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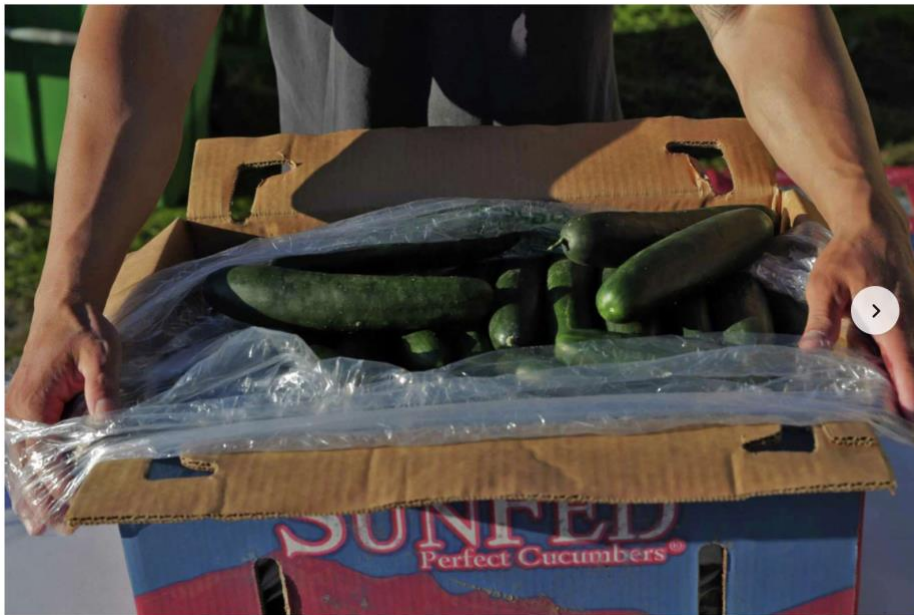
BAY AREA

San Francisco considers plan to rescue 7 million pounds of food waste from restaurants and supermarkets



Tara Duggan

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Vu Pham unboxes cucumbers for clients at the San Francisco-Marín Food Bank food pantry on Treasure Island in San Francisco.

Carlos Avila Gonzalez/The Chronicle 2021



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Lasar (top) gives donated mesclun to Ebony Wilkerson of St. Joseph Family Center at San Francisco's wholesale produce market.

Gabrielle Lurie/The Chronicle 2017



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Russell Rodriguez, 4, holds the watermelon he picked at the San Francisco-Marín Food Bank food pantry on Treasure Island in San Francisco.

Carlos Avila Gonzalez/The Chronicle 2021

San Francisco could provide an additional 7 million pounds of food to the hungry under a plan announced Tuesday that would require supermarkets and restaurants to rescue edible produce, prepared meals and other food, and to reduce what they send to landfills.

The legislation from Supervisor Shamann Walton and the San Francisco Department of the Environment is intended to help the county comply with SB 1383, which seeks to reduce the amount of organic waste sent to landfill by 75% to meet state climate goals.

Signed into law in 2016, SB 1383 requires food businesses to divert food waste from landfills and to rescue “the maximum amount” of edible food. It went into effect in January for large-scale food businesses like supermarkets and distributors, and will apply to larger restaurants (over 250 seats and 5,000 square feet), hotels, caterers and health facilities in January 2024.

The timing is good, said Alexa Kielty of the Department of the Environment, because the need for food almost doubled during the pandemic, just as food donations went down when hotels and other providers experienced a loss of business.

“Food insecurity remains a significant issue in San Francisco with 1 in 4 residents at risk of hunger due to low income or economic insecurity,” said Walton, who represents District 10, in a statement. “BIPOC communities, in particular Black and Latino, with a growing trend in the city’s Asian community, are most at risk.”

An estimated 35% of food in the United States is wasted, resulting in a loss of \$408 billion in 2019, according to the nonprofit organization ReFED. At the same time, when food, yard waste and other organic matter break down in landfills, they emit methane and other greenhouse gases that add up to around 20% of the state’s methane emissions.

While composting reduces such emissions and is part of the strategy behind SB 1383, the law also intends to rescue more food while it’s still edible.

Walton’s proposal, which the Board of Supervisors passed preliminarily on Tuesday and will be up for a second vote on June 14, would require food

businesses to keep track of the amount of food they rescue and make sure they're sorting waste properly. It also allows the Department of the Environment to inspect businesses and impose fines when they don't comply.

However, "Our site visits are really focused on education and technical assistance," said Kelly Gaherty, commercial zero waste assistant coordinator at the Department of the Environment. "We know that this is a brand new law."

San Francisco has been preparing for SB 1383 since 2019, when it received a \$500,000 grant to test software that matches food businesses with excess to food recovery organizations like food pantries. The city also used the funds to buy equipment to help organizations handle the expected extra food, such as a new fork lift purchased for the San Francisco-Marín Food Bank.

The work done with that grant resulted in rescuing over 3 million pounds of food, or about 2.5 million meals, according to the Department of the Environment.

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