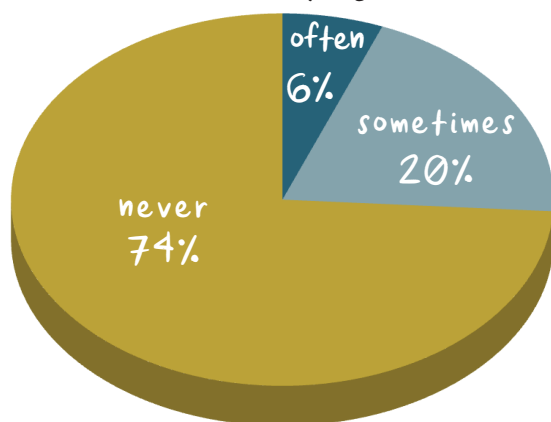


Goal 1: Ensure Access to Healthy Food for All

The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to ensuring access to healthy food for all:

- **The Rogue Valley is faring worse than the state for both health outcomes and health factors** with higher rates of diet-related diseases than state averages.
- **The Rogue Valley faces higher food insecurity in the region than the state, especially among children:**

Within the past 12 months, the food I bought ran out, and I didn't have money to get more.

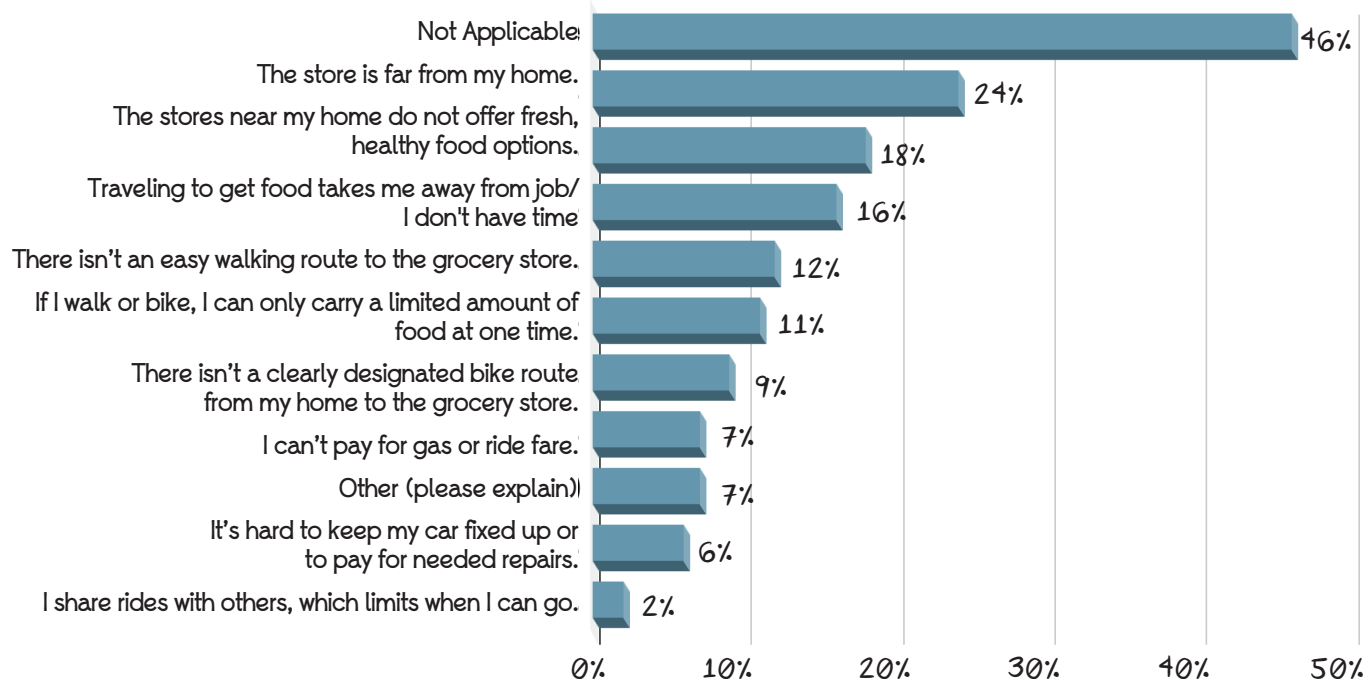


- **Pandemic-related assistance helped food security:** Food insecurity rates *decreased notably between 2018 and 2022* in the Rogue Valley. There was an *increase* in food insecurity rates between

