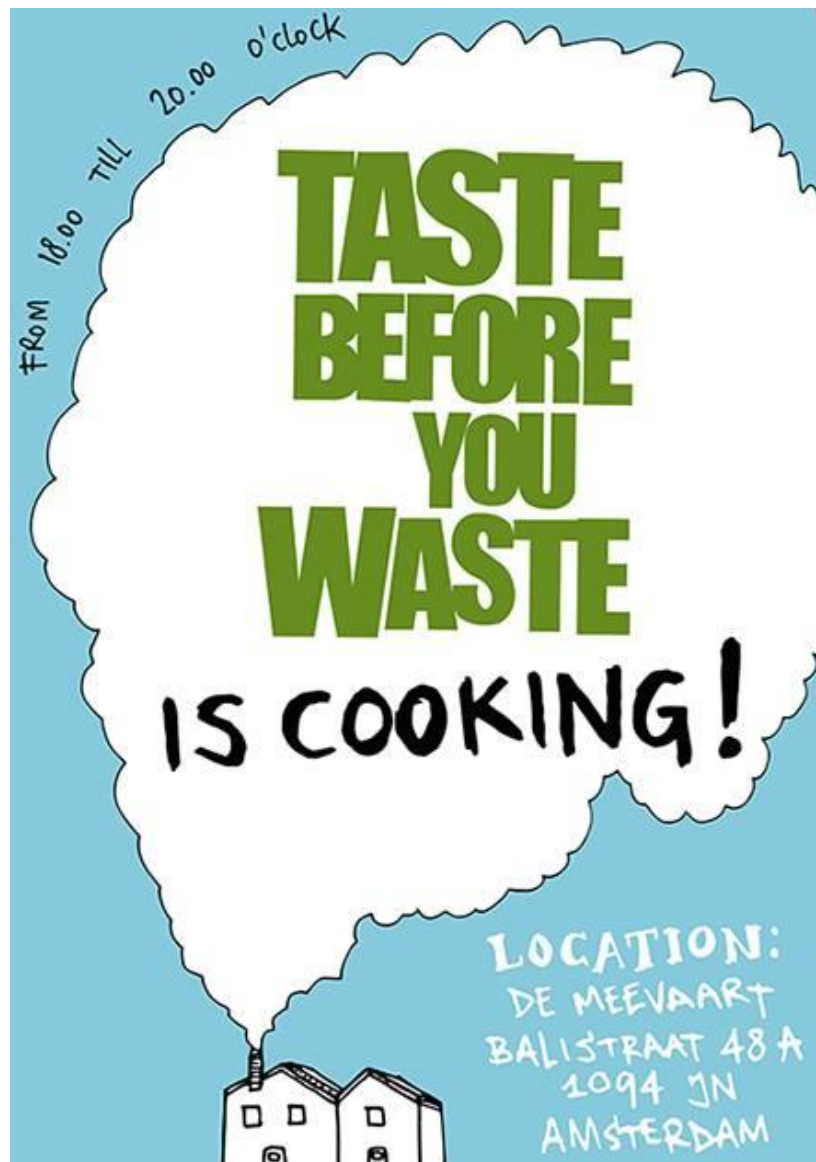


## Final Report Community Project Spring 2015

*Serving consciousness on a platter.*

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Date: May 23, 2015

Grade: A-

Dear Ms. Zandstra,

During the 16-week period in the spring semester of 2015, I have conducted, and am still conducting, my Community Project with Taste Before You Waste. The following report will give an overview of the community project partner, my activities for the organization, and skills, insights and knowledge gained in that time. Furthermore, I will evaluate and reflect on my work and experiences as Taste Before You Waste's chef cook.

