



Upcycling Kitchen Toolkit

A Resource for Organizations
Upcycling Rescued Food

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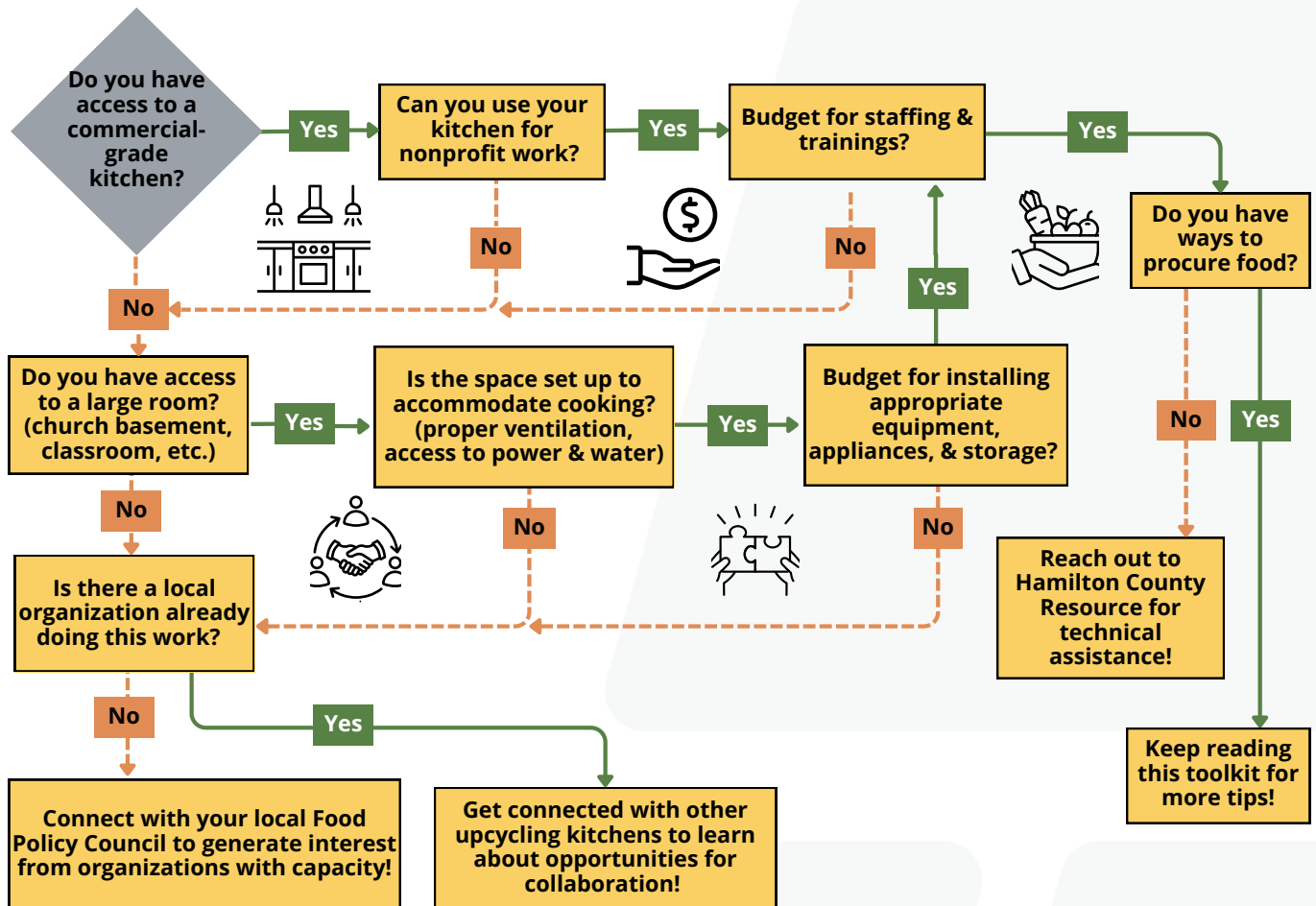
INTRODUCTION

Do you want to fight food waste in new and creative ways? An upcycling kitchen might just be the solution. Upcycling kitchens (sometimes called recovery kitchens) are organizations that rescue food that would otherwise be discarded and transforms it into nutritious meals. Surplus food is often rescued from local farmers, food banks, grocery stores, and restaurants. The innovative nature of these organizations provides opportunities for addressing food insecurity while simultaneously reducing food waste.

