

Cam Pascual and Mia Zavalij
Food Recovery Network
2015 Start Up Challenge winners



Cam Pascual and Mia Zavalij co-founded the Food Recovery Network at the University of Maryland as students back in 2011 because they hated the sight of good food going to waste. They believe in creating a sustainable food system to feed a growing global population and believe food recovery is part of the answer. The Food Recovery Network is now at nearly 200 campuses in 43 states across the country and has donated more than 1.3 million pounds of food that would otherwise be wasted.

What has FRN's biggest accomplishment been since winning last year's challenge?

Mia: In November 2015, FRN donated its millionth pound of food! Since then, that number has grown to more than 1.3 million pounds of food donated, or more than 1 million meals. And in April 2016, FRN hosted the first-ever National Food Recovery Dialogue, bringing together 315 FRN students from 91 universities across the country and 120 other attendees from government agencies, dining services, local and national nonprofits, and other leading food recovery and food justice organizations.

What achievements have you made in 2016? What else is to come for this year?

Cam: 2016 has been a huge year for FRN. This school year, we started food recovery programs at 42 additional college campuses across the country (including establishing chapters in seven new states, officially expanding our reach to 43 states), recovered more than 500,000 pounds of food, convened nearly 500 students and professionals at our first national conference, and held our first food recovery Lobby Day. The rest of this year, we're going to keep working toward expanding to all 50 states, and energizing the FRN network around elevating the profile of food waste and advocating for legislation that helps businesses and consumers reduce their food waste.

FRN is celebrating its 5th anniversary this year. How have you all achieved so much in just a few short years?

Mia: FRN's model is simple, high impact, and beneficial for everyone involved. We like to say it's a "win-win-win-win model." First, it's a "win" for hunger-fighting nonprofit organizations, who receive the surplus prepared foods from FRN chapters. The foods donated by FRN chapters are high-quality, nutritious foods that are then served to food insecure individuals in the community. Second, FRN also benefits its student leaders. Our program focuses on empowering students and providing them with the tools and skills to succeed. A third benefit is the community that is strengthened through multi-stakeholder collaboration. Lastly, FRN benefits the food donors

(campus dining halls, restaurants, etc.) who receive positive PR and cut costs through source reduction, decreased waste-hauling fees, and tax benefits.

What advice would you have for a young student looking to make a difference in their community's sustainable habits/culture?

Cam: For students, sustainability can be one of the most daunting issues to approach because it's easy to feel powerless in the face of these huge threats to our planet. But those are exactly the kind of people we need confronting these issues; students who are curious, passionate, and can creatively think about innovative solutions to influence their communities' culture around sustainability.

This year, FRN held its first national conference, the inaugural 2016 National Food Recovery Dialogue. What do you think was the biggest take away?

Mia: The 2016 National Food Recovery Dialogue convened 315 students and 120 professionals in the food recovery, food justice, policy and environmental spaces. The Monday following the weekend-long conference, more than 90 students participated in FRN's first-ever Lobby Day. Students met with 30 staffers from congressional offices to advocate for Rep. Chellie Pingree's (D-ME) Food Recovery Act and Rep. Jerry McNerney's (D-CA) Food Waste Accountability Act.

There are two big takeaways from the event. First, FRN students have a tremendous amount of power and passion. Second, the time to take action to stop food waste in America is now. In September 2015, the USDA and EPA announced the nation's first-ever food waste reduction goal — to reduce food waste in America by 50 percent by 2030 — and many organizations have come together to move toward reaching this goal. FRN is thrilled to help move the food recovery movement forward.

Why do you think students are so engaged and interested in the topic of food waste?

Cam: Food waste is a unique issue in that it unites students interested in a wide range of areas. When we talk about addressing food waste, we're actually talking about addressing climate change, sustainability, hunger, foodies, innovation, human rights; it's a universal issue that touches on lots of areas that students are already passionate about. It's also a really accessible issue. The concept of food recovery is incredibly simple and uncontroversial: Don't waste perfectly good food. It's something everyone can get behind.

If a student would like to get involved with FRN what should they do?

Mia: If you want to get involved with FRN as a student, first check to see if there is an [existing chapter on your campus](#), and get involved if there is. If your campus does not have a Food Recovery Network chapter, [apply to start one here](#) and get connected to a staff member at FRN National!