# Flashfood
## February 2026

### Tools of Change Illustrated
- Feedback
- Financial Incentives
- Norm Appeals
- Overcoming Specific Barriers
- Prompts
- Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering Communication
- Word of Mouth

### Location
- Canada and the USA

### Initiated by
- Flashfood

### Partners
- By early 2025, Flashfood had partnered with grocers representing 2,300 stores across North America.

### Results
- Over a three year period (2022, 2023, 2024) Flashfood reduced waste by 97.8 million pounds and saved consumers a total of US $230 million.

## Introduction

Food waste is a major driver of climate change. It is responsible for 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. And when it decomposes in landfills, it releases methane, which traps heat 25-80 times more strongly than carbon dioxide. This app informs users about local food in surplus or nearing its best before date, discounted by 50% or more. While some items should be consumed within a day or two, others can last for weeks – especially if frozen or cooked.

The Flashfood app enables food stores to sell food that would otherwise be thrown out, while reducing their carbon footprint. Consumers are able buy food that they would otherwise deem too expensive.

## Background

**Note: To minimize site maintenance costs, all case studies on this site are written in the past tense, even if they are ongoing as is the case with this particular program.**

Food waste is a top contributor of methane gas and climate change. Food stores typically mark down items nearing their best before dates and throw them away if unsold. Many food stores have programs to mitigate food waste, for example to improve procurement and operating procedures and shorten supply chains to keep food fresher and longer. In addition, some stores donate older food items to charities, food banks and farms for animal feed. But not all the stores' food waste can be eliminated this way. The Flashfood app was created by Toronto entrepreneur Josh Domingues in 2016, after his chef sister threw out $4,000 worth of food following a

catered event.

## Getting Informed

After coming up with the basic concept for Flashfood, Domingues interviewed hundreds of grocery employees and top-level executives in the grocery industry to learn how to make the idea practical.

Then, Domingues piloted the approach with a few stores belonging to three supermarket chains: Farm Boy and Longos in Ontario, and Buy-Low Foods in Vancouver B.C.

Flashfood continued to carry out consumer research. For example, it ran an online survey in April 2023 with 2,018 U.S. adults ages 18+. That survey's findings were accurate to within +/- 2.8 percentage points using a 95% confidence level.

## Prioritizing Audiences

Flashfood targeted consumers who would buy this food. Guided by their mantra, "to feed families, not landfills," their mission appealed to a broad target – essentially anyone who shopped for groceries. That said, they specifically catered to deal-seekers, families, and individuals shopping for households across incomes who valued fresh food at great prices. To be able to offer this food, Flashfood also targeted supermarkets as suppliers.

## Setting Objectives

Flashfood's objectives were to reduce food waste and make fresh foods more accessible and affordable.

## Delivering the Program

While some grocery stores offered discounted foods directly to customers in-store, Flashfood provided a digital marketplace, allowing shoppers to shop for discounted products conveniently from home. Flashfood had a large and engaged shopper base, driving more shoppers to the stores. It also offered a more organized experience than traditional discount programs.

Using the Flashfood app, participating food stores posted details with pictures of food items nearing their best before date. (*Vivid, Empowering Communication*)

The grocers provided the fridges and racks to store these foods, moved the food to these locations, and uploaded items to the app. Flashfood handled payments for retailers and kept a cut for itself. Domingues says that the stores were "still donating as much as previously. What we're selling is product that goes unsold in addition to what is recovered by food banks and food rescue."

Using the app, consumers could easily find and see pictures of what was available in nearby stores. Next, they purchased and paid for the food using the app. Then, they picked up the items in a special zone (with a refrigerator and/or storage rack) near the front of the store. (*Overcoming Specific Barriers, Prompts*)

All purchases on Flashfood were made exclusively through the app. Retailers selected items nearing expiration, removed them from store inventory, and listed them on Flashfood. These items were usually not purchased anymore because shoppers typically preferred products with the longest possible shelf life.

Consumers benefited because:
- They could buy food at a deep discount (up to 50%), which made it possible for more people to eat a healthy diet. (*Financial Incentives*)
- Flashfood enabled them to transition from highly processed foods to a more nutritious, fresh diet.
- They got to see themselves as part of a climate solution. (*Norm Appeals*)

- Flashfood added SNAP EBT into its platform, enabling participants to use their benefits for purchases. This addition helped low-income families to access and afford nutritious foods more easily.
- The new Flashfood app offered a smoother experience with features like an improved onboarding process, easier SNAP EBT shopping, and the ability to explore deals across multiple stores in one view, making it easier to save on fresh foods.
- Active Flashfood users could save up to $1,000 annually, depending on their usage.

