Rethinking Food Insecurity

2020 presented unprecedented challenges for underserved communities and many small businesses, including restaurants. When the pandemic hit neighborhoods across the country, it inevitably led to two crises: the rise in food insecurity and restaurant closures. Taking care of — and showing up — for our communities lies at the heart of the work we do at Rethink Food and we knew we had to pivot and find ways to help.

Rethink Food was founded in 2017 with the idea to transform excess food from restaurants, corporate kitchens, and grocery stores into nutritious meals. As restaurants started to close when COVID-19 hit, we faced a challenge of our own: losing the main source of excess food that helped keep communities fed with accessible meals.

In March 2020, we leveraged our food rescue and distribution experience to quickly pivot to food relief and launched Rethink Certified, a partnership program to feed communities and keep restaurants and food establishments in operation during the pandemic. We also opened the Rethink Cafe, one of NYC’s first pay-what-you-can community cafes, and increased our efforts through our Commissary Kitchen to expand the ways we feed our communities during this challenging time.

Our annual report provides an in-depth understanding of how we have been examining our past efforts, how we are rethinking the current food system in the most uncertain times, and the ways in which we will have a lasting impact on our communities — not just in times of crisis, but beyond.

I want to thank the Rethink team, our network of partners, community-based organizations, donors, and volunteers that helped support our mission and serve our communities. You have continued to work tirelessly to ensure we get closer to achieving a more sustainable and equitable food system.

Matt Jozwiak
Founder and CEO
2020 impact of the pandemic on communities and restaurants

MORE THAN 45 million Americans were impacted by food insecurity

AN ESTIMATED 7 million people faced a job loss

110,000 restaurants temporarily or permanently closed down

Source: Feeding America, National Restaurant Association

Rethink Food's 2020 Impact

MORE THAN 2,400,000 meals prepared for communities impacted by food insecurity

60 Rethink Certified partners prepared meals for local communities

400,000 LBS of excess food utilized for meals

MORE THAN $10,000,000 invested in local communities and restaurants

119 community-based organizations distributed meals

OVER 145 jobs saved or preserved
Our Programs Feed Communities

2020 has been one of the most challenging times for our communities with more than 45 million people experiencing food insecurity*.

At Rethink Food, our mission is to create a more sustainable and equitable food system — one where everyone has access to nutritious and affordable food. Our programs — Rethink Certified, Rethink Cafe, and the Rethink Commissary Kitchen — are designed to address food insecurity, use underutilized food, and make sure everyone can get access to nutritious meals.

*Rethinking America

Rethink Certified

In April 2020, with food insecurity escalating and restaurants facing widespread closures due to the state-mandated shutdown and limited financial aid, Rethink leveraged its experience as a food rescue and distribution model to launch Rethink Certified in April 2020, an emergency response program with a two-fold purpose: to feed communities and keep restaurants in business.

Since April 2020, Rethink has partnered with restaurants and food establishments to prepare culturally sensitive meals for communities facing food insecurity. These meals are distributed through local community-based organizations (CBOs). In exchange, restaurants receive funding and other resources to support integrating community meals into their daily operations.

To scale the distribution of meals, Rethink Food developed Xylem: a web-based technology platform that enabled both the Rethink Certified restaurant partners, and the CBOs for whom they provide meals, to communicate their needs directly with one another in real-time, streamlining operations to better serve and nourish their local communities.

Last year, Rethink invested over $10 million into local restaurants. Sixty Rethink Certified restaurant partners prepared more than 2.4 million meals for their local communities.
At the height of the pandemic, in March 2020, the Rethink Cafe opened its doors on 154 Clinton Ave, Brooklyn. We knew there would be an increasing need for healthy and accessible meals and as one of New York City's first pay-what-you-can community cafes, the Rethink Cafe invited everyone and anyone to enjoy a nutritious meal for a suggested donation of $5.

