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WKU students divert 5,000 pounds of food from landfills to charities

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When Western Kentucky University senior Elaine Losekamp traveled to a sustainability conference in 2018 and discovered a way to cut food waste and feed people simultaneously, an idea popped into her head.

“I’ve always been interested in food systems and passionate about food insecurity and environmental issues,” said Losekamp, of Bowling Green. “I was just really impressed by Food Recovery Network kind of finding a solution for all of those issues and bridging that gap.”



The advertisement consists of a white rectangular box. On the left side, there is a circular icon containing a green leaf. To the right of the icon is a photograph of a white bowl filled with a vibrant green soup, garnished with black pepper. A person's finger is shown touching the surface of the soup. In the top right corner of the photo, there are small blue icons for play and close. Below the photo, the text reads: **How To Remove Musty Smell**, followed by '1 Simple Trick To Easily Remove Musty Smell In Older Homes Built Before 1995'. A green circular button with a white right-pointing arrow is located in the bottom right corner of the advertisement.

When Losekamp returned to campus, she went to Elizabeth Gafford, WKU’s coordinator for resource conservation, with her idea: source surplus food from campus eateries for donation.

“For example, if the restaurant has a policy where they have to throw out bread after a certain number of days ... then we’ll pick up that bread,” Losekamp said. “We started out with just one location and right now we’re recovering regularly from five locations on campus. We’ve recovered from 13 different restaurants total – mainly on campus, but a variety in the community as well.”



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On Thursday, WKU President Timothy Caboni honored the student group, which has saved more than 5,000 pounds of food bound for landfills and diverted it to a dozen homeless shelters, soup kitchens and food pantries.

Caboni presented the students with a plaque during a small gathering at WKU’s Downing Student Union recognizing the group’s “tremendous success of recovering 5,300 pounds of food since their efforts began last year.”

Along with Losekamp, the students include Nelson Stone, Christine Belance, Olufunmilola Obielodan, Josiah Garcia and Allison Cook.

“On behalf of everyone at WKU, thank you,” Caboni said. “Thank you for sacrificing your personal time to conduct nearly 300 individual food recoveries. Thank you for achieving and pursuing ServSafe certification in order to be able to do this work.”

The student group has collected bagels, pastries, yogurts and fruit cups from Einstein Bros. Bagels; bread loaves and cookies from Subway; pre-made sandwiches and fruit cups from P.O.D. Market @ Bates and Pitstop Convenience Store; and soup, pastries and

cookies from DaVinci's and Java City, Caboni said.



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Among the agencies receiving the food are Christ Episcopal Church, MEALS Inc., Salvation Army of Bowling Green, Room In The Inn, Hope House Ministries and WKU's food pantry, Caboni said.

“We want to elevate the communities in which we live, and this is a remarkable example of how this work is making a difference in our local community in the lives of so many,” Caboni said.

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