Stores benefited because:
- They could earn money from food that they would otherwise throw out. For example, in 2019 Loblaws sold 77% of the food it posted on Flashfood, earning $US 800 to $US 1,000 weekly at its largest stores. (*Financial Incentives*)
- Stores paid less to dispose of the food they couldn't sell. (*Financial Incentives*)
- They got a PR boost from helping the environment and providing affordable food. (*Norm Appeals*)
- The new Flashfood platform for independent grocers offered flexible onboarding, customizable pick-up models, automated insights and support to help them adapt to their unique store needs.

The following strategies were used to make the app even more appealing and popular.

Consumers
- Consumers were encouraged to recruit their friends as users. If a friends' first purchase was over $15, both the friend and the person who recruited that friend got $3 off. This was later increased to $7 off. (*Word of Mouth*)
- The app told users how much food and how much money they had saved. (*Feedback*)

Stores
- Flashfood continued to recruit new supermarket chains through pilot implementations. For example, Meijer saw food waste reduced by 10% in its pilot, which helped convince the chain to expand the program to all 246 of its stores. (*Financial Incentives*)

The following table summarizes the key barriers to action and how each was addressed.

| Barrier | How it was addressed |
|---|---|
| Inconvenient for consumers to hunt for these discounted items. They often didn't know what 'rescuable' food was available locally. | • Consumers could find and see pictures of what was available in nearby stores using the app.<br><br>• Consumers paid for the food items using the app, then picked up the items in a special zone (refrigerator or storage rack) near the front of the store. |
| Some consumers found it challenging to pay the full cost of buying food. | • Consumers got a deep discount using the app. |
| Food stores could run into problems contributing leftover food to charities that had limited storage and refrigeration space. | • Food stores could sell leftover food using the app. |
| Food stores found perishables hard to provide to food banks, because they had such a short shelf life. | • Flashfood was designed to handle items that needed to be sold and eaten within a day or two. |

Flashfood initially raised $1.5 million from angel investors. It was then accepted into the Techstars Retail accelerator program in Minneapolis, which led to further pilots in Target and Hy-Vee supermarkets in the U.S. Midwest and helped Flashfood raise additional venture financing.

## Measuring Achievements

Using the app, the food stores entered the amount of each item posted. The app then tracked the total amount of items sold.

## Providing Feedback

The app told users how much food and how much money they had saved.

## Financing the Program

It is rare for climate change mitigation programs to fund themselves; this one did so by enabling Flashfood to take a cut of the revenues from recovered food.

## Results

Over a three year period (2022, 2023, 2024) Flashfood reduced waste by 97.8 million pounds  and saved consumers a total of US $230 million.

On average, grocery stores using the Flashfood app reduced their food waste by about 27%.

## Notes

- This approach used an app to reduce the barriers that both consumers and food stores faced in reducing food waste, while enabling both consumers and food stores to save money and gain other significant benefits. It was one of the few apps available that helped reduce food waste by positioning it to consumers as a way they could help slow climate change.

- While the app-based data demonstrated environmental and financial savings, a more precise and reliable calculation of these savings would have also taken into account food waste from a randomly selected sample of stores that were not using Flashfood.

- In 2023, Fast Company named Flashfood the top company in the Social Good category of its annual list of the World's Most Innovative Companies.

- Named the #1 Clean Tech company in Deloitte Technology's Fast 50, in 2022.

## For More Information

http://ottawa.citynews.ca/2022/01/23/canadians-flocking-to-food-rescue-apps-to-reduce-grocery-bills-and-waste-4984378/

http://www.flashfood.com/news/flashfood-releases-its-2022-impact-report-the-state-of-food-waste

http://www.flashfood.com/blog/secret-food-waste-confessions-from-a-grocery-store-employee

http://www.flashfood.com/blog/this-is-not-bad-food-loblaw-pairs-up-with-toronto-startup-flashfood-to-reduce-waste

http://www.flashfood.com/blog/worcester-save-money-and-the-planet-with-flashfood-now-at-stop-shop

## Case Study Contact

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## Landmark Designation

The program described in this case study was first reviewed by our Climate Change panel in 2022 and was designated by the panel in February 2026.

Designation as a *Landmark* (best practice) case study through our peer selection process recognizes programs and social

marketing approaches considered to be among the most successful in the world. They are nominated both by our peer-selection panels and by Tools of Change staff and are then scored by the selection panels based on impact, innovation, replicability and adaptability.

The Climate Change panel members that reviewed and designated this program consisted of:

- Amjad Alghamdi, George Mason University Department of Communication

- Anna Kelly, Power TakeOff

- Brooke Tully, BrookeTully

- Doug McKenzie-Mohr, McKenzie-Mohr Associates

- Julianna Gwiszcz, Center for Climate Change Communication

- Madeleine Lemaire, City of Coquitlam

- Susan Schneider, Western Michigan University

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For step-by step instructions in using each of the tools noted above, to review our FULL collection of over 200 social marketing case studies, or to suggest a new case study, go to www.toolsofchange.com