### **About Taste Before You Waste**

Taste Before You Waste is an Amsterdam-based initiative focused on the prevention of food waste that was founded over two years ago. Its aim is to raise awareness about the enormous amount of good food that is thrown away every day, and inform people about what one can do to prevent this wastage. This is achieved through a variety of activities, ranging from "Free food markets" and "no-food waste diners", to the organization of theater and art events. The core of the organization is the carrier bike, which is used by a growing base of volunteers to pick up unwanted fruits, vegetables, and other products from small, independent grocery stores in the Indische Buurt in Amsterdam. After the food is saved, it is distributed among several charities around the city, who give the fruits and vegetables a second chance to serve their purpose and become a delicious meal.

### **Why Taste Before You Waste?**

I first encountered Taste Before You Waste at a Free Food Market two years ago, when I started as a first-year student at AUC. Since then, I have been involved in various activities with the organization, ranging from food pickup and delivery, cooking in the neighborhood and catering events, to demonstrating at Dam Square and presenting about food waste to a large audience. As a young student starting to become a more independent, and a critical thinker, I have been influenced by the ideas of Taste Before You Waste. This has largely contributed to my awareness about food, something we all love and need every day. Before I saw how many perfectly edible products are thrown away on a daily basis in our own neighborhood, and learned about the huge international numbers, I had no idea how big the food waste problem was, or that there was one at all. I certainly know better now. Furthermore, I have seen how a very simple idea – picking up and distributing unwanted food - can grow out to be a project supported and picked up by many. I have been inspired by the things Taste Before You Waste has already done and achieved in the short time that I have been a part of it, and I believe that that it will only grow and accomplish more in the future. I want to be part of this inspiring young organization, and contribute to its cause: serving

consciousness on a platter. For these reasons I chose to do my Community Project with this organization.

### **My Activities at Taste Before You Waste**

Serving platters with consciously prepared food was exactly my job in the past few months. As the supervisor of Taste Before You Waste's cooking team, I have been responsible to organize, prepare, serve, and coordinate "no-food waste dinners" on a weekly basis in community center De Meevaart in Amsterdam Oost. Every Thursday from 18:00 till 20:00 anyone hungry and interested has been welcome to join the vegetarian and tasty meal prepared with the day's "harvest" for a donation of €2,50 or more. The basic ingredients of the dinners are always vegetables, fruits, and bread that have been picked up with the carrier bike by another volunteer earlier that day. From 15:00 till 18:00 the cooking team, consisting of two to sometimes even five volunteers plus myself, prepares the meal. This can be quite a challenge, because it is not possible to predict what the ingredients are going to be, or the amounts of food picked up that day, or how many people will join the table for dinner. We have had days with only oranges, cucumbers, and some carrots, and days with a wider variety of foods. Sometimes the food would be eaten before seven, other days there were leftovers to take home and distribute via AUC's Facebook community. With money earned from previous dinners, we had the opportunity to buy extra ingredients if necessary. However, I like to give myself the challenge of working just with what we have, without extras, as much as possible. Spices, sugar, salt, vinegar, flour, and rice were fortunately available. Essentials such as oil, garlic and onions were usually on my grocery list. Furthermore, I provided the cooks with Taste Before You Waste's cooking knives, clean aprons, cutting boards, and towels, which are not always available in De Meevaart's kitchen. Together with the other cooks, I would decide what to cook once we had had a look at the boxes full of sometimes soft and sometimes moldy food, and the big trash bag filled with bread rolls, croissants and sandwich bread. Although it might sometimes have seemed too difficult to create a meal for 20-30 people with the available ingredients, I was always pleasantly surprised with the end result. The guests would fortunately always agree and compliment the cooks. The volunteers that helped with the preparation of the meal could of course, join dinner for free. The dishwashing shift, starting at 18:00 would usually join dinner before as well. Two to three volunteers would help me from 18:00 till about 21:00 with the serving of the food, receiving donations, and mostly, doing the dishes and cleaning the kitchen. Not the most fun part of the day, but certainly necessary.

