

## The tale of the first food bank in Sweden

A food bank is a non-profit organization that collects surplus food leftover from society and feeds it to the poor. Its benefits go beyond fighting hunger to promote a higher standard of living for humanity, while also preserving the environment we live in. This activity is sometimes called "*food redistribution*" as it prevents the food from being wasted by the food industry. From an environmental perspective, not only is the food saved, but also the energy and resources invested in food industries for production and distribution are secured.



However, the goodwill of securing food for the poor should be accompanied by food safety and quality. All food donated must sustain its good quality, assuring that it does not inflict any harm on vulnerable people with food poisoning.

This brought us to study how food banks can secure food safety and quality in charitable food redistribution, as well as contribute to food waste reduction. We explored the first food bank in Stockholm, established by Stockholms Stadsmission a couple of years ago. Field observations were made to investigate their routine practices. This was coupled with field tests, which were used to collect temperature data for the food being circulated. Every day the food bank collects food from their one main donor and delivers it directly to social organizations. The food bank manages to assure food safety through the manual tracing and tracking of food flow. However, in looking to adapt to a growing number of partners, a more robust traceability system is needed. Besides internal challenges, the food bank's redistribution operations face external difficulties in maintaining proper temperature control at receiving and dispatching points. Therefore, it is important that rigorous routine be exercised to make sure the food is safely delivered to recipients.

The food bank deals with food in vulnerable conditions as the food discarded by industries is food close to its best before date. Besides the intrinsic deterioration of the food, limited knowledge of time-temperature abuses in the previous stages, i.e. when the food has been transferred between different actors, arouses suspicions and concerns over food quality. While a time-temperature indicator showing more realistic remaining shelf-life of individual product has still not been commercialized, sharing of information across the chain partners has been the only tool to ensure food safety. This stresses the importance of traceability capability for all actors across the food value chain. Each actor contributes to the final quality of the food, thus transparency of how the food is treated will not only guarantee safety for consumers, but also prevent unnecessary destruction of edible food.