEETS

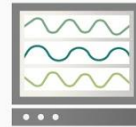
Provides users with solution overviews to help gain buy-in and take action.



### IMPLEMENT

U.S. FOOD WASTE SOLUTION PROVIDER DATABASE

Connects users to solution providers by allowing them to search by solution type, service area, and impacts.



### MONITOR

U.S. FOOD WASTE POLICY TRACKER

Enables users to monitor active and pending food waste related policies at the federal, state, and municipal levels.



### IDENTIFY

U.S. FOOD WASTE INVESTMENT TRACKER

Helps users find opportunities to invest and/or receive capital by reporting on philanthropic, private, and public investment in food waste solutions.



### CALCULATE

U.S. FOOD WASTE IMPACT CALCULATOR

Allows users to easily calculate the environmental and social benefits of their actions by converting the weight or dollar value of food waste they've mitigated.

AWARENESS

ACTION

# Contact ReFED to learn more

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For more information on ReFED's  
COVID-19 crisis response:

[Covid.refed.com](https://www.covid.refed.com)

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