As 23% of the residents of Bedford-Stuyvesant live below the poverty line, food insecurity is a constant struggle. Our donation-based model has been successful in attracting a diverse group of customers. Our Rethink Cafe has become as much as a neighborhood go-to spot for grabbing coffee or lunch or a place where people can pay it forward for someone else’s meal.

In 2020, the Rethink Cafe served over 7,000 meals and its revenue went directly towards our mission to create a more sustainable and equitable food system.

Our Commissary Kitchen team converts donated food items from grocery stores, corporate partners and restaurants, into nutritious and culturally sensitive meals that are delivered to local community-based organizations 6 days a week, at no cost. In 2020, Our Commissary Kitchen was able to distribute about 140,000 meals.

“During the pandemic, we really needed to live up to our name, RETHINK! We saw how much more we are needed and learned that in a crisis there are windows of hope when we all come together as a community to help one another. Many people who were unemployed chose to come and volunteer on a weekly basis, we were getting an average of 2 to 3 truck loads of donations almost daily, and all the chefs in the commissary kitchen risked their lives for something bigger than them.” - Felix Martinez, Rethink Food Kitchen Manager
Restaurant Partner: Brain Food

Brain Food is located in Brooklyn. Owners Ali and Ana Ahmed have been committed to providing dynamic, nutritious and affordable meals for their community after seeing this disparity between availability and demand of healthy options in their neighborhood. Meals are created with fresh and organic ingredients and cater to different diets including vegan, halal, paleo, Whole 30 and keto. Since joining the Rethink Certified program in April 2020, Brain Food has been preparing 2,000 meals a week for underserved communities.

“Working with Rethink Food has been the best thing that could have happened to my business during COVID-19. They have saved my restaurant from closing its doors and brought back all our employees full-time. We are proud to cook with a higher purpose and serve our community while keeping our business operational.” - Ali Ahmed, Owner of Brainfood

Community-Based Organization: Bronx House

Bronx House is a community center that provides healthy, educational, recreational and cultural opportunities for neighborhood residents. Bronx House encourages their local community to participate in their wide-array of programs to forge the values of community and the individual. Bronx House has partnered with Rethink since April 2020 and distributed 1,660 meals a week.

“Rethink started providing us with 250 meals a week, but as the pandemic raged on, the need to feed seniors grew exponentially. Today, we receive almost 1,700 meals a week to provide 5 meals a week to Seniors in our community. This was a very frightening time for everyone, especially for Seniors who faced isolation from their loved ones. The last thing they should have had to worry about was where their next meal was coming from.”
- Howard Martin, CEO of Bronx House
Corporate Partner: Brookfield Properties

Brookfield Properties is one of the world’s largest real estate managers. Recognizing COVID 19’s intensification of New York City’s need for emergency food assistance and in an effort to revitalize restaurants in the community, launched a $1,000,000 partnership with Union Square Hospitality Group and Rethink Food to help speed up the reemployment of restaurant employees and provide more than 125,000 meals to New Yorkers in need.

“Local restaurants are a vital part of our communities, and they have been hit hard by the pandemic. Working with Union Square Hospitality Group and Rethink Food, Brookfield is thrilled to help even just a few of New York City’s favorite eateries get back to work and continue to be a defining part of their neighborhoods, all while providing meals for tens of thousands of food-insecure families.” - Callie Haines, Executive Vice President at Brookfield Properties

Food Donor: Kvarøy Arctic Salmon

Kvarøy Arctic shares our belief that everyone should have access to delicious, healthful, and dignified meals. In 2020, Kvarøy Arctic donated 6,000 lbs of sustainable seafood from their native Norway which was utilized in our Rethink Cafe and Commissary Kitchen to create nutritious and culturally sensitive meals for our local communities facing food insecurity.