2021 and 2022, particularly among children, as the pandemic-related food assistance programs ended.

- **There is a considerable SNAP gap:** As of 2023, 12% of Rogue Valley residents qualify for the benefit but are not enrolled.
- **Food affordability is a major concern:** Over a third of residents are worried about the high cost of groceries and the affordability of food.
- **Community members need more transportation options and better food choices at grocery stores** (see below graph)
- There is a stated need for more **emergency preparedness coordination** to ensure that food is available in times of emergency.
- **Strong community support networks are emerging:** 64% of community members report providing groceries to others in need.
- **Innovative partnerships are expanding food access:** Healthcare providers, schools, and food banks are creating solutions through programs like Double Up Food Bucks and Protein Bucks, while eight farmers markets and nine CSAs help connect local food to local people.
- **School nutrition programs show strong engagement:** The Rogue Valley leads the state in school meal participation and WIC enrollment, with farm-to-school programs helping connect students to fresh, local food.

What are some challenges you experience when traveling to get food/groceries? Check all that apply.



Objectives and Actions

The objectives and actions in this goal address critical factors influencing food access, including the physical accessibility of food stores and pantries, the affordability of food, the ability for residents to grow their own food, the strength of the charitable food network, and the resilience of the food system to emergencies. *Nutritious, culturally appropriate, fresh food is foundational to good community health. Food grown, raised and produced locally will be the freshest, transported the least and will support the local economy the most.*

Objective 1. Ensure that the built environment supports access to healthy food

Actions: Improve public transportation; increase the number of neighborhood healthy food outlets; increase the amount of fresh, healthy, locally-grown options grocers stock in retail stores; find ways to better support rural grocers; attract more affordable grocery stores in small, rural areas; find ways to encourage grocery stores and small food businesses to locate in low-income and low fresh food access areas.

Objective 2. Make food more affordable for Rogue Valley residents

Actions: Increase SNAP enrollment among eligible individuals and families; advocate for policies that extend SNAP eligibility; invest in technology support for retailers to make it easier for them to accept SNAP; advocate for state funding to expand Double Up Food Bucks (DUFb) and ensure sustainability of the Protein Bucks program; build awareness of existing programs that provide food access at farmers markets; advocate for statewide universal free school meals; advocate for farm-to-school programs at all schools; create innovative grocery retail models that prioritize affordable food; integrate and support the OCFSN Veggie Rx working group to build programs and support in southern Oregon; help make food assistance programs (specifically WIC and DUFb) more easily available to micro-retailers.

“A just and sustainable food system ensures that all people have access to nutritious food, supports the livelihoods of those who produce it, and preserves the health of the environment for future generations.”

Objective 3. Support RV residents' ability to grow, hunt, and prepare their own foods

Actions: Increase community gardens for residents to grow their own foods; expand and promote opportunities to learn skills that support food literacy and cooking skills; invest in farm-to-school programs to teach students how to grow, harvest, cook, and preserve their own food; find ways to encourage Rogue Valley residents to grow their own food; increase support for community/urban farming efforts targeting lower income populations

Objective 4. Strengthen the charitable food network in the region

Actions: Expand pantry access at additional times and locations; expand farm-to-food pantry programs; utilize state and federal funds to buy food from local farms to supply local food pantries; promote and expand Southern Oregon's Neighborhood Food Projects (green bag projects); invest in collaborative grant writing and fundraising support for the network of food banks and pantries in the region

Objective 5. Strengthen emergency response systems to ensure that food is available in times of emergency

Actions: Translate emergency food communications into multiple languages; expand emergency service capacity; utilize existing networks with local churches, businesses, and supportive organizations to enhance community food support and resource sharing; expand energy resilience initiatives that support food preparation; develop locally made freeze-dried MREs for emergency food access; increase fresh produce storage and processing to have available during emergencies.

