



Continuing the Feast

Food Rescue in Urban Events and Its Impact on Sustainable Food Systems

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What if events became part of the solution instead of part of the waste problem?

Continuing the Feast

The Central Question

Urban events bring people together through food, celebration, and hospitality — but they also create significant surplus due to uncertain attendance and consumption.

Our question is not simply how to dispose of leftovers. It is how events can become active participants in sustainable urban food systems.

The Presentation Arc

01

The Paradox

Event abundance alongside food insecurity

02

The Framework

Prevent, recover, and redistribute surplus

03

The Evidence

Levy, Javits/CULTIVATED, and Philadelphia 2026

04

The Action

A practical protocol for planners and partners

The Abundance Paradox

70M

Tons of Surplus

U.S. surplus food generated in 2024

29%

National Supply

Share of the national food supply wasted

\$380B

Estimated Value

Dollar value of wasted food annually

<13%

Donated

Of donatable food that was actually donated

Source: ReFED, 2026



Not All "Waste" Is the Same

Language matters: edible surplus is **not** automatically waste. The EPA Wasted Food Scale prioritizes prevention and donation over composting and disposal.



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Wasted Food Scale, 2026

A Three-Stage Framework for Events



1. PREVENT

Avoid avoidable surplus through data-driven planning



2. RECOVER

Safeguard unavoidable edible surplus



3. REDISTRIBUTE

Connect events to permanent community networks

These three stages must be **designed together**. Donation should never become permission to overproduce. Prevention protects budgets; recovery safeguards edible food; redistribution builds lasting community ties.

Data

Logistics

Partnerships

Stage One: Design Out the Waste



Forecast with History

Use attendance and consumption history; align guarantees with realistic attendance



Flexible Production

Prepare in flexible batches; use modular, made-to-order menus



Right-Size Service

Right-size portions and replenishment; use smaller serving vessels



Measure & Learn

Track what remains and why; use post-event debrief to inform the next forecast

Source: ReFED, 2025 and 2026; U.S. Food Waste Pact, 2026



Measurement Changes Behavior: Levy Waste Not 2.0

Levy's **Waste Not 2.0** moves the conversation from "we had leftovers" to "what remained, where did it originate, and what should change?" A donation total alone cannot reveal whether a menu was overproduced or whether forecasting improved.

- ❏ Repeated measurement helps culinary teams modify ordering, preparation, service, and replenishment across every event.

