



Relational and Logistical Dimensions of Agricultural Food Recovery: Evidence from California Growers and Recovery Organizations

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Research Questions

1. What are the material and social barriers to agricultural food recovery in California?
2. How, and to what extent, do stakeholders employ relational strategies to address their various material challenges?
3. How are recovery partnerships established and maintained over time?

Data & Method

- Semi-structured interviews (n=50):
 - 35 growers
 - 15 recovery organizations

	n	%
Growers	35	70.0%
Respondent role		
Farmer/owner	25	71.4%
Production manager	7	20.0%
Sales	3	8.6%
Crop		
Leafy greens	8	22.9%
Peaches	11	31.4%
Tomatoes	9	25.7%
Multiple crops	7	20.0%
Farm acreage		
0–99 acres	5	15.2%
100–499 acres	2	6.1%
500–999 acres	4	12.1%
1000–4999 acres	9	27.3%
5000+ acres	13	39.4%
Emergency food	8	16.0%
Respondent role		
Executive director	2	25.0%
Food sourcing/procurement	6	75.0%
Organization type		
Food bank	6	75.0%
Food kitchen	1	12.5%
Hunger relief	1	12.5%
Private businesses	7	14.0%
Respondent role		
CEO/Co-founder	4	57.1%
Food sourcing/procurement	2	28.6%
Sustainability manager	1	14.3%
Organization type		
Grocery delivery	3	42.9%
Produce sales/distribution	2	28.6%
Processing	1	14.3%
Food service	1	14.3%
Total	50	100%

Results

Likelihood of Agricultural Food Recovery

		<i>Economic/Logistical Challenges</i>	
		High	Low
<i>Social/Relational Challenges</i>	High	Recovery less likely	Recovery possible with attention to building relationship
	Low	Recovery possible where relational work can create logistical solutions	Recovery more likely

Results

Logistical Challenges

- Logistical challenges = highly specific and variable
- Key challenges:
 - Scale
 - Labor
 - Infrastructure
 - Financial viability



Results

Relational Challenges

- Misunderstandings and assumptions can create reluctance to potential partnership

*We have people come through from all over the world and they go, “Wow, why are you throwing this away or why are you throwing that away?” We’re like, “**We wish the hell we weren’t.**” And they’re going, “We’re going to figure this out.” And we go, “Okay, get back to us.”*

- Grower



Results

Establishing Recovery Partnerships

- Draw on a common identity or history

*Our food sourcers are people from industry, they live in those communities, they already know everyone there.... **It's all about trusted partners.***

- Recovery outlet

- Focus on mutual interests

*She pointed and just said, "where does this go, where does this go?" When I said this goes to goats, she said, "we'll take it." **And that started the relationship of realizing what they could take.** We didn't know how much they could take.... Now we load sometimes five or six semi-trucks a week to them of product that we were just disking into the ground.*

- Grower

Results

Maintaining Recovery Partnerships

- Communication to facilitate collaborative problem-solving
- Flexibility and consistency

He has twice-weekly pick-ups, and we go and glean whatever is leftover. That works well for us because it's very predictable.

***He also is really communicative.** If, for some reason, there is not a lot leftover, he will reach out and say, "Hey, there's only one box of lettuce this week, and it might not be worth the resources that it would cost you guys to drive out here."*

- Recovery outlet

*I might say, "**This time let's move the trash for them, and then we'll educate them.**" If they're a new donor we'll educate them on what our guidelines are, invite them to take a tour of our warehouse, talk to them about it a little bit and then try again. Because that might be an opportunity for more in the future.*

- Recovery outlet

Conclusion

- Relational barriers to food recovery exist alongside financial/logistical challenges.
- Relational work can also help address financial/logistical challenges.
- This work is dynamic and context-specific.



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