“The recent pandemic has reinforced our mantra as we learned from chefs, thought leaders and partners about where to give, what support is needed, and where it would have the most impact. Giving whenever and wherever we can. Therefore, it was important for our team to support Rethink Food’s work in areas identified as having high numbers of affected individuals from vulnerable communities. Bringing consistent and regular access to lean protein in the form of our sustainably raised frozen fillets, burgers and hot dogs in an effort to help build their capacity for response, support and recovery.” - Jennifer Bushman, Strategic Development Officer, Kvarøy Arctic

You can find the full list of our 2020 partners here.
Our Supporters

Rethink Food's programs would not be possible without the support of a collective movement of corporations, foundations, food donors, and individuals who supported Rethink in 2020. We are beyond thankful for your support during such a challenging year for our communities.

Anonymous (4)  
The Alphadyne Foundation  
American Express  
Audemars Piguet  
The J. Baker Foundation  
Michele and Timothy Barakett  
Beyond Meat  
Brookfield Properties  
Costello Charitable Fund  
Martin Eltrich  
Goldman Sachs  
L&L Holding Company  
Robin Hood  
Benedict Silverman Foundation  
Marshall and Amy Smith  
Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)  
Tiger Global Management  
William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust  
Natasha and Dirk Ziff

Click here for the full list of our 2020 supporters or see the appendix below.**

We have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the above list but errors and omissions may rarely occur. If your name has been inadvertently omitted or misspelled, please contact us.

Financial Update

Our lives changed forever when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020. In addition to witnessing thousands of restaurants close around the country, we immediately understood that our communities would be seriously impacted by greater food insecurity. The Rethink Certified program was created out of this dual need with a starting and unanticipated budget of $10 million.

We shared our plan with our supporters and received an overwhelming response. Donations of funds as well as food reached all-time peaks, enabling us to go from serving 5,000 meals per week to 85,000 meals per week. We committed to getting as much funding as possible to restaurants and in turn, as many meals as possible to our neighbors.

In 2020, we received nearly $37 million in donations, including a two-year grant to support the new Rethink Certified program that was created as an emergency response to the pandemic. We maintained expenses of approximately $18 million in the year of 2020, with half of that covering Rethink Certified.

As we look to the future of Rethink, we are entirely dependent on charitable contributions to continue our work. Please contact us if you would like to make a gift to Rethink, and if you would like to receive a copy of our 2020 audited financial statements.
Anonymous (4)
The Alphadyne Foundation
American Express
Audemars Piguet
The J. Baker Foundation
Michele and Timothy Barakett
Beyond Meat
Brookfield Properties
Costello Charitable Fund
Martin Eltrich

Goldman Sachs
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Robin Hood
Benedict Silverman Foundation
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Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)
Tiger Global Management
William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust
Natasha and Dirk Ziff

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Flagship Culinary Services
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Lauren Iannotti
Ironstate Development

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Merritt Johnson
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Peter Kadens
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Philip Kelly
Molly O’Laughlin Kemper
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Barbara Lincoln
David Loo
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Maven Securities Holding Limited
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Peggy Wong
World Centric
Aamir Wyne
Jinah Yun
Younggak Yun
Brian Zaratzian
Zevv
Robert Zizza

**Restaurants**

46 Mott Street
Adda
Audrey
Bahar Masala Restaurant
BARCHA
Boka-Chinatown
Boka-St. Marks
Bon Chovie
Brain Food
Bululu
C Bao
Charles Pan Fried Chicken
Chefscape
Collective Fare
Commissary - Rethink
Crown Shy
David Burke Tavern
Duck Season
East Side Glatt
Eleven Madison Park

Emma’s Torch
Esme
Estrella Latina
Excell Kingston Eatery
Field Trip
Genuine Foods
Gertie
Girl + The Goat
Grovehouse Hospitality
Inday
Intersect
Kabooz’s Bar & Grille
Katie O’s
Kopitiam
La Morada
Little Tong
Lucille’s
Made Nice
Mai Bpen Rai
Manna’s Restaurant
Marta
Mashallah Grill
Master Bao Inc.
MD Hospitality
Mimi Cheng’s Dumplings
Monks Food Co.
Mott Haven Bar & Grill
Nansense NYC Inc.
Olmsted & Maison Yaki
Petit Crenn
Pig and Khao
Rahi
Renaissance Harlem
Riverdale Kosher Market
Sfoglia Restaurant
Sushi Nonaka
Taco Mix
Taste So Good
Union Square Events
Uptown Veg
Zen Yai
Community-Based Organizations

