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## Combatting Inefficient Food Waste in NWA with Food Loops

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**Combatting Inefficient Food Waste in NWA  
with Food Loops**

by

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**Advisor: Dr. Amy Farmer**

**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of  
Science in Business Administration in Business Economics.**

**Sam M. Walton College of Business  
University of Arkansas  
Fayetteville, Arkansas**

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# 1. Introduction

It is no longer a speculation that the actions of the human race have had detrimental impacts on the environment. As consumers become increasingly aware of this fact- and the fact that many of the issues are caused by bad business and environmental management, many individuals are wondering what they can do about it. This growing area of demand is where many businesses have begun to take on the challenge of being profitable while benefiting the environment at the same time, and some have even found ways to create a profit by engaging in activities that directly benefit the environment. Food Loops is one example of the latter: this Northwest Arkansas company focuses on reducing inefficient food waste, which is an often-overlooked issue that amplifies food insecurity, poor economic outcomes, and carbon emissions.

Food Loops is reducing inefficient food waste through a variety of activities centered around the practice of food composting. Food composting is a biological process that turns solid organic materials into a soil-like end product. It is a desirable alternative to landfills and incineration as the process is considered environmentally friendly and the end product can be put back into the environment (Schuab and Leonard 1996). Food Loops works to bring composting solutions to Northwest Arkansas residents and businesses, providing residents with an alternative option to sending compostable food and materials to the landfill where they would contribute to high carbon emissions.

Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, I have been working closely with Michael Kraus, Food Loop's Director of Operations, to expand the company's reach within the Northwest Arkansas region by targeting the University of Arkansas community. Specifically, we have been working to establish residential composting deals with student apartment complexes in Fayetteville. To establish the validity of this project I sought to understand what food composting is, what issues it is tied to, and it's viability as at least part of the solution to those issues. In addition, I reviewed Food Loops' history and business model to confirm that this project would provide significant value to their growing business. In this research paper, I will discuss my experience helping Food Loops expand their residential food composting service to apartment complexes in Fayetteville. I will discuss the practice and viability of food composting, Food Loops history and mission, and my specific project, including its design, implementation, evaluation, and my reflection on it.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Food Handling Issues

Food waste is an important issue, and yet it is still largely under researched (Evans, Campbell, and Murcott 2013). Much of the current research on what food waste is and why it is significant presents information on the issue of food waste together with the issue of lost food. In most research, "Food losses" refers to food that is lost in the production, harvest, and processing parts of the supply chain, while the term "food waste" refers to all of the food that is lost at the end of the supply chain by the consumer (Gustavsson et al. 2011). Together, food handling issues affect many different aspects of societal and environmental health; the issues directly affect the food production and agriculture economies, food insecurity, and the environment. Together, total food waste and food losses prove to be significant from an economic point of view as they are valued at \$ 1 trillion (USD) lost per year at the global level (Rezaei and Liu 2017); in the United States alone, the economic cost is more than \$161 billion USD. In addition to the economic value lost, food losses and waste also hurt the effort to reduce food insecurity (Mourad 2016). Food waste in particular is considered to be detrimental to the environment. It puts strain on the

resources used to produce it, and is associated with soil erosion, deforestation, and pollution that results from the production, transportation and storage of food (Schanes, Dobernig, and Gözet 2018).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations conducted a study in 2011 in an attempt to quantify the amount of food that gets lost or wasted around the world. The organization estimates that each year, about 33% of food gets lost or wasted globally, which amounts to roughly 1.3 billion tons of food. Looking specifically Europe and North America, an estimated 95-115kg (or 209-253 lbs.) of food is wasted per capita each year at the consumer level. This is contextualized by the fact that Europe and the North American countries produce around 900 kg (1985 lbs.) per capita per year. Food losses occur in different ways around the world due to changes supply chain structure based on culture; in industrialized countries it was found that 40% of food waste occurs at the retail and consumer levels, while over 40% of losses for developing countries occurred in the harvest and processing stages (Gustavsson et al. 2011). The numbers on food waste become increasingly concerning understanding that the United Nations predicts the world population to grow to around 9 billion in 2050, and believes that the global demand for food will nearly double, stressing already scarce resources (FAO 2009).

Northwest Arkansas is not an exception to these trends as the region's businesses and individuals are responsible for approximately 80,000 tons of food waste per year (Zimmardi 2019). In Fayetteville, where this project is focused, food waste accounts for 18% of the total waste that the city sends to the landfill each year ("Food Waste/Compostables"). Without change in the practices of individuals and local businesses, these numbers cannot be expected to fall due to the growing population of NWA, which is currently growing at a rate of 32 people a day, making it the 27<sup>th</sup> fastest growing metro area in the United States (Rosa and Dala 2021).