Goal 2: Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy

Regional farm production is a key economic driver in our region. Pears put the Rogue Valley on the map 100 years ago and for thousands of years, the natural abundance of the region has been tended by and provided for the Takelma, Shasta and many other peoples. Investing in a thriving food and farm economy means supporting the range of food ways and food production that is possible in the Rogue Valley.

There are many benefits to a thriving local food and farm economy: Farms and local food businesses provide meaningful employment, boost income through wages, increase economic activity by buying from other local businesses, and build the local tax base that supports community infrastructure and services.

The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to building a strong local food and farm economy:

- **Agricultural sales have surged 62 percent since 2017**, led by small-scale producers who generate over \$12.3 million in direct-to-consumer sales - showing the vibrant connection between farmers and their communities.
- **Infrastructure barriers limit potential:** Critical gaps in processing facilities, cold storage, and commercial kitchens constrain growth.

Which of the following food system infrastructure components would you need to scale up?

On farm coolers / storage

44%

Additional sales outlets for local food

44%

A food hub that handles aggregation and distribution

40%

Irrigation and/or water conservation infrastructure improvements

33%

USDA large animal processing facility

27%

Other (please specify)

24%

USDA poultry processing facility

24%

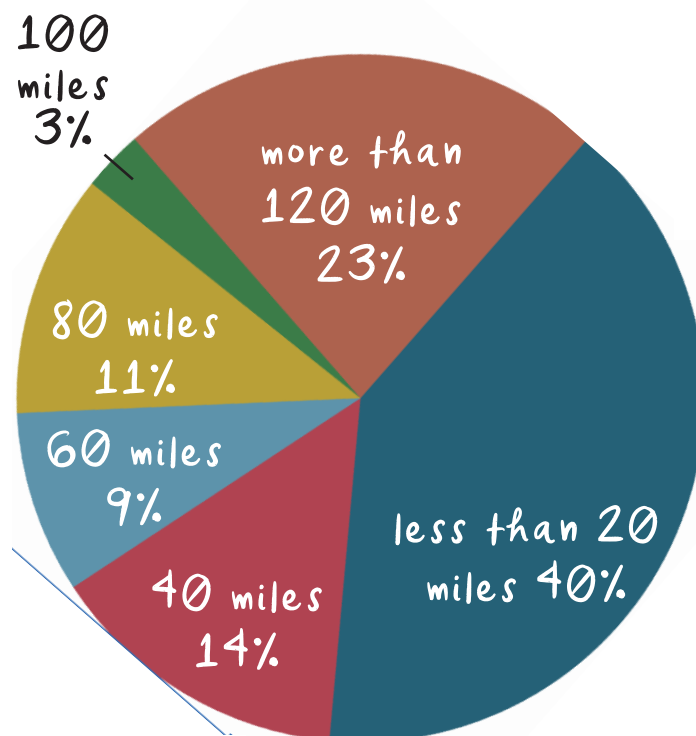
Agritourism support

22%

Co-packing facility or small food manufacturer

13%

On average, how far do you drive to your preferred slaughter/processor facility (one way)?