This Toolkit is intended to provide resources for people just starting out or organizations with upcycling kitchens who are looking for ways to improve. It includes information to help **new** kitchens get organized and **long-standing** kitchens stay motivated, as well as tips and tools for **everyone** looking to improve uptake of nutritious foods. This resource supports organizations where they are and helps them with the next steps to better achieve their goals around increasing access to safe and healthy foods.



If you are new to this, follow the decision tree below to inspire next steps for getting involved in upcycling kitchen work!



DIGNITY WITHIN FOOD RESCUE

Rescued food refers to edible food that would otherwise be wasted due to imperfections, overproduction, or nearing expiration dates. For example, if a grocery store receives an oddly shaped produce item, they may discard it instead of selling it. Produce may be rejected from a grocery store for not meeting size restrictions, shape, or color standards, even though it is safe to eat. Other reasons edible food may be discarded include, but are not limited to:

- Packaging and manufacturing errors (Ex: labels being misprinted)
- Transportation errors (Ex: missing signature on shipping logs)
- Misinterpretation of 'best by' dates

Upcycling kitchens work to end the stigma that rescued food is food that has gone bad or is of lower quality. This is done by ensuring rescued food is checked for quality assurance, and by demonstrating knowledge of the food being served. Upcycling kitchens meet people where they are by offering prepared food options to those accessing charitable food, who may not have the tools, equipment, or ability to cook for themselves. Dignity within charitable food systems creates spaces that empower, respect, and nourish individuals experiencing food insecurity.

This work is possible as a result of the Food Donation Improvement Act of 2021.¹ If you have access to legal counsel, consult with them before getting started.



FOOD SAFETY

Organizations working in the food industry must be well-versed in food safety practices to protect public health. The content in this section focuses on basic food safety practices, such as food preparation, storage, and serving. For more detailed information, please consult the [Food and Drug Administration \(USFDA\)](#)² and the [U.S Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#)³ websites or your local health department.

For individuals who are regularly handling food and are interested in diving deeper into food safety best practices, [ServSafe certification](#)⁴ trainings are recommended. To find local training options, search for “ServSafe Hamilton County, Ohio” or reach out to Hamilton County Public Health’s Environmental Health Division for more details.

Food Safety– Key Terms

Cross Contamination	The transfer of harmful bacteria from food, utensils, cutting boards, and other food preparation equipment to other foods.
Danger Zone	Temperatures between 41 degrees Fahrenheit and 135 degrees Fahrenheit, where bacterial growth occurs, impacting food safety.
FoodBorne Illness	Diseases that are caused by consuming food or beverages contaminated with bacteria, viruses, parasites, chemicals, or toxins.
Food Date Label	A calendar date provided on food packaging to tell consumers how long a product will be at its best quality.



Food Safety- Key Terms

Food Safety	Practices and processes of storing, handling, and cooking food that prevent foodborne illnesses.
Minimum Internal Temperature	The lowest temperature that a food item's interior must reach to kill off potentially harmful bacteria and be considered safe for consumption.
Non-Perishable Food	Foods that can be stored at room temperature for an extended period of time without spoiling.
Perishable Food	Foods with a limited shelf life that can become unsafe for consumption if not properly stored.
ServSafe	An educational program developed by the National Restaurant Institute that aims to educate those working in food service industries on food safety regulations and compliance.
Thawing	The process of defrosting frozen foods to prepare them for cooking and consumption.
U.S Food and Drug Administration (USFDA)	The federal agency tasked with regulating 80% of the nation's food supply to ensure that food is safe for consumption.
U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA)	The federal agency tasked with regulating specific areas of the nation's food supply, such as meat, poultry, and eggs.



