

Harvest Manitoba: Coordinating Food Redistribution Across the Province

Company Overview

Harvest Manitoba is more than a food bank. It plays a central role in how food moves to people in need across the province. Operating from its warehouse in Winnipeg, Harvest coordinates food collection and distribution through a network of over 400 partner agencies serving urban centres, rural communities, northern regions, and First Nations.

Each month, more than 100,000 people rely on this network for food support. In total, Harvest moves over 12 million pounds of food every year. While food banks are often seen as simple charity operations, Harvest functions much closer to a large-scale logistics organization, connecting surplus food from farms, processors, and retailers with real community demand.

To strengthen this work, Harvest Manitoba is developing a Food Transformation Centre. This facility will allow the organization to process, preserve, and prepare surplus food instead of only redistributing it. The goal is simple: rescue more usable food and make it available in forms that better meet community needs.

The Challenge

Manitoba's food system reflects a problem seen across Canada. There is no shortage of food, but much of it never reaches the people who need it. Perfectly good food is lost because of short shelf life, limited transportation or storage, mismatched supply and demand, and gaps between different parts of the supply chain.

At the same time, food insecurity is increasing. More people are turning to food banks, yet perishable food continues to be wasted. Even with Harvest Manitoba's extensive network, limits on storage and processing mean that not all donated food can be saved or used efficiently.

Harvest Manitoba: At a Glance

Where Loss Occurs

Production, processing, distribution, retail

Main Drivers

Supply-demand mismatch, limited logistics/storage, perishability, fragmented coordination

Solutions

Food aggregation, centralized sorting/distribution, coordinated network management, structured food access

Key Partners

Producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, community agencies, volunteers

Produce Types

Fresh, frozen, shelf-stable, prepared foods

Measurement

Pounds of food recovered/distributed, households served, network reach

Social/Environmental Impact

Reduced food waste, increased food access, nutrition for families, community resilience

Financial Outcomes

Lower disposal costs, greater resource efficiency, leveraged donations, improved food system return

Policy Context

Food recovery infrastructure, redistribution frameworks, donation incentives

UN SDGs

2 – Zero Hunger
12 – Responsible Consumption
13 – Climate Action

The Solution

Harvest Manitoba tackles this challenge by acting as a province-wide platform for food recovery and redistribution. Its system has several key moving parts.



Food collection

Surplus food is gathered from many sources, including farmers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, and community food drives. Combining these donations allows Harvest to turn scattered supply into a more predictable food stream.

Centralized Sorting and Distribution

Food moves through the Winnipeg warehouse, where it is sorted and packed before being delivered to partner agencies. This centralized system helps food move quickly instead of sitting unused.

Network Coordination

A centralized intake and referral system helps direct people to local agencies and balance supply with regional demand. This reduces duplication and improves consistency across the network.

Standardized Food Access

Programs such as the Harvest Hamper provide households with several days of balanced, nutritious food, making planning easier for both families and agencies.

Food Transformation Centre Integration

The Food Transformation Centre will expand what Harvest Manitoba can do with surplus food. Bulk produce and cosmetically imperfect items can be processed rather than discarded. Surplus food can be turned into ready-to-use meals, frozen for later use, or preserved to extend shelf life.

This shift moves Harvest beyond redistribution alone. It allows food to be rescued earlier, stored longer, and used more flexibly, especially for perishable items that are currently hard to manage.

Where Food is Lost

Food loss happens at every stage of the supply chain: production, processing, distribution, and retail. The main causes are fragmentation, logistics constraints, perishability, and limited coordination.

Harvest Manitoba's model reduces these losses by aggregating supply, centralizing logistics, and managing distribution across a province-wide network. The Food Transformation Centre will be designed specifically to reduce losses of fresh and bulk food that cannot be handled with existing infrastructure.



Measuring Impact

Harvest Manitoba tracks its performance by pounds of food recovered and distributed, households served, and network reach. The results are tangible: less food in landfills, lower disposal costs, more efficient use of donations, and stronger, more resilient communities.

