

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

In support of the City of Austin's Zero Waste goals and in keeping with the Sustainable Food Policy Board's (SFPB) charges to advise policymakers on strategies to improve food security and to strengthen the local food system, the Austin/Travis County SFPB recommends that the City of Austin and Travis County provide guidance and leadership in implementing food recovery efforts locally. In accordance with the USDA/EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy, such efforts could:

- 1) reduce and prevent waste through effective food ordering and handling procedures
- 2) direct appropriate food surplus to people and animals, and
- 3) direct remaining leftovers to industrial uses and compost.

Food waste has garnered national and international attention as data becomes available illuminating the breadth of this problem. In the U.S., 40% of food is reported to be wasted along its journey from production to consumption and the high percentage of water lost in the process raises additional concerns. When food products end up in the landfill they produce methane which is at least 20 times more potent of a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, and up to 70 times more potent over 100 years. Even landfills with landfill gas capture, which most do not have, only recover a small fraction of the emissions generated. (http://www.epa.gov/lmop/documents/pdfs/conf/9th/anderson_abs.pdf). Hence, our city's plan to phase out the landfilling of organics.

The City of Los Angeles adopted a policy in 2010 aimed more narrowly at directing surplus food to human service agencies. In the coming years the City of Austin will be asking restaurants and residents to compost their waste. Prior to enacting the required food composting elements of the Universal Recycling Ordinance in Austin, the City can support the development of mechanisms that facilitate the higher priority forms of diversion in the Food Recovery Hierarchy. This means giving priority to the prevention and donation of food before and in addition to the composting of food waste.

Austin Resource Recovery is well positioned to adopt policies so that the City implements the Food Recovery Hierarchy in its own facilities and at City-sponsored events. Additionally, the Department can coordinate with the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department to educate stakeholders (producers, intermediaries, and receivers) about safe and legal ways that they can recover food. For example, the Good Samaritan Act protects food donors, as long as proper food safety handling procedures have been followed. In coordination with stakeholders and other government entities, such efforts to recover food surplus will further align the City's actions with its Zero Waste goals, and potentially: save money through smarter ordering and serving, address hunger issues in Austin, support local farmers by reducing costly feed expenditures for livestock, contribute to the production of biofuel, and

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help build soil fertility.

Members of the SFPB Food Surplus and Salvage Working Group have compiled an extensive resource document detailing environmental impacts, the human need, examples of food recovery programs operating around the United States as well as a relatively comprehensive list of local agencies and individuals that are working on one aspect or another of food recovery.

[Available here: _

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/139duVhV2bsK9c6x6PpiXBSzko77thc3uWxszsRwKoU/edit>]

This information has been shared with Austin Resource Recovery Staff, the Office of Sustainability, and Health and Human Services, and will be made available to staff working to implement any related policies. Additionally, a summary overview of resources and best practices is attached to this letter.

Thus, the Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board recommends that Council take action to ensure that the City provide leadership by implementing the USDA/EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy internally and providing guidance for stakeholders to do the same throughout Austin and Travis County.

Sincerely,

Paula J. McDermott

Chairperson

Austin/Travis County SFPB