FOOD PREPARATION BASICS

Food preparation is the process of transforming food ingredients into ready-to-eat meals. Safety steps are essential during the preparation of food to prevent foodborne illnesses and cross-contamination to guarantee the product is safe for consumption. The FDA and USDA promote a 4-step guide to keep foods safe for consumption- **Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill.**

CLEAN

Wash hands and surfaces often while preparing food. **Hands should be washed before and after handling food, and after touching raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs.** Clean and sanitize surfaces before preparing food on them. After preparing different food items, wash, rise and sanitize cutting boards, dishes, and utensils and sanitize countertops. Additionally, rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water before cooking and consuming, and clean lids of canned goods before opening.

SEPARATE

Juices from raw meat can contain bacteria that may cause foodborne illness, which is why they need to be kept separate from ready-to-eat foods. **Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from ready-to-eat foods** in grocery carts, grocery bags, refrigerators, and while cooking. Use one set of knives, cutting boards, and cooking utensils for raw meat, poultry, and seafood, and a separate set for fresh produce if possible. Alternatively, wash knives, cutting boards, and cooking tools in hot soapy water between cooking with raw meat and cooking with fresh produce. Plates that have been in contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs must be washed in hot soapy water before cooked foods can be placed on them.

COOK

Cooking food to the right temperature kills harmful bacteria and reduces the risk of foodborne illnesses. Bacterial growth occurs between 41 degrees Fahrenheit and 135 degrees Fahrenheit, which is known as the “danger zone,” where food can become unsafe for consumption. **Use a food thermometer to ensure that foods are cooked to the safe minimum internal temperature.** Additionally, wash food thermometers with soap and water between uses to avoid cross-contamination. The table below shows proper minimum internal temperatures for different types of foods.



Product	Minimum Internal Temperature and Rest Time
Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb Steaks, Chops and Roasts	145 degrees F (62.8 degrees C) and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes
Ground Meats	160 degrees F (71.1 degrees C)
Ground Poultry	165 degrees F (73.9 degrees C)
Ham, Fresh or Smoked (Uncooked)	145 degrees F (62.8 degrees C) and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes
Fully Cooked Ham (to Reheat)	Reheat cooked hams packaged in USDA-inspected plants to 140 degrees F (60 degrees C) and all others to 165 degrees degrees F (73.9 degrees C)
All Poultry (Breasts, Whole Bird, Legs, Thighs, Wings, Ground Poultry, Giblets and Stuffing)	165 degrees F (73.9 degrees C)
Eggs	160 degrees F (71.1 degrees C)
Fish & Shellfish	145 degrees F (62.8 degrees C)
Leftovers	165 degrees F (73.9 degrees C)
Casseroles	165 degrees F (73.9 degrees C)

Safe Minimum Internal Temperature Chart | Food Safety and Inspection Service.⁵

CHILL

Refrigerate food promptly to protect the quality and safety. Set refrigerators to at least 41 degrees Fahrenheit and freezers to at least 0 degrees Fahrenheit by using an appliance thermometer. **Freeze or refrigerate perishable foods within 2 hours of cooking or purchasing.** If food is exposed to air temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, ensure freezing or refrigeration occurs within an hour. For quicker cooling, divide larger amounts of leftovers into shallow containers and leave space between the containers within the refrigerator or freezer to allow for proper air circulation. Lastly, use most leftovers within 7 days after cooking and reheat them to 165 degrees Fahrenheit.





FOOD THAWING

Thawing food must be done safely to maintain food quality and prevent bacterial growth. Leaving frozen foods on countertops to thaw exposes foods to temperature danger zones where bacteria can rapidly multiply, affecting food quality and safety. Therefore, food should never be thawed at room temperature or in hot water. The USDA recommends three safe food thawing practices—**refrigerator thawing, cold water thawing, and microwave thawing**. Cooking foods from a frozen state is also a safe practice, however, it can take roughly 50% longer than cooking fully thawed foods or fresh foods.