- **Climate challenges threaten stability:** Our farmers face mounting pressures from heat waves, drought, pests, and wildfires, highlighting the urgent need for regional climate adaptation programs that protect both crops and livelihoods.
- **Land and labor shortages constrain growth:** Limited access to affordable farmland and reliable workers continues to challenge both new and established farmers looking to expand, despite strong market demand for local products.
- **Market access shows promise but needs expansion:** While our region benefits from diverse food outlets - from farmers markets to CSAs - many remain out of reach for low-income and rural residents.
- **Infrastructure funding lags behind needs:** Despite increased grant programs, the demand for infrastructure investment far exceeds available resources, particularly affecting small and mid-sized producers eager to expand but lacking capital.
- **Collaboration offers solutions:** Emerging models of shared resources and infrastructure demonstrate how working together can help small producers thrive while building a more resilient local food system.

Objectives and Actions

The objectives and actions in this goal are aimed at strategies to grow the local food and farm economy by supporting farmers, growing the supply of local food, growing consumer demand for local food, and building a robust career pipeline for workers in agriculture and food businesses.

Objective 1. Support farmers and ranchers

Actions: Facilitate land access for new and next-generation farmers; ensure access to statewide farm disaster relief funds; increase available funding and transition focus from recovery to resilience; improve farm workforce conditions with additional training, enhanced wages, housing, and access to essential services; invest in infrastructure, equipment, and distribution support for producers; develop regionalized collective disaster response funding to support farmers and businesses in the face of drought and other environmental crises or challenges; use locally adapted seeds for food production; re-establish the Josephine County OSU Extension Service; advocate for a state beginning farmer tax credit; compensate farmers for the ecosystem services their regenerative production practices provide.



Objective 2. Build the supply of local food

Actions: Provide education and technical assistance to producers to scale production; strengthen partnerships to scale successful farm models and provide mentorship opportunities; facilitate growth by enhancing access to wholesale and institutional markets for local producers; conduct an assessment of meat processing infrastructure to identify existing resources; develop a public resource guide and address gaps not covered by the current system.

Objective 3. Build demand for foods produced in the Rogue Valley

Actions: Expand participation and circulation of the Rogue Flavor Guide; launch a local food branding campaign to raise awareness and promote the identity of Rogue Valley's locally produced food; facilitate procurement gatherings that connect farmers with buyers; reduce barriers in school procurement policies to support schools sourcing local food; increase support for and reach of farm to school education; increase the procurement of locally sourced products in grocery stores and expand programs that support affordability of local food in these outlets (e.g. Double Up Food Bucks); leverage the success of the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program, which funds food pantry programs to buy food directly from local producers; explore feasibility of adopting local food purchasing guidelines and policies within local governments and institutions.

Objective 4. Support food system entrepreneurs and create careers in agriculture and food

Actions: Develop comprehensive workforce training programs in food manufacturing, culinary arts, and agriculture; expand food system business support services by enhancing financial education programs and providing producers with diverse financing options; conduct a comprehensive review of existing resources for food-based entrepreneurs and develop targeted tools to address gaps in business development, access to capital, infrastructure, and technical assistance; enhance business support for producers by building capacity within existing technical assistance organizations to provide specialized farm-related education in business planning, disaster resilience, and agricultural accounting.

Goal 3: Protect soil and water health

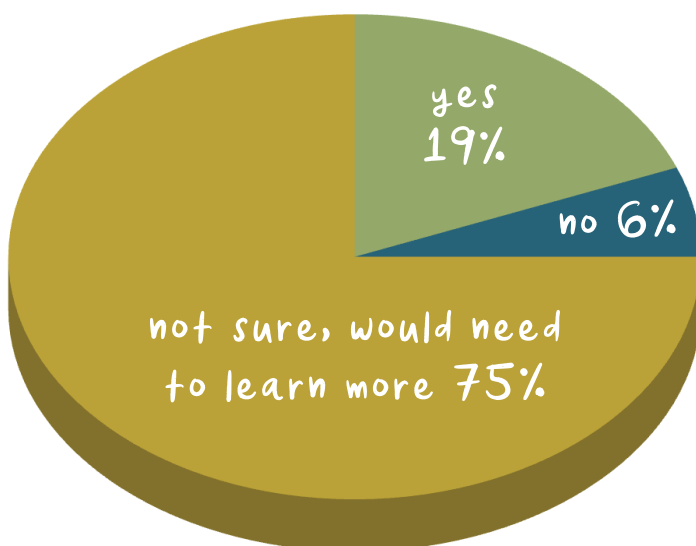
Soil and water resources in the Rogue Valley provide the very foundation of our food system. Historically, the Rogue River watershed has been one of enormous abundance – salmon runs, oak forests, meadows of camas, elk, deer, rushing rivers, hazel, berries, and much more. The agricultural management decisions made in the 1920s through 1960 profoundly reshaped this landscape. Today, the interconnected web of water, land, wildlife, and agriculture continues to feel the impact of management decisions made one hundred years ago.

