



## **SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A.,  
Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University

Cooperative Extension Service

SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

### **Leader Training Guide**

#### **From Waste to Worth**

#### **Objective:**

Upon completion of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Understand how food rescue efforts help reduce food waste while supporting individuals and families experiencing food insecurity.
- Explain how safe, surplus food from businesses, farms, restaurants, hotels, and households can be redirected to community members in need rather than being discarded.
- Identify practical strategies for reducing food waste at home and in the community, including meal planning, food sharing, donating, preserving, composting, and creative use of leftovers.
- Recognize the importance of partnerships among organizations, volunteers, businesses, and community members in transforming surplus food into a valuable community resource.
- Develop a personal or community-based action plan to reduce food waste and promote food recovery efforts in their local area.

#### **Lesson Overview/Introduction:**

Food waste is not only a household issue; it is also a community, environmental, and food access concern. One of the most valuable lessons from the Thailand trip was learning about the work of the Scholars of Sustenance (SOS) Foundation. Through its food rescue model, SOS demonstrates that food often considered “extra” or surplus is still safe, nutritious, and valuable. Rather than allowing edible food to go to waste, SOS collects surplus food from various sources and redistributes it to individuals and communities experiencing food insecurity. This approach not only reduces food waste but also helps improve food access and supports environmental sustainability.

Scholars of Sustenance (SOS) is a food rescue and environmental foundation dedicated to reducing food waste while addressing food insecurity. In Thailand, SOS rescues safe, high-quality surplus food from businesses and redistributes it to vulnerable communities. Through its food rescue efforts, SOS has helped reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase access to nutritious food for those in need. Its programs include food rescue operations, rescue kitchens, food waste composting, school food drives, rescue farms, and food education initiatives.

This lesson connects the food rescue principles demonstrated by SOS to practical actions that families, community organizations, and local groups can apply in South Carolina. The goal is to encourage participants to view food waste from a new perspective—not as trash, but as a valuable resource that can be planned for, shared, rescued, repurposed, donated, composted, or returned to the soil. By making small changes in how food is managed, individuals and communities can reduce waste, support food security, and contribute to a healthier environment.

## **Lesson: Reducing food waste through the “Rescue, Reuse, and Return” approach**

**Facilitator Prompt:** Ask participants: When you hear the phrase ‘food rescue,’ what do you think it means?

Suggested Time: 5–10 minutes

### **1. Rescue: Save good food before it becomes waste**

Food rescue involves identifying edible food that may not be sold, served, or used but is still safe, nutritious, and of good quality. Examples include surplus meals, extra produce, day-old bread, unserved prepared foods, or items approaching their “best by” date that remain safe to eat.

In Thailand, Scholars of Sustenance (SOS) demonstrates how food rescue can be successfully implemented through community partnerships. Food donors may include hotels, grocery stores, restaurants, farms, food manufacturers, and other businesses. Instead of allowing surplus food to be discarded, SOS collects and redistributes it to individuals and families who can benefit from it.

### **Key Teaching Points:**

Surplus food is not necessarily spoiled food. It may simply be extra, cosmetically imperfect, close to a quality date, or left over from food service operations.

- Effective food rescue requires planning and adherence to food safety practices. Food must be properly handled, stored, transported, and distributed.
- Partnerships are essential. Businesses, volunteers, community organizations, churches, schools, Extension programs, and nonprofit agencies can all contribute to successful food rescue efforts.
- Food rescue can begin at home. Families can reduce waste by checking existing food supplies before shopping, using leftovers creatively, freezing excess food, and sharing unopened shelf-stable items when appropriate.

### **Local Household Examples:**

- Use ripe fruit in smoothies, muffins, oatmeal, fruit sauces, or freezer packs for future use.
- Freeze extra bread to use later for toast, sandwiches, croutons, stuffing, or breadcrumbs.
- Transform leftover cooked rice into fried rice, soups, casseroles, or grain bowls.
- Share surplus produce from home gardens with neighbors, churches, senior centers, or local food pantries.
- Create an “Eat First” section in the refrigerator for foods that should be used soon to prevent spoilage.

**Facilitator Prompt:** What foods do you most often throw away at home, and what is one way you could rescue or use those foods before they become waste?

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

## 2. Reuse: Turn Leftovers and Surplus Food into New Meals

One important lesson from the SOS model is that reducing food waste requires creativity. Food rescue does not end when food is collected; it also involves transforming rescued or surplus ingredients into meals that people can enjoy and use. Programs such as Rescue Kitchen and Cook for SOS focus on preparing nutritious meals from rescued food, demonstrating that ingredients often considered "extra" can still have significant value.