Preparation Trim

Waste from ingredient prep

Overproduction

Food made beyond demand

Unserved Surplus

Food prepared but not served

Spoilage

Food lost to time or temperature

Plate Waste

Food left by guests

Source: Levy sustainability and Waste Not 2.0 materials

Javits Center: Total Food Utilization

1 ac

Rooftop Farm

Operating atop the Javits Center

21.5K

Pounds/Year

Up to 21,500 lbs of produce annually

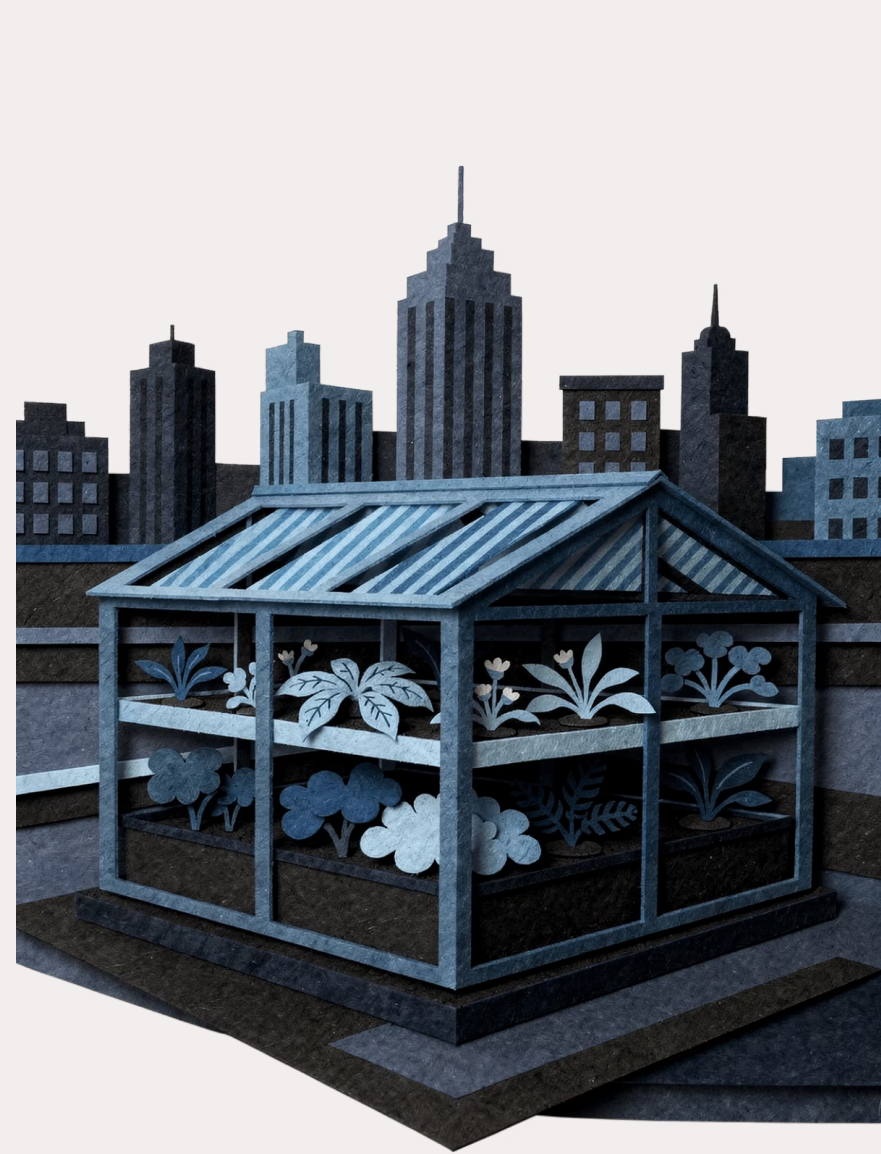
3,500

Sq Ft

Dedicated greenhouse space

CULTIVATED reframes rescue as something that happens *before* food becomes surplus. Imperfect or excess produce becomes soups, purées, pickles, and more. The venue operates not only as an event site, but as a participant in a localized urban food system — with food recovery built directly into operations.

Source: CULTIVATED and Javits Center sustainability materials



Philadelphia World Cup 2026: Recovery at Scale



6

Matchdays

410K

Spectators

Nearly 410,000 total

20K

Lbs Recovered

Approximately 20,000 lbs of food

24hr

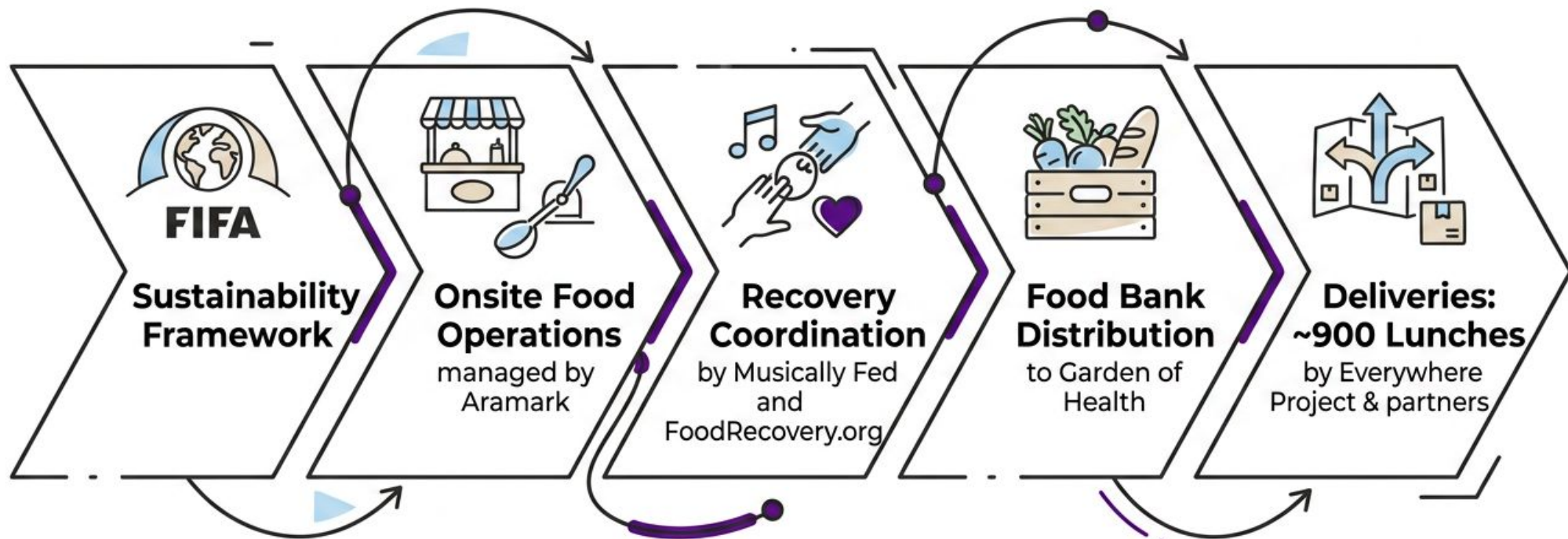
Turnaround

Full recovery window

Aramark managed refrigerated surplus and dry products from concession operations. Food was identified, consolidated, chilled, palletized, collected, and transferred within a 24-hour window — a **planned reverse-logistics operation**, not an informal end-of-night donation.