The food production practices we choose can either extract from or regenerate this natural resource base. In the Rogue Valley, there is strong support for food production practices that protect and regenerate our soil and water.

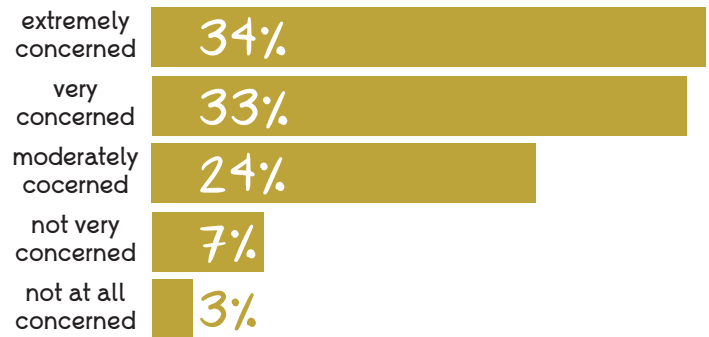
The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to protecting our environment and natural resources:

- **A shifting climate baseline** will bring significant impacts to the region: The climate in the Rogue Valley is predicted to be warmer, drier and more variable. This shift will impact the crops that can grow in this area, the prevalence of pests, water availability, and production capacity as the growing season lengthens and freezing diminishes. It also impacts the working conditions for farm laborers as long and intense heat waves and smoky summers become more frequent.

Are you interested in implementing regenerative agriculture techniques on your farm/ranch?



How concerned are you about the impact of environmental changes on your community's food system at some point in your lifetime? This may include factors such as extreme weather events, shifts in temperature patterns, wildfire and other climate-related influences.



- **Water management continues to be a pivotal issue**, with a strong need for coordination between urban and agricultural water management as well as a need to improve and incentivize better water conservation practices and infrastructure.
- **Wildfires impact food production**, labor, harvesting conditions, housing, and the quality of key products such as wine.
- **Indigenous foods** such as salmon, acorns, camas, game animals, and berries were historically plentiful in the Rogue Valley. Managing resources and partnering with Indigenous leaders and communities to support their vision of restoring indigenous foodways is an important part of natural resource management in the region and fundamental to creating a resilient, thriving, equitable food system.
- **Regenerative farming and ranching**: seventy-six percent of the producers surveyed for the Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment said that they use some form of regenerative farming or ranching practices. Technical and financial assistance were listed as the primary needs in more producers implementing regenerative practices.
- **Agricultural lands threatened by development**: Despite a 50% increase in the number of farmers in the Rogue Valley since 2012, the utilization of prime farmland to meet housing and other development needs is putting food production at risk. Although Oregon has strong exclusive farm use (EFU) protections in place, Jackson County currently has the potential to be one of the three hardest hit counties in Oregon, with 13,700 acres at risk for development by 2040.

Objectives and Actions

The objectives and actions in this goal are aimed at strategies to protect water quantity and quality, build healthy soils, and preserve land for food production.

