

# Food Recovery at Macalester College

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## The Food Recovery Network at Macalester

### **The Food Recovery Network**

The Food Recovery Network is a student-led movement for donating excess dining hall food from universities across the country. The first chapter of the Food Recovery Network was founded in 2011 at the University of Maryland, and was able to donate 30,000 meals to non-profits in its first year of operation. In 2012, the Food Recovery Network founded a second chapter at Brown University. In 2013, the Sodexo Foundation fully funded the Food Recovery Network, allowing it to have a full-time staff and be a professional non-profit. Since then, the Food Recovery Network has expanded across the country to 44 different states and 230 individual chapters. Today, the Food Recovery network is the largest student-led movement fighting hunger. More than 2 million pounds of food and 1.8 million meals have been donated to nonprofits since 2011.<sup>1</sup>

At each chapter, students organize to collect the excess food from their dining halls. Extra food is packaged and stored in freezers or fridges overnight before it can be transported to local partners. The process varies between schools. The Food Recovery Network provides chapters with grants of up to \$350 dollars per semester.<sup>2</sup> The following table and graph show the average amount of food recovered each year by Macalester's FRN chapter and other chapters in the region. Though it looks like Macalester donates significantly less than other institutions, such as University of

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<sup>1</sup> Food Recovery Network.

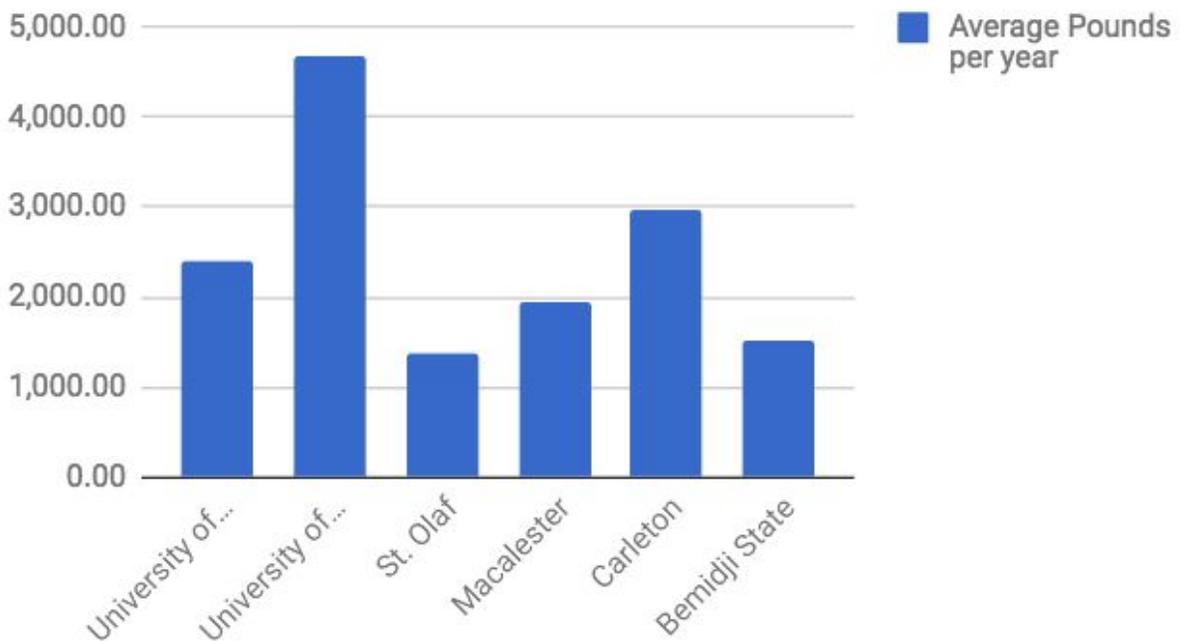
<sup>2</sup> Food Recovery Network.