Families can apply the same concept at home by viewing leftovers as ingredients for future meals rather than as unwanted food. Reusing food creatively can help reduce waste, save money, and provide nutritious meal options.

### Key Teaching Points:

- Leftovers can become planned ingredients for future meals rather than being discarded.
- A single food item can be used in multiple ways throughout the week.
- Cultural food traditions often provide creative examples of using available ingredients efficiently and reducing waste.
- Cooking with foods already on hand can save money, reduce grocery expenses, and prevent unnecessary food waste.

### Reuse Ideas:

- Leftover vegetables → soups, omelets, pasta dishes, stir-fries, wraps, or grain bowls.
- Leftover chicken, fish, beans, or tofu → tacos, salads, sandwiches, quesadillas, or rice bowls.
- Stale bread → French toast, bread pudding, croutons, stuffing, or breadcrumbs.
- Overripe bananas → banana bread, pancakes, smoothies, muffins, or oatmeal toppings.
- Cooked greens → add to eggs, soups, beans, casseroles, or grain dishes.
- Fresh herbs → freeze in water or oil using an ice cube tray for future cooking.
- Vegetable scraps → use for homemade broth, composting, or enriching garden soil.

### Thailand-Inspired Connection:

Many cultures, including Thai food traditions, make excellent use of available ingredients by combining herbs, vegetables, rice, broths, sauces, and small amounts of protein into flavorful meals. These traditions demonstrate that reducing food waste does not mean sacrificing taste or variety. Instead, it encourages making the most of available ingredients while creating nutritious and enjoyable meals.

### Mini Meal Makeover Examples:

- |                                                              |                                                       |                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| • <b>Before:</b> Leftover rice, soft vegetables, and one egg | • <b>Before:</b> Leftover cooked vegetables and broth | • <b>Before:</b> Extra fruit and yogurt       |
| • <b>After:</b> Vegetable fried rice                         | • <b>After:</b> Vegetable soup                        | • <b>After:</b> Smoothie or breakfast parfait |

**Facilitator Prompt:** What is one leftover food your family does not usually eat, and how could you transform it into a new meal or snack that everyone would enjoy?

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

### **3. Return: Compost what cannot be eaten**

Not all food scraps can be rescued or reused. Some food materials are not edible, such as fruit and vegetable peels, eggshells, coffee grounds, spoiled produce, and tough plant stems. The SOS model in Thailand recognizes composting and environmental education as important components of reducing food waste. Through food waste composting programs and educational activities involving gardening, cooking, planting, and composting, SOS teaches individuals how food scraps can be returned to the environment in a beneficial way.

Composting helps transform food scraps and other organic materials into nutrient-rich compost that can improve soil health and support plant growth. Rather than sending these materials to a landfill, composting allows them to be returned to the soil, completing a natural cycle. This practice can be especially valuable for households with home gardens, schools, and community garden projects.

#### **Key Teaching Points:**

Composting is intended for inedible food scraps and organic materials that can no longer be used for human consumption.

- Whenever possible, food should be rescued, shared, donated, or reused before being composted.
- Compost improves soil quality, supports plant growth, and helps reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills.
- Composting can be practiced at home, in schools, community gardens, and through local composting programs.

#### **What Can Usually Be Composted:**

- Fruit and vegetable peels
- Coffee grounds
- Tea bags without staples or plastic
- Eggshells
- Plant trimmings and garden debris
- Leaves and yard waste
- Small amounts of plain grains or bread, depending on compost setup

#### **What to Avoid in Basic Home Compost:**

- Meat & poultry
- Fish & Sea Food
- Grease, oils and fats
- Dairy products
- Large amounts of cooked food
- Pet waste
- Highly oily or heavily processed foods

**Facilitator Prompt:** Ask: "If a food item cannot be safely eaten, shared, or reused, what are some ways it can still be used to benefit the environment instead of becoming waste?"

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

**Group Discussion:**

Ask participants to discuss:

Use the following questions to encourage reflection and discussion about food waste, food rescue, and community action:

1. What surprised you most about the food rescue model and how it helps both people and the environment?
2. What types of food are most often wasted in your household or community, and why do you think this happens?
3. What challenges make it difficult for families to reduce food waste, and what solutions might help?
4. What local organizations, businesses, farms, food pantries, or community groups could play a role in rescuing or sharing surplus food?
5. How could churches, schools, Extension programs, community gardens, or other community organizations help reduce food waste and improve food access in your area?
6. What is one strategy from today's lesson that you could begin using at home this week?
7. How can the “Rescue, Reuse, and Return” approach help families save money while supporting a healthier environment?
8. What opportunities do you see in your community for reducing food waste and helping people in need?

