

The Value of Every Bite

By: Hope Campbell

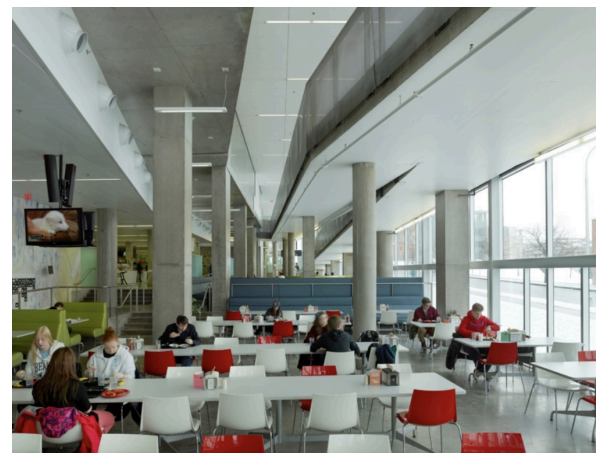


At Syracuse University, multiple dining halls are located around campus and each serves thousands of students each day. A positive aspect of each of these dining halls is that they offer almost every type of food cuisine at all times—but this abundance comes with extensive food waste. Walk through any dining hall at the end of a busy lunch period, and it's hard to miss the trays of half-eaten or untouched meals that overflow the trash.

“I am super passionate about this topic because I feel like at this point, the school should have more productive ways of limiting waste, and they just don't” said Syracuse University student Katherine Ferris. “Without fail, every time I went to the dining hall, the amount of food wasted was genuinely sad. You could even tell at the end of the day what wasn't really touched and knew that would just end up getting thrown out.”

Ferris believes the university could do more to address food waste. “I've never seen the school addressing these issues, and in my opinion, it kinda just gets disregarded,” she says. Her perspective is not unique, as many students share concerns about the waste in dining halls.

Addressing this student's concerns, an anonymous dining hall worker revealed “Its become so normalized I'm just used to seeing the build up everyday.” Continuing, “Do I think the campus will do anything about this, maybe and I



really hope so but I personally have not heard about any changes to the regular routine.”

Within the Syracuse community, rather than accepting this as an unavoidable reality, students and campus organizations are stepping up with innovative solutions to address the problem.

The Food Recovery Network (FRN) at Syracuse University has emerged as a key player in combating food waste on campus, turning extra food into a resource rather than a liability. Part of a national organization founded by college students, FRN operates on recovering unserved food from dining halls and delivering it to local organizations that address food insecurity. FRN not only helps reduce the university’s environmental impact but also supports the surrounding community.

“Food Recovery Network will work with local charitable food distributors and producers to create a food recovery program to help combat food waste and end hunger within the community. We will also commit to educating the public on food waste and hunger in America,” explains Jason Gillan, president of Syracuse’s FRN chapter.

The organization’s mission is straightforward. “Basically, FRN’s goal is to recover leftover food and food waste produced by Syracuse University and get it to those in need in the greater Syracuse community,” Gillan says. “The main way we do that is by recovering leftover food in the dining halls. We do this every weeknight when food is available and deliver the food to local churches, charities, and food pantries.”

FRN’s work begins in the dining halls, where surplus food is identified and prepared for redistribution. “The process varies slightly with each dining hall,” Gillan explains. “In general, volunteers show up sometime in the early evening, between 5 and 8 p.m. They are brought to the back of the kitchen by SU Dining staff, where they pack the food that was recovered and cooled the night before into delivery bags. Then they drive the food to whatever agency they have been assigned and drop it off. There are pretty extensive safety measures in place from both SU Dining and the Food Recovery Network.”



These agencies include local churches, charities, and food pantries, which distribute the recovered food to individuals and families facing food insecurity. “We prioritize those in need and those most affected by food insecurity,” Gillan adds.

In past semesters, FRN has recovered between 10,000 and 15,000 pounds of food. However, recent changes in Syracuse Dining’s cooking processes have reduced the amount of leftover food

produced. “The dining halls are producing significantly less leftover food this semester, and therefore we are recovering quite a bit less,” Gillan notes. “We don’t have that exact number yet.”

Despite the reduced recovery volume, the organization’s impact remains significant. For local organizations, the donations fill a critical gap, providing meals to vulnerable populations who might otherwise go without. These recovered meals ensure that community members facing food insecurity have access to nutritious, prepared food, which can be particularly critical for families, elderly individuals, and those with limited access to other resources.



“The food we recover fills a critical gap for many organizations,” Gillan says. “It’s rewarding to see how something that would’ve been wasted can instead make a real difference in people’s lives.”

A hurdle for the organization is raising awareness about food waste and the organization’s efforts on campus. “No, I do not think that there is enough awareness,” Gillan admits. “A lot of people don’t know about the Food Recovery Network or about the work we do. Last semester we introduced a new e-board position whose entire focus is outreach, so we

hope that over time and in the future, we will be a much better-known organization. Our organization isn’t very controversial, and fighting food waste is something a lot of people can get behind.”

FRN’s efforts are part of a broader push for sustainability on campus. Syracuse University Dining Services has taken steps to reduce waste at the source by adjusting cooking methods and preparing food in smaller batches. These changes have reduced the surplus food available for recovery, signaling progress in waste prevention but also highlighting the need for continued innovation.

Gillan hopes FRN’s work will inspire more students to think critically about food waste and sustainability. “If students understand the impact of food waste and the importance of recovery efforts, they’re more likely to support or even get involved in what we’re doing,” he says.

The Food Recovery Network’s work demonstrates how local solutions can address global challenges. By recovering food that would otherwise be wasted and redirecting it to those in need, FRN is creating a model for sustainability and community engagement.

As Syracuse University continues to prioritize waste reduction, organizations like FRN will play a crucial role in shaping a more responsible campus culture. For students, staff, and the wider community, the message is clear that food waste is solvable, and everyone has a part to play.

At the core of this effort is a simple but important idea that the food on your plate has real value. Through education, collaboration, and taking action, Syracuse University is showing how small steps can lead to meaningful change



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Fighting food waste, feeding our community! 🍏 The Food Recovery Network at Syracuse University rescues surplus food from dining halls and delivers it to local shelters. A simple yet powerful way students make a difference. 💚 [#FoodRecovery](#) [#SyracuseUniversity](#)



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