With the Food Transformation Centre, impact measurement will expand to include volumes of food processed, meals produced, shelf life extended, and new program outputs. This highlights deeper social and environmental benefits beyond redistribution.

Social and Environmental Impact

By redirecting surplus food, Harvest cuts waste and greenhouse emissions while making sure more Manitobans eat well. The Food Transformation Centre will amplify this by turning perishable surplus into nutritious meals and frozen products. This reduces landfill waste and carbon footprint even further.

Financial Outcomes

Rescuing more food reduces disposal costs and increases the value of donations. The Food Transformation Centre will also improve efficiency by allowing food to be handled in larger volumes and forms that require less repeated labour. Over time, it opens the door to new partnerships and funding linked to sustainability and food innovation.

What Makes This Model Work

Scale

Millions of pounds of food aggregated and distributed every year—keeping resources in the system.

Coordination

Centralized intake and allocation harmonizes supply and demand across a vast network.

Consistency

Standardized processes for food access, with value-added food products increasing reliability and variety.

Partnership

Deep relationships with industry, community, government, and food producers, including collaboration on supply chain innovations and surplus management.

Beyond Charity: System Coordination

Harvest Manitoba is not just handing out food. It actively manages a province-wide flow of supply and demand. It coordinates donations, manages inventory, tracks needs, and ensures the right food gets to the right places. This is food redistribution as a managed system, not a scattershot series of handouts.

“Harvest Manitoba is not just distributing food. It is coordinating how food moves across the province.”

The development of the new Food Transformation Centre marks a shift from redistribution alone toward full food system integration, including processing, preservation, and transformation. This evolution enables Harvest Manitoba to capture more surplus earlier in the supply chain, convert it into higher-value products, and tailor food support to community needs in innovative ways.

Turning Surplus into System Value

Through its partnerships, Harvest Manitoba preserves both food and its value. Surplus and off-grade produce is kept in the food system longer, reducing waste while increasing the return on food that has already been grown, harvested, and transported.

With the Food Transformation Centre, this model scales further. It processes produce at volume, creates ready-to-use meals, and freezes surplus to extend usability. The centre turns Manitoba’s agricultural abundance into a circular food economy with minimized waste and maximized impact.

Financial and System Outcomes

Harvest’s model delivers concrete results:

- Millions of pounds of food recovered every year
- Lower landfill and disposal costs
- More efficient distribution
- Greater community and volunteer engagement
- A stronger, more resilient provincial food system
- New value streams created through processing and meal production

By matching supply and demand and integrating transformation, the organization closes gaps that would otherwise mean both waste and hunger.

Already Part of the Value Chain

Harvest Manitoba is not waiting for a new model. It is already operating as a logistics coordinator, surplus aggregator, network manager, and vital access point. The Food Transformation Centre will deepen this integration into Manitoba’s agri-food value chain, bridging growers, processors, agencies, and families with a modern, circular food system.

Provincial Infrastructure in Action

The system includes:

- A central warehouse and logistics hub
- 380 plus agencies across 50 plus communities
- Coordinated intake and referrals
- Standardized distribution with the Harvest Hamper
- Thousands of volunteers and a growing donor network
- The upcoming Food Transformation Centre, a modern facility adding processing, preservation, and value-added production

This infrastructure forms the backbone of Manitoba’s food system, keeping surplus moving, transforming it into usable products, and communities supported.

The Path Forward

“The Food Transformation Centre will turn surplus food into nutritious meals, extending the reach and impact of food rescue across Manitoba.”

Harvest Manitoba offers a blueprint for how food recovery can operate at a system level. By connecting partners, managing distribution, and maximizing the value of every donation, the organization ensures food is used where it matters most.

The foundation laid by the current network enables the next phase. The organization will move beyond redistribution toward full integration, processing, and transformation of surplus into new products and opportunities powered by the Food Transformation Centre.

For more information visit www.harvestmanitoba.ca or email ceo@harvestmanitoba.ca