Minnesota, it's important to keep in mind that Macalester is a small school and thus produces less excess food than other larger universities.

Table 1: Food Collected by Minnesota FRN Chapters

	Average Pounds per	# years in existence
Bemidji State	1,512	1
Carleton	2,073	4
Macalester	1,946	4
St. Olaf	1,373	3
University of Minnesota	4,678	4
University of St Thomas	2,386	4

Graph 1: Food Recovery at Minnesota FRN chapters



## **Food recovery at Macalester**

Macalester's Food Recovery Network chapter was founded in the Fall of 2014 by a student worker in the sustainability office named Amanda Wareham. The first "hunger-fighting" nonprofit partner for Macalester's chapter was a local non-profit organization from Minnesota called Loaves and Fishes. At the time, Bon Appétit staff encouraged the integration of Macalester as a Food Recovery Network Chapter.

Food Recovery at Macalester was established with the help of another equally new student organization. While Amanda was working on creating Macalester's chapter, a group of students founded a food-justice umbrella group named MacFEAST. Though getting the Food Recovery Network chapter off the ground was difficult, student members of MacFEAST were eager to help out by accepting volunteer positions. This allowed the chapter to stabilize its week to week operations.<sup>3</sup>

Macalester's chapter of the Food Recovery Network continues to be active. Each semester the program organizer, currently Hazel Chew (class of '19), sends out an email asking students to help with Macalester's food recovery efforts. Every Wednesday evening about three to five student volunteers make their way into Cafe Mac's kitchen. For the two or three days preceding this collection date, Cafe Mac cooks store excess, unserved food in metal tubs. The students transfer this food to foil trays, labeling each one with its weight, the date, and type of food. This process takes about half an hour to execute. The trays are stored in the refrigerator or freezer until the next day, when Loaves and Fishes, a non-profit free meal program, picks them up. Loaves and Fishes

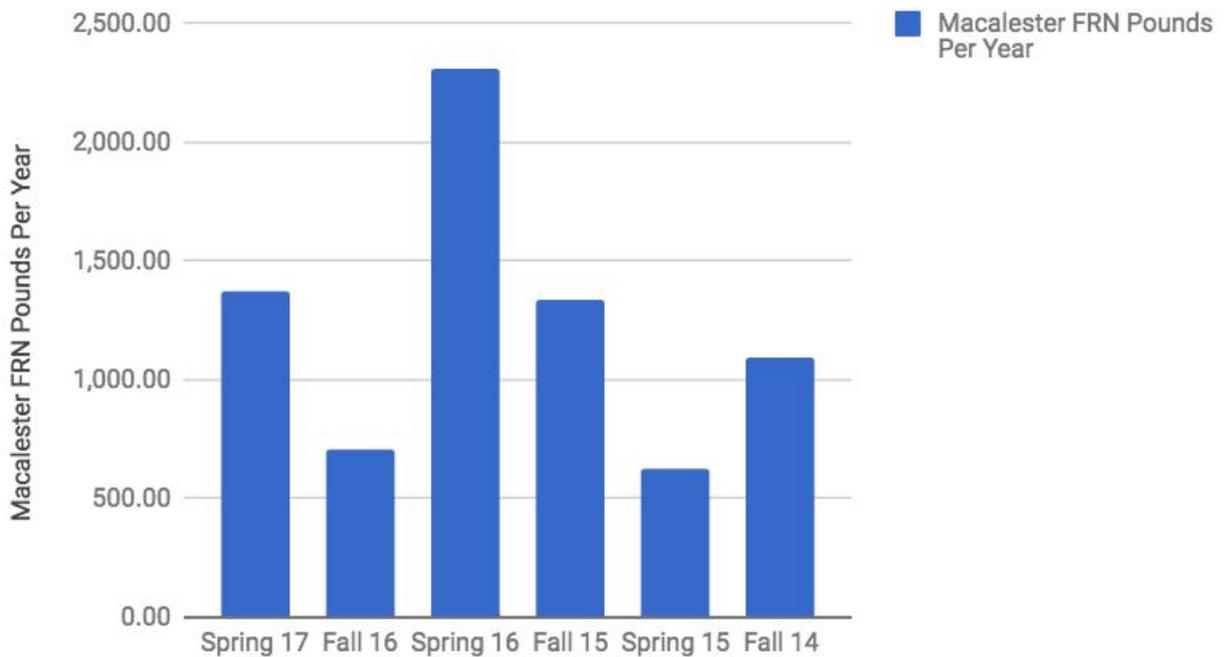
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<sup>3</sup> Wareham, Amanda. (2017, November 7). Personal Interview.