**Suggested Activity: Food Rescue Sorting Game****Supplies Needed:**

- Printed food cards or fake food items
- Three labeled baskets or boxes:
  - Rescue/Donate
  - Reuse/Cook
  - Return/Compost
- Markers
- Tape or labels
- Optional: meal planning sheets and grocery list templates

**Instructions:**

Give each participant or group a set of food cards. Examples may include:

- |                         |                       |                  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| • Day-old bread         | • Apple peel          | • Carrot tops    |
| • Overripe banana       | • Leftover chicken    | • Leftover soup  |
| • Wilted spinach        | • Bruised tomato      | • Unopened pasta |
| • Unopened canned beans | • Coffee grounds      | • Moldy bread    |
| • Cooked rice           | • Extra garden squash |                  |
|                         | • Expired milk        |                  |

Participants decide whether each item should be rescued, reused, returned to the soil, or discarded for safety reasons.

## **Debrief Questions:**

- Which items were easy to sort?
- Which items were confusing?
- What foods should not be donated?
- What foods could be saved earlier with better planning?
- What is one change you can make at home this week?

Suggested Time: 15–20 minutes

## **Suggested Activity: “Eat First” Home Action Plan**

Participants create a simple plan using these prompts:

1. This week, I will rescue: Example: fruit, leftovers, bread, vegetables, pantry items
2. I will reuse it by making: Example: soup, stir-fry, smoothies, casseroles, rice bowls, wraps
3. I will return scraps by: Example: composting, garden use, community compost, reducing trash
4. One habit I will change is: Example: shop with a list, freeze leftovers, label containers, use an “eat first” bin

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

## **Lesson Summary:**

Food waste is a significant challenge, but the experiences shared during the Thailand trip and the work of the Scholars of Sustenance (SOS) food rescue model demonstrate that meaningful solutions are possible when individuals, organizations, businesses, and communities work together. Food that is safe and edible should be used, shared, donated, or rescued before it becomes waste. Surplus ingredients and leftovers can be transformed into nutritious meals, while inedible food scraps can be composted and returned to the soil to support future food production.

The key message of this lesson is simple:

**Rescue what can be eaten. Reuse what can be transformed. Return what can nourish the soil.**

Everyone has a role to play in reducing food waste. Families can plan meals, use leftovers creatively, and compost food scraps. Community organizations, churches, schools, Extension programs, food businesses, and volunteers can work together to rescue surplus food, improve food access, and support environmental sustainability.

Participants should leave this lesson understanding that reducing food waste is about more than saving money. It is about valuing food, protecting natural resources, reducing environmental impacts, supporting individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, and strengthening communities. By making small changes in daily habits, each person can contribute to a healthier, more sustainable, and more food-secure future.

## **Suggested Supplies:**

- Printed food cards or fake food items
- Three baskets or containers labeled Rescue, Reuse, Return
- Meal planning sheets
- Grocery list templates
- Markers or stickers
- “Eat First” refrigerator label
- Food waste diary handout
- Compost example container or photo

## **Suggested Handouts:**

- Weekly Meal Plan
- Grocery List Template
- Food Waste Diary
- “Eat First” Bin Label
- Rescue, Reuse, Return Action Plan
- Safe Food Donation Tips
- Composting Basics

## **Additional Resources**

### **Composting Basics**

Clemson HGIC Composting

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/composting/>

### **Safe Food Donation Tips**

USDA Donating Food

<https://www.usda.gov/about-food/food-safety/food-loss-and-waste/donating>

### **Leftovers & Food Safety**

USDA FSIS Leftovers and Food Safety

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/leftovers-and-food-safety>

## **Personal Action Step**

Before leaving, ask participants to identify one action they will take this week to reduce food waste at home, such as:

- Creating an “Eat First” section in the refrigerator
- Planning meals before grocery shopping
- Freezing leftovers for future meals
- Sharing excess garden produce
- Starting a simple compost container
- Finding a new way to reuse leftover foods

Encourage participants to share their action step with the group and report back on their success at a future meeting or program session.

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# WEEKLY MEAL PLAN



\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

|        | BREAKFAST | LUNCH | DINNER | SNACKS |
|--------|-----------|-------|--------|--------|
| SUNDAY |           |       |        |        |
| SUNDAY |           |       |        |        |
| SUNDAY |           |       |        |        |
| SUNDAY |           |       |        |        |
| SUNDAY |           |       |        |        |
| SUNDAY |           |       |        |        |
| SUNDAY |           |       |        |        |



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# GROCERY LIST



*Plan smart. Shop healthy. Eat well.*



## Fruits & Vegetables

- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
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## Protein

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## Grains

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## Dairy

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## Pantry/Other

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- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
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### Healthy Shopping Tip:

Choose a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables each week.



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