- **Refrigerator thawing** requires planning ahead due to the time this method takes. When thawing raw meat and poultry, ensure juices are not dripping onto other food to avoid cross-contamination. Large frozen food items, such as a turkey, require at least 24 hours of thawing for every 5 pounds of weight. Smaller items such as chicken breasts or a pound of ground meat may require a full day to thaw. Once food has fully thawed in the refrigerator, it will remain safe for an additional day or two before cooking. Food that has been thawed in the refrigerator may be refrozen without cooking, but this may impact the food quality.
- **Cold water thawing** is faster than refrigerator thawing, however this method does require more attention. The frozen food item must be placed in leak-proof packaging to avoid introducing bacteria or water absorption into the food. Then the bag must be submerged in cold running water. Meat packages that weigh around a pound may thaw in under an hour. Whereas packages weighing up to 4 pounds may take 2–3 hours. Food thawed using the cold running water method must be cooked immediately once it is thawed completely. Additionally, foods must be cooked before refreezing.
- When using the **microwave thawing** method, foods must be cooked immediately after thawing due to some parts of the food potentially beginning to cook during the process. This could bring portions of the food into the temperature danger zone which increases the risk of bacteria growth. Consider flipping the food every few minutes to ensure even thawing. Foods that are thawed using the microwave method must be cooked before refreezing.



FOOD STORAGE

Storing food properly is another way to prevent food borne illness, protect food quality, and reduce food waste. When transporting food, it is essential that it is maintained at the proper temperature. Ensure that perishable food items, such as meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, and produce, are not kept at room temperature and are refrigerated within two hours of receiving or purchasing .

PERISHABLE FOOD

- Keep refrigerators and freezers at the proper temperatures (refrigerators at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below, freezers at 0 degrees Fahrenheit or below).
- When putting food away in refrigerators and freezers, avoid stacking items on top of one another and allow ample room between products so that air can circulate properly.
- Check food product labels for storage directions to confirm they are kept at an appropriate temperature.
- Place ready-to-eat products above raw products to avoid cross-contamination.
- Cover any leftovers in airtight packaging and follow the recommendations outlined in the [FDA food storage chart](#).⁶
- Be aware of the signs of spoiled food and discard any foods that look or smell suspicious.

NON- PERISHABLE FOOD

- Leave unopened and store in a clean, cool, and dry place.
- Check canned goods for damage, and discard any cans that may be leaking, swelling, or rusting.
- Products should be discarded if they have any severe dents or holes. Compromised canned goods can allow air and moisture to enter, causing bacterial growth and increasing the risk of foodborne illness.
- Store separately from cleaning products and chemicals.

Refrigerator Storage Chart

- Always store ready-to-eat foods on the top shelf to prevent possible cross-contamination of bacteria from raw foods.
- Arrange other shelves by cooking temperatures (highest cooking temperature on the bottom).

Lowest Cooking Temperature

Ready-to-Eat foods and washed produce (top shelf)

Any food that will be hot held that is not in other categories. 135°F (57°C)

Whole seafood; beef, pork, veal, lamb (*steaks and chops*); roasts; shell eggs. 145°F (63°C)

Ground, injected, marinated, or tenderized meats. 155°F (68°C)

All poultry (*chicken, turkey, duck, fowl*); stuffing made with foods that require temperature control. 165°F (74°C)

Highest Cooking Temperature

Thermometers: Keep at least one accurate thermometer in the warmest part of the refrigerator.

Holding Temperature: Keep refrigerated foods at a temperature of 41°F (5°C) or below.

Overloading: Do not stock a refrigerator with more food than it is designed to hold. It is important to maintain air circulation around food.

Food Protection: Unless cooling, keep all food covered to protect it from contamination.



Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Division of Food and Recreational Licensing, 2811 Agriculture Drive, PO Box 8911, Madison, WI 53708
datcp.wi.gov

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Note: this guidance pertains to retail food establishments only.

FOOD DATE LABELS

Factors that go into deciding food date labels include how the food is packaged, stored, and the characteristics of the food product. For example, food products that contain ingredients used to preserve the product, such as canned goods, may maintain a products quality longer, resulting in a prolonged food date label in comparison to perishable food items such as fresh meats and produce. Commonly used phrases to describe food date labels vary.