was founded in 1982, and now serves meals to those in need in seven different Minnesota counties.<sup>4</sup> Macalester’s extra food sometimes also goes to other programs, such as Sarah’s Oasis, a women’s shelter.

Over the four years that Macalester has been doing food recovery, it has donated 7,786 pounds of food. The amount of food students package can vary greatly depending on the week, but tends to fall between 20 and 200 pounds, excluding the summer, when almost no food is recovered. This variation is visible in the graph below, which shows the amount of food collected per semester starting in the Fall of 2014.

Graph 2: Macalester FRN Pounds Per Semester



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<sup>4</sup> Loaves and Fishes

## Current Challenges with Food Recovery at Macalester

Though Macalester's chapter of Food Recovery is rescuing a significant quantity of food, there are ways that the program could be improved. First, ideally collection would happen more than once a week. The extra food from the first part of the week goes to people in need, but the leftovers from later in the week are fed to pigs. As illustrated in the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy<sup>5</sup>, ideally uneaten food goes to hungry people before livestock. The current program coordinator, Hazel Chew, is trying to increase the frequency of food collection days to twice per week, but is having trouble communicating with Bon Appétit.



Ideally this first problem is solvable, but when it is resolved, a second issue arises: shortage of volunteers. Though there are enough participants to make one night per week happen, there are not enough for two. This is likely due to the current advertising methods and short-term, unofficial leadership positions.

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<sup>5</sup>EPA

A third issue with the current system of food recovery at Macalester is the use of disposable instead of reusable trays for storing and transporting food. Each week students use between four and fifteen disposable foil trays, which is unsustainable in terms of cost and environmental impact.

## **Recommendations**

### Executive summary of recommendations listed below:

- Create formal Food Recovery Network coordinator position at Macalester
- Improve communications with Cafe Mac in order to recover food on multiple days
- Purchase reusable trays

The most significant way that Macalester's chapter of the Food Recovery Network can be improved is by increasing the amount of food that it is able to donate. The short term solution is to continue to ask the management of Bon Appétit to allow the Food Recovery Network to collect food on two, or ideally even three, days each week. However, as this technique has not worked thus far, the longer term solution of institutional change is advisable. Firstly, Macalester's chapter needs a formal coordinator. This could be a new student work position or an expanded role of a currently existing position in the sustainability office.

Having an official coordinator will improve the organization of Macalester's chapter, especially during times of transition between coordinators. For example, part of the job description could be taking notes for the following coordinator on the details of packaging food or communicating with the partner organizations. We believe Bon

Appétit will be more likely to allow food collection twice a week if the chapter is very well organized. Having an official coordinator position will also facilitate communication between the chapter and Bon Appétit. For example, part of the coordinator job could be to meet monthly with a Bon Appétit representative. Bon Appétit staff will more likely take the time to meet with an officially-titled student than with an unofficial student volunteer. Creating an official position may also help facilitate communication with the Civic Engagement Center, which in turn will assist the chapter in recruiting more volunteers.

Having an official coordinator position will help Macalester's chapter remain active. Without a formal coordinator, the unofficial coordinator is responsible for figuring out how the Food Recovery Network will continue when they leave the role. Every year, and sometimes even every semester, there is the possibility that the chapter will cease to exist. Having an official position will ensure that the role of coordinator is filled.

