

Our Food Donations

It's the ultimate paradox of an affluent society. Each year, some 14 billion pounds of food are sent to landfills in America. Meanwhile, nearly 37 million Americans – including 14 million children – are at risk of hunger.²⁰

	Pounds Donated	Recipient Agencies
Olive Garden	3,438,264	671
Red Lobster	2,313,636	649
LongHorn Steakhouse	1,463,866	333
Warehouse	941,240	43
The Capital Grille	546,320	34
Bahama Breeze	35,322	31
Seasons 52	19,853	7
Total	8,758,500	1,150¹⁹

Darden, like most restaurants, grappled for years with the problem of food waste. We particularly struggled with the uncomfortable dilemma of throwing away food that was perfectly good and safe to eat, yet, for a variety of reasons, couldn't be sold to our guests.

That's why we were so pleased to partner with the [Food Donation Connection](#), a national network that works with restaurants and other food service companies to distribute high-quality, prepared foods to hunger-relief organizations across the United States. A pilot program that began in 2003 grew into a company-wide effort the following year. Today, nearly all of our 1,800 restaurants participate in what is called the Darden Harvest food donation program.

Our Food Donation Partners

Our food donation program wouldn't be so successful without the efforts of many different organizations. These include:

Food Donation Connection. This national organization acts as the liaison between the restaurants interested in donating leftover food and the social service agencies that provide meals for the homeless and people at risk of hunger.

Feeding America. As the largest hunger-relief agency in the country, Feeding America collects the majority of our prepared food donations and distributes the meals to charities in the communities where our restaurants are located.

Social Services Agencies. In the Orlando area alone, our food donations help to support more than 50 local charities, including food banks and residential treatment centers for adults struggling with addiction.

¹⁹ Total is less than sum because many agencies pick up from more than one restaurant brand.

²⁰ Source: Feeding America

In fiscal year 2009, Darden restaurants contributed 8.7 million pounds of cooked food to families in need across the United States. Our main distribution partner is Feeding America (formerly America's Second Harvest), the nation's largest hunger-relief organization. Representatives from Feeding America take the food from our restaurants to the charities that directly feed the needy. More than 1,200 charities benefit from our food donation program.

How It Works

Here's how the program works: Each night, at the end of a dinner shift, our restaurants have leftover food that can't be used – such as full trays of thawed chicken breasts or steak tips. (We even sometimes donate lobsters.) Our rigorous food safety guidelines won't allow us to save food items like these for use on the following day. So instead, our kitchen crew cooks them just as they would for any paying guest, then packages and freezes them for weekly collections by the hunger-relief agencies. Our donations also often include cooked vegetables and sauces, like Olive Garden's popular Alfredo sauce.

Our restaurants are extremely good at forecasting what our guests will order. But we can't predict with 100% accuracy, and we don't want to run out of menu items, either. This means there are always some leftover ingredients at the end of each day. (Other leftover food includes take-out meals that were prepared, but never picked up by the diners who had ordered them. These, too, get frozen for the charities.)

For safety reasons, we never donate any raw foods – only items that have been thoroughly cooked.

Program Benefits

The food donation program has so many benefits – social, environmental and economic – that it's hard to know where to begin. First, and most important, it lets us assist Americans who are in need of a good meal. Second, it reduces our waste stream by taking food that would otherwise have gone to landfills and diverting it to an extremely worthy cause. Third, the program saves our company money, thanks to generous federal tax deductions and reduced disposal costs (i.e., less food waste = less money for waste removal fees).

Our restaurant employees benefit from the program, too. Many of our team members routinely tell us that they feel good knowing that they are helping members of their communities.

We're proud of the work our employees do to make this program so successful. In fact, it's one of the most valuable things we do as a company. This program gives us yet another way to fulfill our core purpose – to nourish and delight everyone we serve.