



Last Food Mile Conference Survey Results

Following *The Last Food Mile* conference in early December, we surveyed well over 150 participants to assess their impressions of the event and to glean information to help us shape future work on food wastage across the U.S. supply chain. Approximately one third of those surveyed responded.

Some brief quantitative results are below.

First, in terms of the participant base, just over 50% were from academic environments, with about 20% each from the business and non-profit sectors and the remaining eight percent from government and media organizations. More than three quarters of the respondents attended both days of the conference.

Our intention for *The Last Food Mile* conference was to provide a great deal of high quality content from multi-disciplinary thought leaders in four distinct segments to ensure a strong learning experience for all participants, and as a result we crafted a very full schedule for both days. Feedback in this regard was quite favorable. On a ten-point scale (with ten being the most favorable outcome), respondents expressed an **overall level of satisfaction of 8.3**. Respondents were also pleased with the **quality of the speaker presentations, as shown by a rating of 8.6**.

We also asked for some “free form answers” which included listing one to three key highlights (i.e. individual takeaways) from the conference, suggestions for improvement, areas for future research, and actions that individuals would take to reduce food waste as a result of their participation.

While it is difficult to summarize such a large number of qualitative responses, scrolling through the results shows that many individuals were clearly pleased with the event and inspired to both provide suggestions for future work and to take steps in their own arena to reduce food wastage.

Some quotes which reveal the flavor of the responses are listed below:

[Key Highlights from the conference:](#)

“Top notch presenters”

“Illustrated the breadth and complexity of the topic”

“Broad interdisciplinary perspective of speakers and audience”

“Stem to root demo at the reception”

“Speakers were uniformly excellent”

“The making of peachy salsa (wonderful!) from second rate peaches” (references discussion by Dave Stangis of Campbell Soup)

“The enthusiasm and dedication of the crowd to solve the problem”

“Diversity of topics – seeing the problem at many levels”

“Excellent range of topics and speakers”

“A lot of important info packed into two days”

“Best practices for reducing food waste”

“Good mix of factually dense material and questions for discussion”

“Composting in Bahamas – so great in theory, shocking to find it was exorbitantly expensive. Underscored need to get sustainable practices to be ‘affordable’ and ‘viable.’”

“Made me think all night long for several nights and has me talking to major companies about their food waste habits.”

Suggestions for Improvement:

(Note: we did receive several comments on the facility itself, especially regarding the (very cold) room temperature – and we have provided feedback to Penn Facilities).

“Talk about animal agriculture and how it impacts sustainability”

“More time for attendees to network and share ideas”

“More interactive panels. Perhaps debates between speakers. It seems everyone brings something a little different to the table, but there is little interplay across disciplines or joint work between industry and academia to solve the problem of food waste.”

“Spreading the conference out into 3 or 4 days. The presentations were so rich and educational – it made it difficult to sit for such long periods of time and not have a chance to digest or speak to others. I also recommend to have debrief or times set aside for workshops, maybe set in classrooms where the audience can have all their questions answered and/or discuss how to make their programs better.”

Suggestions for further work/research:

“Universities to start better tracking their waste and improving upon this”

“Very little was left out - great conference”

“Further quantification of where wasted food is happening, especially on the farm”

“Follow-up conferences and interactions among attendees and speakers that are collaborative”

“I feel like there needs to be more psychological research about behavior modification on the consumer level and long-term arguments for business that don't threaten profit”

Information sharing about what is happening. Food safety and food science training for people involved in food waste/reuses.”

“It would be interesting to learn more about the microbiological risks associated with some of the food waste reduction techniques, for example gleaning”

“Effectiveness of strategies for overcoming obstacles - especially at the consumer level where it is most voluminous.”

“Better metrics of food waste Studies on how to change peoples' attitudes towards food. Better educational opportunities on global food security and food waste. Create a masters level program at Penn.”

“Continue to increase awareness and expand partners to develop meaningful research and solutions”

“Better estimates of the amount of food waste that is recycled rather than completely wasted. Estimates of food waste in terms of human edible calories and protein rather than fresh weight.”

“Make the conference an annual event!”

“How does it fit into world history? Is it worse today than earlier? If so, why? Answers to these questions would help us solve the problem.”

“Let's advance legislation to make COMPOSTING a legal requirement. It is coming anyway. Let's get used to it.”

“More focus on those in the US experiencing food insecurity, although we do waste a lot there are even more individuals going without any food at all. It's important to understand why that is occurring.”

"I would like to see this conference continue on a regular basis. I to see policy makers invited to attend and others from the food industry as well as getting registered dietitians on board"

"Solutions, solutions, solutions! Meaningful education of consumers to change behavior."

"More focus on how industry contributes to a culture of food waste/promoting overconsumption"

"Seems important for many reasons to pursue strategies to make measuring food waste, especially in settings like school meals programs, technically easier and less expensive."

"Better behavioral and psychological data on waste in the consumer sector. Better measures to convert food waste into measures that other stakeholders would care about: water, gasoline, years, acres, people, quality years of life, etc."

"Developing calibrations so people can estimate their food waste reduction more easily. For example, EPA calibrated a bag of food waste for Food Too Good To Waste, so people can make estimates without a scale. Without that the results go unreported - we need numbers!"

Individual actions to be taken to reduce food waste:

"Continue to learn more about food waste and initiatives across the country working to reduce it for inspiration for a future entrepreneurial opportunity"

"Very little food is wasted in our household; however, in business we can use the concepts presented at the conference - a good resource"

"Try and think of creative ways to use food items I would normally discard--the carrot top pesto was a fantastic idea, and got me to think of other ways that I can reduce my waste."

"I hope to expand food waste awareness into school settings. Thanks for putting on a wonderful conference!"

"Working for zero waste at home. Sharing conference findings with friends and encouraging them to be more mindful of food waste at home and work. Live in South Jersey and plan to volunteer in the New Year at one of the local food banks. Also want to learn more about how food waste is handled in my community."

"Making organized grocery lists with planned breakfast, lunch, and dinner options. Buying only what I need, cooking in advance, freezing more of my food items. Telling everyone who will listen about food wastage and directing them to some of the great resources from the conference."

“Already re-used leftovers from a work-catered lunch to make into a new dinner dish (and lunch the next day). Eating roommates’ plate scraps at meals, and informing them they should take less initially, and then grab more if they are still hungry after. Trying to make sure I eat perishables soon after purchasing, keeping them in front of the fridge as opposed to the back of the fridge.”

“Will be sharing information at county/state level; working to form a local task force to identify strategies to reduce food waste; educate policymakers/stakeholders about food waste”

“I have started using “wasted food” rather than food waste when talking about the problem. I give more thought to whether composting is the best alternative, recognizing that feeding animals (backyard chickens) is possibly a higher level.”

“I will certainly make more of an effort to reduce food waste, particularly in my own home as well as share these techniques with my family members.”

“Reach out to new connections for engagement in diverting more wasted food for donation “

“Renewed dedication to encourage corporate food donations to hunger-relief agencies; be more cognizant of waste on the household level”

“More thoroughly evaluate expiration dates / use by dates for our company’s products.”

“Better meal planning. Talk to everyone about the conference and statistics of food waste. Ask waiters for smaller portions. Support party planners to not prepare 3 times as much food as needed for the event. Make arrangements that party leftovers can be sent to people in need.”

“I will bring these food waste and loss strategies back to my institution and share best practices with my team to reduce these waste streams.”

“Continue to prevent food waste at the farm level and use it to feed the hungry”

“I am evaluating and making changes to my own food habits and will be looking at ways I can make a difference in my community”

Conference Organizing Committee, January, 2015