A second necessary change to the Food Recovery Network at Macalester is to replace the disposable foil trays that are currently used to transport food with reusable trays. This would be an investment, as reusable trays would have a higher upfront cost than the disposable trays. We anticipate that this would save money in the long run as we would not need to buy as many trays overall. In other words, though the foil trays are cheaper, their price adds up over the years. However, it is important to note that the Food Recovery Network recommends buying two times the number of trays needed for any single week in order to leave one set of trays at the partner organization. This would allow Macalester to recover food while the partner organization is still giving out the last

week's food. The FRN also recommends washing the trays at the school's cafeteria (even if the partner organization washes them first).

These recommendations come from a guide to food recovery authored by the Food Recovery Network, and supported by the Bon Appétit Management Company (attached in the appendix). Therefore, we are confident that Bon Appétit at Macalester will be willing to cooperate with using reusable trays. Furthermore, we found out that Carleton's Food Recovery Network chapter uses reusable trays. The Carleton coordinators said that Bon Appétit was very helpful and donated dishwasher services to allow them to use reusable trays. They also said they would be happy to connect Carleton's Bon Appétit team to the management at Cafe Mac in order to explain how they were able to donate dishwasher service.

We have estimated the startup costs of buying and using reusable trays to be under 200 dollars. Carleton recovered around 2500 pounds last semester (which is far greater than their average semester collection of 1500 pounds) and used close to 300 dollars worth of trays to sustain this operation. Currently, Macalester recovers less than half of what Carleton recovers a semester. Since the service to order reusable trays includes a bulk discount after buying 4 trays, but not another bulk discount until one spends far more than 300 dollars, we can conclude that we would purchase trays at the same price per unit as Carleton. Therefore, with conservative estimates, we estimate we will be able to purchase 200 dollars worth of trays that will hold enough food and last us at least a year of use (including shipping and accounting for lost and broken trays).

Furthermore, the FRN sometimes subsidises reusable trays, or will give chapters grants of up to \$350 per semester. The main use of this grant is to purchase reusable trays. A second potential way to fundraise the 200 dollars needed to startup the use of reusable trays is to go through the Macalester Sustainability Office. Sustainability provides a small project grant to fund projects that have the potential for long lasting impact on the community.

### **Conclusion**

We are hopeful that by auditing Macalester's chapter of the Food Recovery Network, we will be able to increase its effectiveness, save more food, and show that chapters of the FRN can be sustainable, well run and efficient. We aim to show that the changes we proposed are useful, and will potentially share them with other chapters in order to make the Food Recovery Network more attractive to other colleges and volunteers.

## References

- 1, 2. Food Recovery Network. (n.d.). Retrieved November 14, 2017, from <https://www.foodrecoverynetwork.org/>
3. Wareham, Amanda. (2017, November 7). Personal Interview.
4. Loaves and Fishes. (n.d.). Loaves & Fishes. Retrieved November 19, 2017, from <http://www.loavesandfishesmn.org/index.html>
5. EPA. (2017, December 11). Sustainable Management of Food. Retrieved December 11, 2017, from <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food>

## Appendix

Contact person at Carleton:

Emma Link -- [linke@carleton.edu](mailto:linke@carleton.edu)

Website to order reusable trays:

<http://www.webstaurantstore.com/green-square-lid-for-2-and-4-qt-food-storage-containers/407S0204C.html>

(Carleton orders around 300 dollars per year to replace broken trays)

A Guide to Food Recovery for Chefs and Managers:

<https://sites.lafayette.edu//egrs451-fa14/files/2014/09/A-Guide-to-Food-Recovery-Network-for-Chefs-and-General-Managers.pdf>

Small Project Fund:

<https://www.macalester.edu/sustainability/living-laboratory/small-project/>