Objective 1. Protect water quantity and quality

Actions: Ensure food systems stakeholders engage with water management stakeholders and water managers in the region; convene regional water management summits that include conservation, municipal and ag use stakeholders; facilitate and include conversations about water rights and watershed protections in collaborative water management planning; expand and promote financial and educational incentive programs for water quality enhancement ranchers in the Rogue Valley; expand access to programs and policies for safe greywater and rainwater use for irrigation; increase education and subsidize required equipment; restore acreage of land under beaver management as a component of water management strategy; explore ecosystem service credits; collaboratively develop water rate policies that reward conservation and prioritize food production; facilitate the development of a collaborative regional water management strategy; develop transparent data collection processes to assess water use by sector; develop partnerships with timberland managers and livestock producers to implement best practices for watershed protection, including sustainable forest management techniques, riparian buffers, and livestock waste management systems.

“Strengthening the Rogue Valley’s food system while preserving and restoring it’s natural resources requires convening and connecting a diverse range of stakeholders... this collaboration emphasizes the complexity of the interconnected systems that govern water, land, and wildlife, where decisions made in one domain often ripple across others.”

Objective 2. Build healthy soils

Actions: Support peer-to-peer learning and other educational programs to expand the use of climate-adapted agricultural practices that protect environmental and human health; incentivize climate resilient farm management practices that maximize soil carbon and water storage capacity of soils; expand and incentivize projects and businesses that develop compost suitable for agricultural use to improve soil health; increase access to equipment for use in regenerative farming practices; create insurance programs that support specialty crop diversity and community resilience; support education and incentive programs to support and protect biodiversity above and below ground; protect, promote, and support locally adapted seeds grown in the region; increase production and access to locally adapted specialty crops and cover crop seed, especially in quantity.

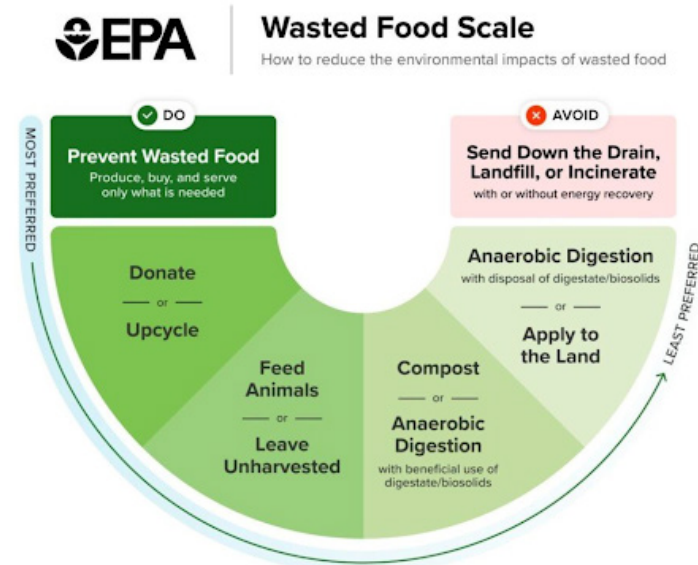
Objective 3. Preserve land for food production

Actions: Promote and ensure sustainability of programs that connect farmers with farm land; promote and educate about land use policies that prioritize food production and agricultural use needs; link regional brand and marketing to agriculture management practices that care for the environment, including soil, water, and biodiversity; develop resources to make land conservation easement opportunities accessible and easy for landowners and the community to navigate; identify gaps and opportunities in conservation and agricultural land preservation policies and programs on county, state and federal level; promote and support education and awareness of indigenous foodways; consider creating an easement for tribes on conservation lands.

Goal 4: Reduce food waste and related solid wastes

It is estimated that 38 percent of all food produced or imported for consumption in the United States is never eaten.¹ Loss occurs at each step in the food system - from unharvested crops in fields to unsold food in retail stores to uneaten foods on plates. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has prioritized preventing food waste in their 2050 Vision and Framework for Action due to the combined environmental burdens of food production, distribution, refrigeration, preparation, and final disposal.²

Reducing food waste can ensure that food goes to feed hungry people, reduce methane emissions that contribute to climate change and save space in landfills.