- **Best if Used By/Before:** recommendation for how long a product will be of best quality and flavor based on a food product's quality assurance period. Products with this label may be sold past this date.
- **Sell By:** communicates to the store's inventory management how long the product should be displayed for sale. Typically used for food products that diminish in quality in 30 days or less.
- **Use By:** indicates the last date the product is recommended for use. Products with this label are not permitted to be sold past this date.

These food label guidelines are reflective of the 2024 Ohio Department of Agriculture Labeling Requirements.⁸



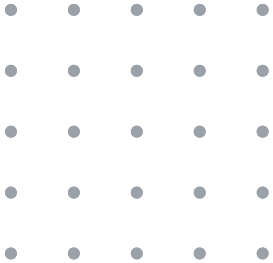
NUTRITION

The adoption of nutrition guidelines within upcycling kitchens is essential to improve the overall nutritional quality of food offered to those facing food insecurity. The primary goal of nutrition guidelines is to create healthy food environments by creating expectations for healthier food and beverage availability. Offering visitors the choice of nutritious foods allows them to be in control and fosters dignity within charitable food systems.



Nutrition – Key Terms

Food Insecurity	The lack of access to sufficient and consistent food to meet basic needs.
Nutrition Guidelines	Increase the availability, promotion, and consumption of healthier foods and beverages to support optimal health and prevent nutrition-related chronic diseases.
Prepared Foods	Foods that are fresh, cleaned, cooked, assembled, or otherwise processed and served. These foods have a relatively limited shelf-life compared to pre-packaged snacks. Examples of prepared foods include hot entrées, side dishes, soups, salads, deli sandwiches, and fresh whole fruits and vegetables.



NUTRITION GUIDELINES

The Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities⁹ represent a set of best practices to ensure that healthier foods and beverages are available and encouraged. These guidelines are based on the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities have been adapted in this toolkit to be relevant for upcycling kitchens.

Due to the unique nature of food rescue, organizations are often not in control of what items are being received or may not know ahead of time what food they are receiving. Therefore, upcycling kitchens are encouraged to align with these nutrition guidelines as much as possible. Consider reviewing your kitchen's current processes and procedures to determine where these guidelines could be applied. Incorporating them into formal policy adoption or daily operations can help enhance the nutritional quality of the meals being served.

Upcycling kitchens often work by rescuing food and transforming it into “ready-to-eat” meals. Prepared foods include those that are made and served on site, or those prepared at a central kitchen and then packaged and distributed to individuals or other organizations. Upcycling kitchens follow two primary models for serving prepared foods—**takeaway and dine-in**.

- **Takeaway model** is often seen in kitchens that distribute meals through carry-out or walk-up windows. These kitchens may also partner with local organizations, such as food pantries, to help distribute prepared meals to their clients.
- **Dine-in model** functions more like a traditional soup kitchen, where individuals are invited to sit down and enjoy a meal in a communal dining space.



STANDARDS TO USE

When planning menus or putting together meals, try to use the following recommendations:

Fruits and Vegetables

- Include a variety of at least 3 fruit options as much as possible, with no added sugars. Fruit can be fresh, canned, frozen, or dried.
- Include a variety of at least 3 non-fried vegetable options as much as possible. Vegetables can be fresh, frozen, or canned, and served cooked or raw.
- Offer seasonal fruit and vegetables as much as possible.

Grains

- Offer half of the total grains as “whole grain-rich” products, as much as possible.
- Offer a “whole grain-rich” product as the default choice.

Dairy

- Include low-fat dairy products (or dairy alternatives) as much as possible, such as milk, yogurt, cheese, and fortified soy beverages.
- When yogurt is available, offer at least one low-fat plain yogurt.

Protein Foods

- Offer a variety of non-fried protein foods, such as seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), nuts, seeds, and soy products, as much as possible.
- Include plant-based proteins, such as legumes (beans and peas), nuts, seeds, and soy products, as much as possible.

