

# One step back

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The community meal our church hosts--a modest operation that serves four free meals a week to about 50 guests--has recently lost its main source of donations. For several years, we've received big boxes of discarded produce--lettuce, peppers, asparagus, chiles, tomatoes, potatoes, whatever was being gleaned from the store shelves--from our local chain grocery. A new manager decided to end this practice.

The loss is devastating. For one thing, our community has only one grocery store. We can't just go down the street to another one and ask its manager to help us. For another thing, the fruits and vegetables that we used as a basis for our menus were the only fresh produce that many of our guests ate each week.

After taking what we needed for our menus, we put the remaining boxes in the hallway for people to "shop." Over and over again, we heard people say, "Oh, green beans. I love fresh green beans. I never buy them for myself because they are too expensive." At the end of the day, we sent the remaining vegetables on to a local farm for goat and chicken feed.

It wasn't a perfect system--there were frustrations and difficulties. But it was almost waste-free.

In a [new book](#), food journalist Jonathan Bloom documents food waste from "farm to fork." He estimates that 40-50 percent of food produced in the United States is never eaten. Obviously, this amount of wasted food is a moral issue, a social issue and a religious issue. It goes far beyond one chain supermarket and one small community.

For a few years, however, we glimpsed what it might feel like to solve this problem. It is painful to watch our solution get dumped in

the garbage.