Source: FIFA, July 8, 2026; CBS Philadelphia, July 7, 2026

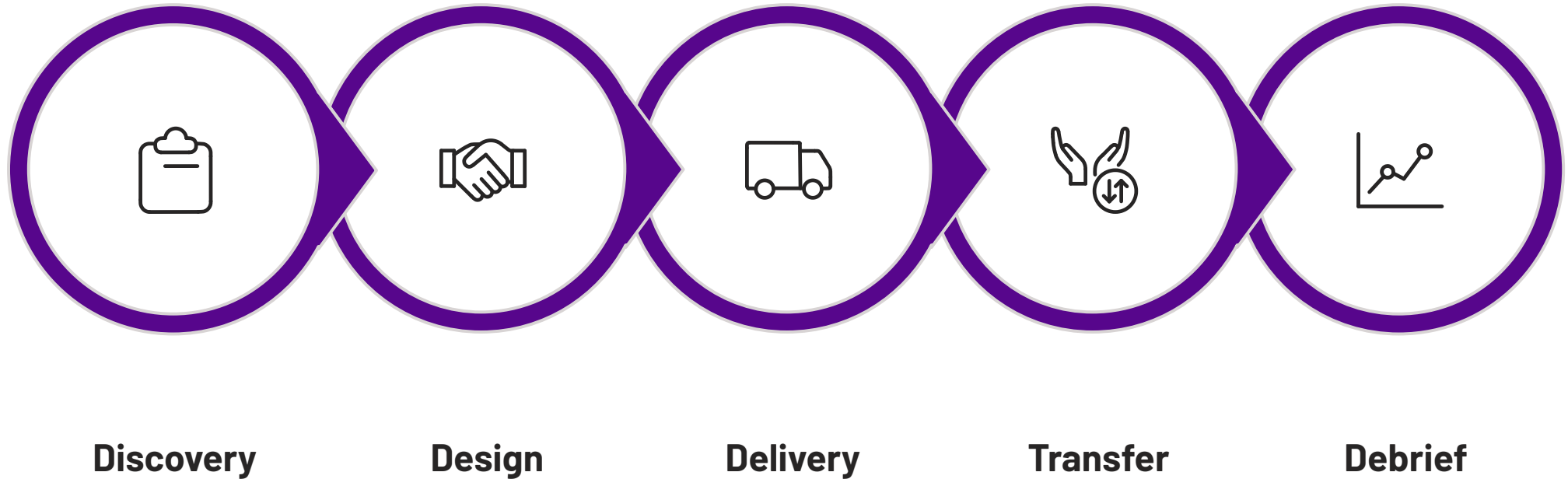
A Network, Not a Single Organization



Each partner contributed a different capability. A willing donor is not enough — recipient and transportation capacity must also be planned in advance. The case shows why recovery requires **foodservice expertise, recovery intermediaries, and community distribution networks** working in concert.

□ Approximately 900 boxed lunches distributed through the Everywhere Project to community members.

The Event Food-Rescue Protocol



The recovery plan should appear in the **contract, banquet event order, contact sheet, and loading-dock plan**. Assign staff responsibility before the event. Document pounds by category and destination. Treat the food handoff with the same operational discipline as load-in or show call.

Barriers Are Real – but Manageable

Operational Barriers

- Food safety and temperature control
- Labor during closeout and strike
- Packaging, refrigeration, and loading access
- Transportation and recipient capacity

Community & Ethical Barriers

- Liability misconceptions — federal good-faith protections exist
- Food dignity and cultural appropriateness
- Recipients determine what they can use — donation must not transfer unwanted food or disposal costs to a nonprofit

- 📄 Most barriers are not reasons to abandon recovery — they are reasons to plan it. Source: USDA guidance on the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.

Food Rescue: Redistributing Food Through Urban Networks

City Harvest, New York City

Rescued over **1 Billion pounds** of surplus food in their 40+ year existence. Serve 400 food pantries and soup kitchens, with food sourced from nearly 1600 businesses.

www.CityHarvest.org

Philabundance, Philadelphia Metropolitan Area

Distributed over **44 Million pounds** of food in 2025, providing 37 Million meals, including 139,000 children's meals. Rescue food sourced from over 100 donors.

www.philabundance.org

The Honorary Kitchen, Denver

Distributed over **10,000 meals** to alleviate hunger. Rescues food from restaurants and supermarkets, with plans to expand to events and enhance meal capability with trucks.

www.TheHonoraryKitchen.com

From Leftovers to Lasting Impact

Standard Practice

Make food rescue standard in event RFPs and contracts

Standing Partnerships

Build local recovery partnerships before the event

Separate Metrics

Measure prevention and recovery separately; report verified outcomes

Shared Standards

Create event-industry standards and shared metrics

Surplus food is a resource — not a waste stream. By planning the full journey of food from purchasing through redistribution, event professionals can reduce harm, control costs, and strengthen communities.



Discussion



Current Practice

Where does edible surplus currently go after your events?



Partner Planning

Which partner would need to be at the planning table earlier?



Next Steps

What could your organization begin measuring at its next event?

Closing question: What is one step you could add to your next event so that good food continues its journey?