Deserts

- When desserts are available, try to offer a lower-calorie option (≤ 200 calories/serving).



Sodium

- Utilize ingredients that are low in sodium when cooking, such as low-sodium canned vegetables or low-sodium broth.

Calorie and Nutrition Labeling

- Provide calorie and nutrition information for any packaged snacks offered as required by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Menu Labeling Final Rule.

Other Considerations

- Limit deep-fried entrée options to no more than one choice per day.

Pro Tip: Boost the nutritional value of recipes by adding veggies! Try adding butternut squash to mac & cheese or zucchini to muffins.

BEVERAGES

Upcycling kitchens that serve beverages alongside their meals are encouraged to follow nutrition standards for beverages. This includes drinks such as water, milk, 100% juice, soft drinks, sports drinks, teas, and coffees.

STANDARDS TO USE:

- Provide access to chilled drinking water (tap or bottled).
- When milk and fortified soy beverages are available, offer low-fat beverages with no added sugars.
- When juice is available, offer 100% juice with no added sugars.

BEHAVIORAL DESIGN

Behavioral Design standards included in the Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities encourage the use of influences and nudges to make healthier food and beverage items easier for consumers to choose. These guidelines aim to increase the selection and consumption of nutritious foods by influencing how they are placed, presented, and promoted. Upcycling kitchens that implement aspects of behavioral design within their kitchens help individuals meet their nutrition needs by **making the healthy choice the easy choice**.

PLACEMENT AND LAYOUT

Behavioral Design standards included in the Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities encourage the use of influences and nudges to make healthier food and beverage items easier for consumers to choose. These guidelines aim to increase the selection and consumption of nutritious foods by influencing how they are **placed, presented, and promoted**. Upcycling kitchens that implement aspects of behavioral design within their kitchens help individuals meet their nutrition needs by making the healthy choice the easy choice. Examples include:

- Placing healthier foods and beverages first in the serving line.
- Highlighting healthier choices on menus by listing them first.



PROMOTION AND INFORMATION

Marketing strategies can be used to highlight healthier food and beverage items. Upcycling kitchens can use information, displays, decorations, and signage to encourage healthier choices. Examples include:

- Introduce healthier products by providing samples to visitors.
- When possible, promote healthier meals.
- Use visuals or color-coded signage and displays to highlight healthier foods.
- Promote photos or posters of healthy foods on menus or throughout the space.
- Draw attention to healthy foods with labels or informational tags (heart-healthy, low-sodium).
- Provide information on food products that are locally sourced, certified organic, or that adhere to religious or dietary specifications (kosher, vegan)



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Use **product innovations** and the inclusion of healthier options as **default choices** at decision points to encourage healthier choices. Examples include:

- Budding nutritious items into set meals (pairing a vegetable soup with whole grain bread).
- Using positive, appealing names for healthier options ("Fit and Fresh Special").

CAPACITY BUILDING



Whether you are an organization interested in starting an upcycling kitchen or you are already operating a kitchen, this section of the toolkit highlights things to consider for increasing capacity and becoming more efficient in your processes. Before implementation, consider what your organization would need to increase capacity, such as:

- Available funding
- Adequate space for a commercial kitchen
- Staffing
- Equipment
- Time for trainings (staff/volunteer trainings, food safety trainings)
- Partner organizations for food sourcing

Check out your local Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library for classes on how to find and apply for grants!

Capacity Building – Key Terms

Food Sourcing	Identifying, selecting, and partnering with suppliers to obtain rescued or donated food for your organization.
Gleaning	The act of collecting excess produce from farms and gardens and distributing it to other organizations for further distribution.
National Sanitation Foundation (NSF)	Standards that ensure commercial-grade food equipment is safe for food preparation and handling.

ESSENTIAL ITEMS

Quality kitchen equipment used for food preparation, including cooking utensils and appliances, is essential for consistency and efficiency of cooking processes.

NSF commercial-grade kitchen equipment should be used for all recovery kitchen work to ensure food safety and quality. Prioritize large-scale cooking equipment depending on your kitchen's capacity and scope.