Moreover, the goal of the dinners, are, of course, not only to provide healthy and affordable dinners to students and people from the neighborhood, but also to inform them about our vision. By

cooking with “wasted food”, having people taste it, explaining where it comes from, and what we do as an organization, I have tried to inform our guests about food waste and the activities and goals of Taste Before You Waste. A picture board, showing photos of previous dinners, a carrier bike completely filled with saved food, free food markets etcetera, was always put up next to the place where people would pay and receive a plate and cutlery. Taste Before You Waste stickers were often widely distributed among the guests by me and the other volunteers. People sometimes asked us how we had prepared the food - which indeed, was sometimes quite creatively, though simply prepared - which I always happily explained. Some of the guests later joined one or more cooking sessions because they saw and liked what we did and wanted to get involved as well.

To have a successful dinner every week, I managed the schedule of the TBYW cooks, to ensure that the cooking and dishwashing teams were complete. Messages from new volunteers interested in joining the cooking team were forwarded to me, so I could introduce them to the kitchen. Furthermore, I have promoted the “no-food waste dinners” by distributing flyers in the neighborhood, and organizing Food Events on [Thuisafgehaald.nl](http://Thuisafgehaald.nl). I communicated with the employees and volunteers of Buurtcentrum De Meevaart, also about promotion, to get a more diverse body of guests interested in our events. I wrote some short blogs on [tasteforeyouwaste.com](http://tasteforeyouwaste.com) about my cooking experience in the “no-waste kitchen”, with some tips and recipes to inspire others to start cooking with their leftovers. As a “core member” of the TBYW volunteers, I attended a couple of meetings to talk about our other events and ideas for the future of the organization. A couple of times I joined extra cooking sessions organized to prepare food for events.

In summary, my activities have contributed to Taste Before You Waste’s goals of reducing food waste, and raising awareness of the problem. Literally, my job was to let people taste food instead of wasting it by coordinating a group of enthusiastic volunteers of the cooking team.

### **Skills, insights and knowledge gained during the community project**

As a science major focusing on biomedical sciences, biology, and health, supervising a community kitchen may not seem to be directly in line with my academic interests. However, doing a community projects is of course not just aimed at gaining skills for an academic or professional career. I have invested my time in this project, in the past four months, and in the years before, to be part of a young organization with a vision to change a serious global problem. Although the activities I did as Taste Before You Waste’s chef cook were modest and simple (washing and cutting vegetables, doing the dishes, washing aprons) I hope to have contributed to the solution of the problem on a local scale in my own personal way. What I have definitely learned, or improved, are

my creative cooking skills, as mentioned before, which may not help me get into a master's program, but may feed me and my friends on the way. Nevertheless, working voluntarily as Taste Before You Waste's chef cook has been an excellent learning opportunity for me outside an academic environment. I am interested in health and nutrition, and how and why people consume certain types of food and lead a certain lifestyle. By bringing different people together in the kitchen and around the dinner table, I have learned more about cooking and eating habits, and the appreciation and value of food in and around our kitchen. Furthermore, I have experienced what it is like to be the coordinator and supervisor of a team. The people helping me in the kitchen were all volunteers; they were not obligated to be there. Hence, I had to be flexible with the schedule, usually planning in a slightly different team every time. I also learned to deal with the disappointment of people cancelling shortly beforehand, by quickly making adjustments of the schedule. This happened mostly in busy moments in the academic schedule, as many of the volunteers are (AUC) students. Furthermore, working with other volunteers challenged me to make the cooking and cleaning sessions worth their time. Many were part of the sessions because of their affiliation with Taste Before You Waste's vision, or because they like to know how we cook, and like to work with food and other anti-waste enthusiasts. I have therefore tried to create an environment where the team members would feel comfortable, in which I think I have succeeded. Promoting the cooking sessions, and talking to the guests about Taste Before You Waste's goals and providing information on food waste and what we exactly do in the kitchen, has helped me develop communication skills that will certainly be useful in the future. Many of the volunteers, but also people visiting the Meevaart dinners were interested or even actively involved in anti-food waste activism and other environmentalist activities. Once a month, the Food Surplus Entrepreneurs Network, a non-profit organization that aims to reduce food waste by facilitating exchange and collaboration between food surplus entrepreneurs, attended our dinner. The TBYW kitchen and dinner table was the optimal place for the exchange of opinions and ideas about the matter, and I have learned a great deal about the happenings in the world of food activism and social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, I have experimented for the first time with blog writing, something that I would like to explore further later on. The numbers of my blogs could have been higher, and I would like to continue writing for Taste Before You Waste in the next semester, to share my experiences in the kitchen and inspire TBYW's followers to start cooking their ugly vegetables.

