

revolve



OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE WASTE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE NZ

JULY 2022 \ ISSUE 182 \ \$9.00

**FROM
BEHAVIOUR
CHANGE
TO SOCIAL
CHANGE**

**FAST
FURNITURE**

**REUSE FOR
TREATED
TIMBER**

**FOOD TO
THE RESCUE**

BIN DAY THE SAFE WAY | MFE UPDATE | VIRTUAL SUMMIT



**REDUCING
FOOD
WASTE
THROUGH
FOOD
RESCUE**

Former engagement lead for AFRA **Gareth Hughes** discusses food rescue's essential role in reducing food waste and addressing food insecurity.

FOOD WASTE is a massive problem, with an estimated 30-40% of food wasted globally. It has been estimated that New Zealanders send 157,398 tonnes of edible food to landfills. Not only is this a waste of money, energy and resources, but it's also a human tragedy when one in five Kiwi kids are growing up in food-insecure households.

Food rescue steps up

Fortunately, numerous food rescue organisations are working to turn this environmental problem into social and economic advantages. Food rescue organisations like Kaibosh and KiwiHarvest pick up or receive nutritious food from producers or retailers that would otherwise go to waste and ensure it gets to New Zealanders in need. The Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance's (AFRA) 26 members have vehicles, warehouses,

chillers and freezers in almost every city and town in New Zealand. They transport, store and distribute food to over 1000 recipient organisations.

The Covid pandemic has added additional challenges to food rescue organisations during the past two years. Those organisations have played an essential role in the national food security system by ramping up their capacity and infrastructure and acting as local hubs for purchased food through the government-supported New Zealand Food Network. In the past year, AFRA's members reported that they rescued and distributed over 10 million kilograms of food, equivalent to about 30 million meals with an estimated retail value of \$76 million.

Environmental benefits of food rescue

The food rescue sector is proud that it can provide food for people in desperate need, while AFRA is pleased with the environmental benefits of this activity. Rescuing food removes it from the waste stream, where it can release harmful emissions while rotting away in a landfill. We estimate that the 7.6 million kilograms of food rescued in the past twelve months prevented 20,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases from entering the atmosphere and stopped 6.3 billion litres of water from entering the earth.

AFRA is a year old

AFRA recently celebrated its first birthday as the national body for the waste food sector, and our focus continues on building capacity, best practice, collaboration and advocacy. In the past year, we have made many

FOOD RESCUE IS MORE THAN DISTRIBUTING SURPLUS LOAVES OF BREAD. IT'S A CRITICAL PART OF AOTEAROA'S WASTE AND FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE BY PROVIDING MILLIONS OF HEALTHY, NUTRITIOUS MEALS TO NEW ZEALANDERS IN NEED.

submissions to the Ministry for the Environment on food waste issues, worked with WasteMINZ's Organic Materials Sector Group steering committee and convened a cross-government working group to promote solutions in this space.

More mahi to be done

It's heartening to see big reforms are on the horizon for the waste industry and climate change policy in New Zealand. Food rescue is keen to play a role in helping the government and communities meet their ambitious goals. AFRA believes food rescue should receive greater prominence as affordable, immediate and providing a high social return on investment.

Research shows that food rescue has a social return investment figure between 1:3 and 1:14. Around the world, governments are backing food rescue organisations with tax breaks, financial incentives, food-to-landfill bans and a host of other policies. We have made a case to our government for the introduction of similar schemes while the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor is undertaking a study into food waste and rescue.

We require more support to grow our work which sits at the top of the waste hierarchy. While many solutions are needed to transition New Zealand to a circular economy, food rescue is an established, locally connected activity with a national presence. It is a more affordable and immediate way to reduce waste and emissions than investment in large scale infrastructure alternatives, can be scaled up quickly and delivers multiple levels of public good. The only limitations are the increased capital cost of warehousing, chillers, trucks and ongoing sustainable operational costs.

Food waste hierarchy and food rescue

We are often asked whether our focus should be on preventing food waste generated by producers, retailers or producers. The answer is yes. AFRA supports the work of Love Food Hate Waste and is a founding partner of the emerging Zero Food Waste Challenge. However, our current food production system relies on producing excess food so that supermarket shelves can always be fully stocked, and the supply can be adequately managed during adverse weather events. We believe leftover food should go to people in need before being sent to landfills.



AFRA Innovations

We are excited about our new data platform and proposed standardised collection system. For the first time, we will be able to present a truly national picture of food rescue across Aotearoa. The data will track food rescued by category and identify what happens to it. As the country sets ambitious waste goals and looks at new funding approaches and legislation, we believe this data will provide an important insight into the immense impact of the food rescue sector and help make informed decisions.

As AFRA looks forward to its second birthday, we continue to support the important mahi of our growing membership and their 4000 plus volunteers. We need more support, more volunteers and even more donated food to continue

to grow this important mahi. We will also continue to build strong relationships with our strategic partners Kore Hiakai and the New Zealand Food Network, enabling us to work together to build a better food system in New Zealand. **R**



Gareth Hughes was AFRA's engagement lead and a former MP. He served on WasteMINZ's Organic Materials Sector Group steering committee but has recently started work as the first Aotearoa country lead for the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, a global collaboration focused on an economic system that delivers human and environmental wellbeing.