For organizations that are directly rescuing food, consider adequate transportation equipment, such as vehicles with refrigerator storage or coolers with ice or ice packs to keep food cold during transport.

For a more comprehensive list of commercial kitchen equipment visit [Commercial Kitchen Equipment Checklist | Restaurant Essentials](#).¹⁰





Types of equipment to consider utilizing in your upcycling kitchen include:



Cooking Equipment

- Commercial range/oven
- Commercial grill/griddle
- Commercial microwave
- Convection oven
- Commercial deep fryer



Food Preparation Essentials

- Commercial mixer
- Food processor
- Food thermometers
- Meat slicer/grinder
- Baking sheets



Refrigeration Equipment

- Reach in freezer/walk in freezer
- Reach in refrigerator/walk in refrigerator
- Undercounter refrigerator
- Ice machine
- Prep table refrigeration



Storage Equipment

- Pot/pan racks
- Vacuum sealer
- Ingredient bins
- Storage carts
- Cabinet storage



Sanitation Equipment

- Commercial dishwasher
- Three compartment sink
- Hand washing station
- Dish rack
- Food safe sanitizing solution



Safety Materials

- Fire extinguishers
- First aid kits
- Safety signage
- Personal protective equipment
- Temperature monitoring



FOOD SOURCING

Looking to expand your operations by partnering with local organizations for food sourcing? This section covers how to set yourself up for success when building connections with potential partners.

Being able to clearly convey your work before reaching out to potential partners is important for identifying areas for alignment. **Building out a clear mission statement** for your work will help others understand the goals of your organization. Below are some questions to consider before contacting partners.

- What is your organization's mission?
- What is your elevator pitch?
 - Introduce yourself, highlight what you do, include a call to action, and align with the audience's interests.
- Are you interested in sourcing locally grown food?
- Do you have contractual agreements that need to be met? (ex: partner must be able to deliver to you.)
- Do you have any donation guidelines that you would like partners to align with?

When it comes to sourcing food for your upcycling kitchen, consider the different kinds of rescued foods that may be available in your area. This could come from local farmers, gleaning operations, food banks/pantries, grocery stores, or restaurants or caterers. Determine what partners align with your capacity and interests, and work on building connections with the stakeholders at each organization.

Interested in building your network and connecting with other food system advocates? **Check out opportunities offered through the Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council!**

GUIDELINES FOR FOOD SOURCING

The Healthy Eating Research Guidelines for the Charitable Food Setting (HER)¹¹ were developed by nutrition experts to help promote access to nutritious foods within charitable food settings. Since many foods do not always clearly fall into a “healthy” or unhealthy” category, HER guidelines recommend categorizing foods using a three-tiered system: **“choose often,” “choose sometimes,” and “choose rarely.”** These guidelines look at saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar content to determine what category a food item would fall into. Having food sourcing guidelines can help support kitchens in reaching their nutrition guidelines goals.

Understanding that upcycling kitchens rely on rescued and donated food items and often have to be creative with the meals they serve, the HER guidelines can be used to help prioritize freezer and storage space. For example, a kitchen could set a goal to have 60% of their freezer and refrigeration space dedicated to “choose often” foods. **Donation guidelines** could also be promoted to donors and food sourcing partners, highlighting the preference for foods that fall in the “choose often” or “choose sometimes” categories. An example Food Donation Guide can be found on the Hamilton County Public Health website.¹² Ultimately, the goal is not about turning away perfectly edible food, but to encourage partners to donate more nutritious foods.

Food Pantry Donation Guide



FOOD WASTE REDUCTION

Upcycling kitchens already play a huge role in reducing food waste through food rescue. Organizations can further practice preventing food waste through the preparation, storage, and disposal of food. Check out the links below for more ways to reduce your organizations food waste!