504 Grand + United Jewish Council
APNA Brooklyn Community Center & Adult Day Care
Asian Americans for Equality
Audrey: Audrey’s Parking Lot
Bowery Mission
Bronx House
CAMBA
Casa Mutua
Child Development Support Corporation
Children’s Aid
Chinatown Strong
CHIPS
City Meals
Collective Fare Community
Community Empowerment) TN & Queens
Cooper House Resident Council
Covenant House
District 35: BAM
Ebbets Field Tenant Association
Edgehill Neighborhood Partnership
Educational Alliance
Equality
Front Porch Ministry

Glide
Grace Tabernacle
Greenpoint Community Kitchen
Hebrew Institute
Hebrew Institute of Riverdale
Henry Street Settlement
Hungry Monks
ICNA Relief USA: Flushing & Jamaica
iGrow
KCI
Leave The Light On
Lenox Hill Women’s Mental Health Shelter
Madison Towers
MCPS
Metro World Child
MHANY
Nashville Free Store / Free Fridges
Neighbors Together
New Alternatives for Children
NICE (New Immigrant
North Brooklyn Angels
Nutrition Kitchen - Brooklyn
Our Lady / St. Michaels - Mandy
Park Avenue Residence Shelter

Plaza Del Sol - Urban Health Plan
Prayer Mission
Project H.O.P.E.
Queens Community House
Rap4Bronx
RETI Center
Riverdale Y
Room in the Inn
Salem United Methodist Church
Shower Up Nashville
St. John’s Bread & Life
Sunnyside Community Services
Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry
The Alliance for Positive Change
The Contributor
The Little Pantry that Could
The Rock
TLC
Union Pool
Urban Hope
West Side Federation for Senior Housing
Wyckoff Gardens
Youth Villages
YWCA Roseland

Food Donors

Austin East Ciders
Bakeri
Baldoir
Barclays
Beyond Meat
Bloomberg
Boys and Girls Club
The Bread Gal
Bricolage
Brooklyn Food & Beverage
Brooklyn Grange
Carbone
Certified Origins
Cherry Point
City Harvest
Cocoiune
Coffee of Grace
Compass
Conrad Hotel
Cookie Mogul
Craig’s Creamery
Crown Finish Caves
Crown Shell
Dali Market
Dig
DUMBO House
Egg
Eleven Madison Park
Farm to People
Food Education Fund
Fraiche
Goldman Sachs
Good Thanks Cafe
Google

Gotham Greens
Grand Street Settlement
Great Performances
The Grill
Grow NYC
Happi Foodi
Happy Valley Meats
Hill Country Chicken
Honey Flower
Hu
Hudson Yards
Hyatt Centric
Illi
Illi Coffee
Impossible Foods
Inday
JP Morgan
Kee’n’s Steakhouse
KING
Kitopi
Kværøy Arctic
Left Bank
Leyenda
Lighthouse
Local Roots NYC
Made Nice
Meat hook
The Metropolitan Museum
Movable Ink
Murray’s Cheese
Newstand
Nix
No. 7 Restaurant
Nomad

North Brooklyn Angels
Peck’s
Performance Food Service
Philip Morris International
Pies n Thighs
Pizza Loves Emily
Polo Bar
Pratt
Preferred Meals
Public
River Fund
Rock Can Roll
Russ and Daughters
SEA
Sagafredo (Barclays)
Small Batch Granola
Square Roots
Ssam Bar Momofuku
St. John’s Bread & Life
Steam Center
Thomson Reuters
Trader Joe’s
Transformation
United Nations
United Sikhs
Waiters
Wegmans
West Bourne
The Whitby Hotel
White Toque
World’s Best Cheese
NYC Emergency Management
Oishii
One Community