The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to reducing food waste:

- **Keep compost local and connect with local farms:** Community members are passionate about keeping compost local, connecting with local farms, and increasing education and awareness about the importance of sustainable food waste management through neighborhood collaborations.
- **Challenges in scaling up:** Businesses working to scale up regional composting models in the Rogue Valley face significant regulatory and funding barriers. Scaling residential food scraps pickup programs face several challenges, including high collection fees for residents, the need to ensure that

compost remains local, and the difficulty of achieving large-scale opt-in participation.

- **Infrastructure and technology needed to scale up:** Accurately measuring and tracking food waste reduction and management strategies require enhanced capacity, infrastructure, and technology, which are currently limited.
- **Collaboration needed:** Addressing all of these barriers will require collaborative efforts to balance resident affordability, regulatory compliance, and the scalability of collection infrastructure.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency prioritizes actions that prevent and divert wasted food from disposal. The most preferred pathways – prevent wasted food, donate and upcycle food – offer the most benefits to the environment and to a circular economy. These “top” pathways prioritize using food for its intended purpose: to nourish people. The least preferred pathways – landfilling, incineration, and sending food down the drain – have the largest environmental impacts and have limited potential for circularity.³

Food Waste By the Numbers

38%

of all food grown or imported for human consumption in the US that goes to waste

71%

of the food waste generated by Oregon households that could have been eaten

6.3 pounds

of food are discarded by Oregon households each week

26%

of Rogue Valley CFA survey respondents who reported running out of food and not having money to buy more ‘sometimes’ (20%) or ‘often’ (6%)

Objectives and Actions

The objectives and actions in this goal propose solutions that first focus on reducing the amount of food waste we generate, then prioritize feeding people food that is safe and nutritious and composting any food waste that remains.

Objective 1. Prevent wasted food

Actions: Launch source reduction educational campaigns for farms and businesses; expand food waste audits and share tables in schools to reduce food waste in cafeterias; revitalize on-farm gleaning programs that prevent unharvestable food from going to waste; support legislation such as date labeling requirements, required food waste tracking, and other policies that encourage food waste prevention.

Objective 2. Support the safe rescue and redistribution of food to feed people in need

Actions: Expand existing food rescue efforts in restaurants and grocery stores; invest in infrastructure (i.e., food hubs, freezer space), transportation, and logistics for food rescue and redistribution; advocate for expanded and accessible state and local tax incentives and grants for food rescue programs; explore the feasibility of capturing food waste generated by seed growing operations, creating value-added food products; cover farmers' harvest costs for produce they donate to food rescue organizations; educate businesses on Good Samaritan laws and liability protections that protect businesses that donate food.

Objective 3. Increase access to composting

Actions: Expand existing composting pilot programs with restaurants and grocery stores; create neighborhood compost sites with local organizations; investigate the viability of a curbside composting program and opportunities to modify contracts with haulers to require bundled services (trash, recycling, and compost); advocate for expanded and accessible state and local tax incentives and grants for composting businesses; work with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to simplify the permitting process for composting operations wanting to scale up; increase access to composting supplies for individuals and families to practice backyard composting; install compost bins next to trash and recycling bins in public spaces, especially those near business districts, food courts and food halls, farmers markets, and areas with a high density of mobile food vendors.



Objective 4. Engage and educate our community about food waste

Actions: Advocate for school-based composting, vermicomposting and composting education in schools; increase awareness of existing compost education programs and expand residential composting education opportunities; collaborate with local solid waste haulers and wholesale composting businesses.

References

- 1 ReFED Releases New Food Waste Estimates and Calls for Increased Action by Food System
- 2 Materials Management in Oregon: 2050 Vision and Framework for Action
- 3 EPA Wasted Food Scale