



Submitted by: Lebanon Co-op Store

### What was the challenge or opportunity?

Grocery stores by design end up producing a lot of food waste. At the Co-op food Stores we were concerned with two major challenges in our community, hunger and food waste. These two problems should never exist in the same system and yet, edible food was going into the landfill while there were people in our community who needed food. So we asked- 'How can we reduce our food waste and get this food to people who need it before it goes bad?'

### What was your approach or solution?

10 years ago a Co-op employee launched an initiative to begin getting edible produce that was no longer sellable to people in need. This initiative is now an independent non-profit called Willing Hands that picks up food from stores and farms and distributes it to people in need. Now, Co-op employees in departments like produce sort out cosmetically unattractive food that is still edible and Willing Hands staff pick it up from our stores to distribute to the community.

### What is the impact (on your bottom line? In the community?, etc.)

A decade later, this program is a great example of community collaboration that benefits everyone involved. The Co-op is able to meet its mission of providing healthy food in the community while also reducing waste costs, Willing Hands gets a major, reliable source of food, and other community non-profits are able to distribute food to hungry people in the community. This program now brings produce, baked goods, meat and even flowers from the Co-op to people throughout our community. Each year the Co-op donates about 250,000 pounds of food to Willing Hands.