

Case Study

Community Harvest Food Bank and Processing Facility, Fort Wayne, IN.

Food Bank and site of The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Produce Preservation Center,

<https://www.communityharvest.org/aboutus/>

Trip description

In 2019, a visit was made to the Community Harvest Food Bank in Fort Wayne, IN. This organization became the first regional food bank in America to open a blanch, chill, and freeze produce preservation facility in 2015. The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Produce Preservation Center allows Community Harvest to preserve bountiful harvests for distribution to hungry families year round.

The intent of the visit was to:

- Evaluate connections between frozen vegetable processing and the emergency food system as potential strategic partners in establishing food processing infrastructure in Southwestern Washington/South Puget Sound
- Gather operational data such as processing times, equipment selection and cost, prices paid and processing quantities

General notes

- Products processed by Community Harvest for distribution to Food Bank clients include blanched and chilled (frozen) beans and corn
- The preservation kitchen is separate from a second kitchen rented to culinary enterprises
- The rental kitchen is used by private processing enterprises, as well as the program “Out of a Jam”, which is a cooking training program for at-risk youth. This program also uses a classroom on site equipped with a computer lab
- A HACCP plan is currently not required by the health department due to lack of cutting in the processes steps (freeze whole product), and distribution through the food bank (not for sale)

Use costs

- Rental of the kitchen for the “Out of a Jam” program is \$750 per month
- Hourly kitchen rental is typically \$10 to \$18/hr
- Dry storage, freezer storage and cooler rental space are \$18 per pallet
- Parking space is a flat fee (per year presumably?) of \$50

Facility information

- Managers of the facility use the program “Sketa” to schedule kitchen use



Fig. Donation of corn from Kurtz Farm, also visited on this trip.



Fig. Green beans blanched and chilled with slight freezer burn.

- Managers of the facility recommend that freezer capacity is twice that of cooler capacity
- Size of preservation kitchen
- Size of rental kitchen
- Size of dry storage for renters

Organization/plans needed to operate the facility

Seasonality

- The preservation facility sources produce from XX farms all in the greater Fort Wayne area, so preservation is a summer activity focused on warm-season crops.
- Off-season preservation? Rental kitchen used year round?

Staffing

- In total, Community Harvest retains 36 full-time employees, 25 full-time volunteers, and manages 7,700 other unduplicated part-time volunteers.
- The processing facility requires 1 full-time employee with time split half between actual blanch-chill processing, and the other half to oversee, administrative, and food safety tasks.

Sales, buyers

- The food bank contracts with farmers to purchase corn at \$0.30 per lb and beans at \$0.20 per lb
- As such, product is essentially donated from farmers that would otherwise waste, or they are inclined to sell low cost for philanthropic reasons
- There are no sales of chill-processed products out of this kitchen. All product is distributed through the foodbank
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Timing, steps and quality considerations

- Management estimates the facility is capable of processing 10 to 20 thousand pounds per week of beans, or 20 thousand pounds per week of corn. Translated to 8-hr shifts and an hourly rate, this equates to 4,000 lbs per day, or 500 lbs per hr. These seemed like an ambitious estimation
- At this facility, both corn and beans are steam blanched in an Accutemp Evolution Steamer, capable of steam blanching 3-4 hotel racks of produce at a time. Vegetables are then plunged into an ice bath, bagged, and moved into a freezer as opposed to IQF.
- The process eschews any tipping, peeling, cutting, or dicing steps in the interest of efficiency and to reduce risk to the largely volunteer run operation.
- Equipment consists mostly of five in-line Accutemp Evolution Steamers, a corn husker, several stainless steel tables, a bank of sinks for ice baths, two ice machines, stackable bread racks on dollies, and hotel pans.
- Product is packed into ziplock bags with a sticky label affixed by hand
- Quality (freezer burn) is not an issue; messaging to food bank clients encourage recipients that flavor and nutritional quality is not impaired by minor frost burn.

Equipment Aquisition



Fig. Five Accutemp Evolution Steamers with 6 hotel pan capacity. Blanch time varies from three to seven minutes. These steam units are not as fast, but eliminate the need for a much more expensive belt blancher.

- Community Harvest coordinated a \$5.5 million capital campaign, but that was for remodeling the Food Bank building acquired from Big Boy restaurant chain. Undetermined how much of that was allocated to establishing the two kitchen spaces at this point.
- The food bank staffs a grant writer
- The building for the food bank and processing facility was donated by the owner of Big Boy restaurants



Fig. The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Produce Preservation Center. The far side of the island houses the steam blanchers. Product is cooled in the ice bath to the left, and two ice machines are out of the frame to the left against a wall. Stainless tables to the right are used to bag and label product.



Fig. The rental commercial kitchen at the site consists of large processing surfaces, several commercial ranges in the far corner under the hood, a few sinks, and a steam unit to the left. A blender-mixer, several racks for storing culinary tools, and tables for breaks and bags are out of frame to the left.



Fig. Rentable supply storage is available for commercial kitchen renters.

Questions

- Facility orientation costs?
- Food safety training provided, required of renters?