



Rep. McGovern Roundtable at UMass Medical School

Testimony of Josh Domingues, Founder & CEO, Flashfood Inc.

Mar 4, 2022

Representatives McGovern, Perlmutter, Raskin and DeSaulnier, my fellow leaders in the anti-hunger space, and members of the UMass Medical School community, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today, and thank you for taking the time to focus on the critically important issue of food insecurity.

My name is Josh Domingues and I am the Founder & CEO of Flashfood Inc. Flashfood is an app-based marketplace that strives to reduce retail food waste by connecting people with affordable food nearing its best-by date. Our app is currently live at five of the local Stop & Shop's locations here in Worcester, along with nearly 600 other supermarkets in 17 states across the Northeast, Midwest and Southeast.

I founded Flashfood in 2016, after being inspired by a conversation with my sister, who was working as a caterer at the time. She called me upset saying that she had just thrown out thousands of dollars of food after an event was canceled. It got me thinking about where else food was being wasted. I began to research and the more I learned about the problem, the more passionate I became about food waste. After many months of reading and meeting with people across the supply chain, it became clear to me that there was a significant opportunity to reduce food waste in grocery stores and to ensure that food ended up on dinner tables, not in landfills.

Supermarkets throw out an estimated 3.75 million tons¹ of food annually which equates to about \$37 billion of loss². This is despite years of trying to solve the problem through improved inventory management and ongoing community donation programs, which are an essential part of addressing food insecurity.

¹ [Insights Engine, ReFed, 2019](#)

² ["Insights Engine", ReFed, 2019](#)

This food waste issue persists in supermarkets because, despite ongoing diversion efforts, it's incredibly difficult to manage the supply and demand dynamics of fresh food at a local store level. Supply chain challenges during the pandemic have only made it harder. Every day, grocery stores are faced with a surplus of food items reaching their "best by" date. Redistribution of that food is complicated by a short time window, and the implications of refrigeration and transport.

Wasted food is the single biggest category of material placed in municipal landfills in America and most of that is perfectly good food that could have helped feed families in need. Not only is wasted food a kick in the gut to the hunger problem in America, but it's a massive contributor to our warming planet: when food ends up in the landfill, it rots and creates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Even worse, throwing food away means that the resources and energy to grow the food and get it from the farm all the way to the grocery store - growing it, production, transportation, storage - that's wasted, too.

Flashfood is a simple solution that's making a massive impact on folks who experience marginal or low food security. It's simple: grocers post surplus or near date items that they collect during their daily culling and post them to the app at a steep discount. Shoppers see the deals closest to them, pay for items on the app, and pick them up in store.

Our primary goal was always to reduce food waste, and Flashfood's environmental impact is significant - we've diverted more than 34 million pounds of food from landfills, which translates to 62.7 million pounds of greenhouse gas emissions that haven't escaped into the atmosphere. To put that into perspective, it would mean zero fuel emissions for over 71 million miles driven by the average car.

What we didn't anticipate is what a significant impact Flashfood would have on food security for families. In the face of rising food prices, we've seen even greater demand and we hear from our shoppers everyday that Flashfood is a game-changer for them.

Flashfood shoppers are generally folks who experience marginal or low food security. They sometimes worry about not having enough food to eat. When they do have enough to eat, there's a lack of variety, too few nutritious options

and often no option to try foods or buy favorites. Flashfood is available to everyone, but our shoppers are typically on a limited budget, trying to make ends meet - either as retirees, students or the primary shoppers for households with multiple children or elders to feed and care for.

I want to share with you a few stories from those Flashfood shoppers. This one is from a pensioner named Rejeanne.

"I am a senior who has not been able to get any variety as far as food is concerned due to limited budget. As you well know it is a hard and difficult time when I get my pension at the end of the month. Well, this month I bought all [my groceries] but \$20 at Flashfood. I spent the whole day checking every hour to see what was available. Let me tell [you] what I will be eating this month! I got some salmon steaks, a whole rainbow trout, filet of sole which I repackaged in eating portions for me [since] I live alone. I got some chicken, some lunch meat, bread and tortilla wraps and cake and cookies and veggies, fresh baby spinach, kale salad and fresh fruit tray and milk....so I am absolutely happy. About 90% of what I bought I have not eaten for a few years....because I could not afford it."

Jean is a licensed practical nurse in Pennsylvania with 6 children ranging in age from 10 to 20 years old, all of whom have special needs.

"The kids definitely love the fruit. Before we had to limit it, like we can only have 1 apple today for the family because we can't buy so many of them. I have a two-year-old niece and she walks around today with an apple holding with her both hands, just like she has the world. That makes a huge difference for us. It really does."

"I'm thrilled by being able to get my families fresh alternatives because I'm a nurse and I know what they should eat and it's just trying to figure out how you can afford to make sure they are eating in the way they should. Flashfood has opened a lot of doors that way."

To date, we've saved shoppers over \$100 million. This impact helped our work take on a different meaning – one that we're reminded of every time a shopper leaves a review telling us we're the reason that they can afford to send their kid to swimming lessons, or that we're helping them manage a health condition by making fruits and vegetables more accessible. Sometimes

it's as simple as allowing people to enjoy more variety, or helping them treat their family to dessert. Our regular shoppers save more than \$540 per year.

Our team is focused on expanding to more supermarkets across America and making Flashfood accessible to more people. One of the key projects we're working on this year, and where government support could help expedite our impact, is adding EBT as a payment option in the app. The most frequent feedback we get from our shoppers in the US. is that folks want to use SNAP benefits on Flashfood to purchase fresh food at a lower price than it's available in their local grocery stores. Our experience to date has been that processing times are long for new EBT applicants.

We're very appreciative to have been included in this session and if there's any way we can collaborate with the other groups here to impact food insecurity, we welcome that work.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our story. I would be happy to answer any questions.