Storing

- [Hamilton County Resource Food Storage Guides.](#)¹³



Cooking

- [Freezing Leftovers: Freezing and Food Safety.](#)¹⁴
- [Scraps Cooking.](#)¹⁵
- [Creativity in Chefs – Garland Butts: A Spud'tacular Guy!](#)¹⁶



Disposing

- [US Environmental Protection Agency – Composting](#)¹⁷
- [Hamilton County Resource – Composting.](#)¹⁸
- [Hamilton County Food Scrap Drop Off Sites.](#)¹⁹

For more information on Food Waste Reduction efforts in Hamilton County, check out [Hamilton County Resource's website.](#)²⁰

LOCAL FOOD RESCUE IN ACTION: OUR DAILY BREAD'S FOOD RESCUE AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Our Daily Bread has long-centered food rescue as a core strategy to nourish the Cincinnati community. In 2024, with the help of Hamilton County ReSource, Our Daily Bread conducted a waste audit, which highlighted the need for back-of-the-house composting and recycling infrastructure. In 2025, the organization significantly expanded its impact through waste reduction practices that align hunger relief with environmental stewardship.

In 2025, Our Daily Bread:

- Rescued 150,000+ lbs. of surplus food
- Received 88,000+ lbs. of donated ingredients
- Produced 200,121 meals
- Composted 17,556 lbs. of food scraps
- Recycled 1,000+ lbs. of materials

These efforts meet a growing need. Over the past decade, the number of guests served has doubled, with visitors trending younger. The organization's strategic plan prioritized increasing its volunteer base, resulting in younger, more representative volunteers.

Volunteers spent 22,513 hours performing essential functions like processing rescued ingredients. While partnerships with organizations like Edible Arrangements and Last Mile Food Rescue ensure a steady flow of surplus food, Our Daily Bread relies on trained volunteers to transform donations into nutritious meals. Their capacity to process high volume, variable donations allows the kitchen team to adapt to the unpredictable nature of food rescue

Food rescue donations arrive in waves. While winter months can bring abundance, summer can require outreach to secure ingredients. Although food rescue is now widely embraced, Our Daily Bread remembers when attracting donations was more challenging.

Staff believe the increase in donations is partly shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. When supply chains faltered and basic goods became scarce, many people gained a new understanding that surplus food can hold tremendous value for others.

Our Daily Bread's integrated approach to food rescue, waste reduction, and community engagement demonstrates how a soup kitchen can evolve into a model of sustainability and resilience. By pairing environmental stewardship with hunger relief, the organization strengthens both community wellbeing and ecological health, proving that every pound rescued and every volunteer hour contributes to a more nourished, sustainable community.



LOCAL FOOD RESCUE IN ACTION: LA SOUPE'S FOOD RESCUE AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

La Soupe is another local organization tackling food waste by transforming rescued foods into nourishing meals. La Soupe utilizes their commissary kitchen model to create and distribute meals through their Share Partners. Due to La Soupe's large capacity, they are able to prepare and freeze meals in-house, and share those meals with their network of community partners who distribute food to those facing food insecurity. This unique approach allows for widespread distribution of upcycled meals.

Nutrition is at the forefront of La Soupe's mission. They collaborate with their onsite registered dietitian to produce a line of medically supportive meals rafted to help prevent, manage, and treat diet-related chronic diseases. Every meal is made from whole food ingredients making them rich in essential vitamins and minerals. For communities facing food insecurity, these meals are more than nourishment. They're a source of dignity, health, and hope.

La Soupe has a commitment to the education of their community and beyond. Their community education programs aim to teach individuals, students, and families essential cooking skills, such as how to prepare nutritious meals and reduce food waste through different cooking methods. Beyond local impact, they lead a Capacity Building Program and a Rescue Kitchen Network™ to help support food rescue organizations across the country with their kitchen programs.

If you or your organization are interested in learning more about La Soupe, reach out to info@lasoupe.org!



La Soupe 2025 Impact Report.²¹

APPENDICES

Content in this toolkit has been modified to best fit the unique needs of upcycling kitchens. Standards for nutrition and behavioral design have come from utilizing the Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities and the Healthy Eating Research Guidelines. Resources for capacity building and food sourcing have been identified through partnership with Green Umbrella and Hamilton County Resource. Content around food safety best practices have been identified from Hamilton County Public Health's Environmental Health Division.

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