I recently realized that cooking for a large group of people is a skill that not everyone has, and that it can come in handy in several situations. I have recently participated in a training week to learn how to become an instructor in outdoor sports camped aimed to teach teenagers to work together, develop themselves, live sustainably, and appreciate nature. My cooking and dinner-planning, and

cook team managing skills (and not for a pasta or nasi) turned out to be useful during those days. This made me realize that I have learned something new and practical, which is always a good feeling. This community project was a good complement and welcome distraction to my more theoretically based studies at AUC.

### **Evaluation of and reflection on my work and experiences at Taste Before You Waste**

Doing my community project as Taste Before You Waste's cooking team supervisor has enabled me to invest time in a cause I care about. Although many people are interested in spending some of their free time as volunteers for this initiative, Taste Before You Waste needs volunteers who are prepared to spend more than one or a few hours per week in order to be able to organize and carry out its new tasks and plans. In the past semester, during the absence of Luana Caretto, the founder of the organization, part of the many tasks has been distributed among different volunteers. I got more involved with the organization by taking over the task of managing the weekly cooking sessions, and hope to have supported its activities. The dinner sessions are only one of the many ways picked up food is used to raise awareness about food surplus, and I think it is an important one. Food and dinners bring people together and create a space to share thoughts and ideas. I had hoped to achieve more diversity in the composition of guests attending the dinners. Although people that are not part of the AUC student body did join the dinners, many of the attending guests were fellow students. I was happy to see that there were families with children who recurred to our dinners, older people, international guests, and employees and volunteers of the Meevaart who joined. Other people who read about us in local magazines, Facebook, flyers, or in Het Parool also found their way to a no-food waste meal. Nevertheless, the guests coming to the dinner sessions could have included more people from the neighborhood, and more people that were not yet involved in anything related to sustainability. It would have made the experience more interesting if there had been more people that could learn new things about that. What I was very happy about, is that, although most of the volunteers were (AUC) students, we also had some people helping in the kitchen from a completely different background, who found us via Buurtbalie, a platform for activities in the Indische Buurt. I could have used their help more in getting in touch with the residents, and the general public of De Meevaart in Amsterdam Oost, and could have taken more initiative myself to collaborate with them. After the summer, I would still like to be involved with Taste Before You Waste and the cooking sessions. Perhaps, then, I would like to focus more on the communication, promotional, and social part, and less on the cooking and cleaning, which hopefully someone else could take over. Furthermore, I would like to write more blogs for [tasteforeyouwaste.com](http://tasteforeyouwaste.com). As I mentioned before, the cooking and cleaning parts were sometimes a challenge, but always succeeded in the end. The cooking sessions were a sort of spin-off activity of

the bigger TBYW picture, and did not need much intervention from Dennis, my supervisor. However, both Dennis and Luana have always been available and ready to help and answer my questions during my community project period. I in return, have tried to be that as well. It is not yet entirely clear to me how this experience will contribute to my future career goals. Nevertheless it definitely did sustain my interest in sustainability and food, and working together, about which I would like to learn more, and will learn more, in my upcoming internship at the German Institute for Human Nutrition.

In sum, this community project has enabled me to learn about personal, social, and environmental responsibility. It has given me the opportunity to support and promote goals that I care about, and has been beneficial for my personal development and that of Taste Before You waste and their cause. I have acquired several new skills, such as leadership skills. And last but not least, I have had a lot of good food.

With this report I hope to have sufficiently informed you about my community project experience.

Best,

Heleen Prins