


# Case Study: Replate reinvigorates SFO's food recovery program



 replate  
a world that  
doesn't expire.

## Highlights



SFO saved 4.3 million gallons of water.



SFO diverted over 33,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air.



There was a 36% voluntary participation rate from vendors in one year.



The Airport has access to all required data for SB 1383 compliance.

## Introduction

As hubs to the global economy, airports have a key role to play in addressing the climate crisis by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and shifting towards more ecological practices overall. San Francisco International Airport (SFO) is doing this and more, as SFO aims to be the first airport in the world to achieve “triple zero:” zero net carbon, zero net energy, and zero waste.

In March 2019, SFO banned all petroleum-based plastic packaging for food and beverage products to reduce the amount of single-use plastic coming on site. Additionally, SFO has implemented a range of climate initiatives, including on site generated solar power, fleet electrification, electric vehicle charging stations, water stewardship measures, and advancing the use of sustainable aviation fuel, which generates 80% fewer emissions than conventional jet fuel.

SFO's zero waste program includes composting, recycling, and landfill diversion, and a transition to fiber-based food ware, with the aim of reducing materials sent to landfills by 90% by 2028. To achieve this goal, the Airport incorporated food recovery initiatives, encouraging restaurants, food and beverage retail stores, and airline lounges to donate surplus edible food to community organizations serving those facing food insecurity.

**SFO Unites Against Hunger program was created to eliminate edible food from going into landfill. Using Replate's transportation logistics, the Airport successfully diverted over 19,000 pounds of surplus food from disposal in the past 15 months.**

— Briana Zhen,  
Environmental Operations  
Specialist

# The Challenge

In 2017, SFO first launched its “SFO Unites Against Hunger,” a food donation program for the Airport’s food and beverage tenants. The Airport designated centralized food donation drop-off locations throughout Airport terminals. SFO partnered with local nonprofit organizations to collect food donations and distribute these through their network of clients.

The recipient organizations relied on volunteers to retrieve the surplus food from the Airport, which frequently resulted in inconsistent and delayed pick-ups. At times, donations would sit in the collection refrigerators for several days, waiting for the next available volunteer to pick up the food.

In addition, SFO lacked an administrative portal to manage, track and measure the impact of food donations, and relied on spreadsheets to track progress. They wanted a bird’s eye view of the food recovery program to improve logistical efforts, and understand social and environmental benefits.

In 2020, SFO’s food recovery program came to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With declining travel and health issues to consider, the team had limited bandwidth to continue their food donation program.

In March 2022, as passenger numbers increased, the Airport relaunched SFO Unites Against Hunger with the plan to find food donation logistics and software services e to support their mission. In addition, California Senate Bill 1383, the State’s new Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy, aims to maximize organic waste collection and requires large venues such as Airports, hospitals, and event venues to donate all surplus edible food beginning January 1, 2024.

To comply with SB 1383, the Airport found it was also in need of building robust operational infrastructure for its food donation program.



## Replate's Solution

In 2022, SFO obtained grant funding from the San Francisco Department of the Environment, and selected Replate as its service provider.

Replate provides paid food rescuers to pick up food from the Airport's centralized food donation hubs on a recurring cadence of three times per week. To encourage concessionaire participation, hubs are conveniently located in each Airport terminal. Using Replate's scheduling interface, SFO selects the day and time for food donation collection. The interface also enables SFO to contact a designated point person for any logistical support.

To overcome administrative hurdles, SFO uses Replate's software to connect with internal vendors, track when they're donating, how often, and how much. All donations are measured in terms of total pounds donated, water saved, carbon dioxide emissions diverted, and meals created. In less than a minute, SFO can extract a variety of metrics for its food recovery program and on its participating businesses, which is immensely valuable for the organization's sustainability reporting.

Every year, SFO publishes its Zero Annual Report to update stakeholders on the Airport's sustainability accomplishments of the previous calendar year, as well as its latest sustainability goals.

Overall, the Airport's food recovery program, SFO Unites Against Hunger, has brought new light to food waste and its environmental impact at SFO. Food and beverage vendors are assessing and quantifying their surplus food, actively donating what they can on a routine basis. In 2024, SFO anticipates working with businesses to identify strategies to reduce surplus and over-purchasing. Replate provides additional tooling to assist with waste prevention.

## Results:

- In its first year donating with Replate, SFO saw a 36% voluntary participation rate among vendors. Out of 108 tenants, 39 voluntarily signed up to donate food.
- Within one year, SFO's participating businesses donated 15,948 pounds of food, creating 13,290 meals. Those donations saved 4.3 million gallons of water and diverted almost 33,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air.
- SFO is considered a leader in large-scale food donation programming and speaks at national events on its food recovery program and its partnership with Replate.