These alarming figures regarding food handling issues, felt both internationally and locally, lead to the conclusion that something must be done. A couple things must be understood here. First, these global issues are multi-faceted; for this reason, no one solution will solve these issues and a number of different strategies should be employed. Secondly, while both food losses and food waste are important issues that are undeniably tied together, each is fundamentally different and they require their own unique sets of solutions. While improvement in the use of technology can be used to combat food losses in the pre-consumer part of the food chain (Jedermann et al. 2017), food composting is one option gaining popularity in the fight against food waste due to its ability to be applied economically to a wide variety of materials (Schuab and Leonard 1996). The project I undertook dealt with the development of understanding and utilizing composting as an option to reduce the negative effects of food waste in the University of Arkansas community. If successful, it can be a model for the development of more efficient food waste practices in other developed communities as well.

## 2.2 What is Food Composting?

Food composting is a biological process, either aerobic or anaerobic, that turns solid organic materials into a soil-like end product. The natural process turns yard and food waste into a compost that can be used as a soil amendment, improving the soil's natural physical properties and overall quality (Watteau and Villemin 2011). Multiple studies have emphasized that compost can improve soil structure, fertility, and plant growth (Goyal Dhull and Kapoor 2005). A review of the typical process of composting was conducted by Schuab and Leonard in 1996. The basic steps in the composting process can be seen in figure 1 and include sorting and shredding the raw materials, the composting process itself, the curing stage, and screening to determine next steps.

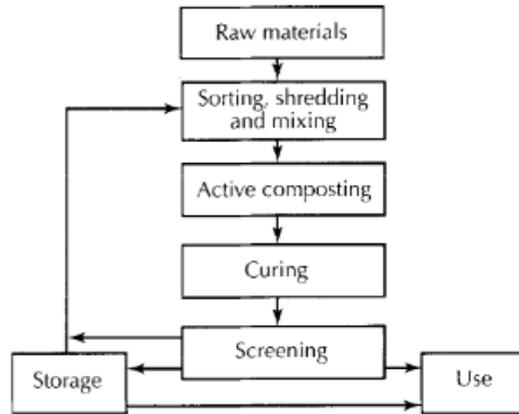


Figure 1: Steps of a typical composting process

The foods that can be composted include vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs (including shells), dairy products, breads and grains, and coffee grounds (Food Loops 2018). The process can also involve other compostable materials; these include tea bags, napkins, and newspaper (EPA 2021), as well as other products such as cups and plates that are specifically noted as compostable (Food Loops 2018).

It is desirable that the particles being composted are small during the process, so shredding might be needed before the activity begins. Once at a desirable level, the mixture is then organized in a pile or windrow. Thermophilic microorganisms are utilized in the active composting process, and these organisms have specific requirements that must be met in order for their activity to be optimal. These factors include temperature, oxygen concentration, pH (6-8), moisture level (40-60%), and a good carbon to nitrogen ratio (between 25:1-35:1 CN). Once the correct requirements are met, microbial activity begins to break down the different materials (Schuab and Leonard 1996). The process involves periodic turning of the mixture and, due to the microbial activity, temperatures are often high. The curing process begins when the temperature of the mixture does not rise after being turned (Pace and Farrell-Poe 1995). During this stage, decomposition is completed and microbial cultures are stabilized (Schuab and Leonard 1996, p 264). Once the process is complete, the compost can be added to soil to improve its richness and quality (Goyal, Dhull, and Kapoor 2005).

The practice of composting is becoming more common, but it is not the only viable practice that works to reduce food waste. In their 2016 paper, Oldfield, White, and Holden compared composting with three other practices that concern the reduction of food waste: minimization, anaerobic digestion, and incineration. In their study they conclude that food waste minimization (participating in practices that reduce the potential amount of food waste generated) is the best option to reduce food waste. However, it needs to be combined with at least one of the other practices as it is difficult to properly identify inefficiencies in the production process and implement changes. With regard to composting, they found that the practice was viable, but provided marginally different positive outcomes than either aerobic digestion (process similar to composting but different in that it doesn't include oxygen) or incineration of the food waste. Ultimately, the results of this study do not conflict with this compost-centered project, and it can be concluded that composting is not only a viable practice to reduce poor food waste outcomes but a very realistic one at that. The structure of Food Loops,

the company I worked with on this project, arguably increases the viability of this practice as it amplifies the practicality of the composting process for the average person.

### 2.3 Food Loops

Food Loops is a company based out of Rogers, Arkansas that works to provide full circle food waste solutions options for companies and individuals primarily in the Northwest Arkansas region. My contact, Michael Kraus (co-founder), helped co-founder & owner Tom Rohr establish the grassroots organization in 2017 with the mission to divert the 80,000 tons of annual food waste from landfills in the Northwest Arkansas region. They pursue this mission with the broader motivation of helping residents in the region to live more sustainably at home and at work by meeting them wherever they are.

The company focuses on five main areas related to food waste solutions: residential food waste composting, commercial food waste composting, zero waste events, compost, and compostable product sales. Selling compost, distributing compostable products and hauling food waste for commercial enterprises such as hospitals, restaurants, and schools are the main sources of revenue, especially during Covid-19. During Covid times, with events on the back-burner and more food waste being generated at home, Food Loops focused on residential food waste more than ever.

Founder Tom Rohr estimates that about 15% of people living in Northwest Arkansas are living in an environmentally conscious way, while the other 85% either do not care to live sustainably or care to do so, just not enough to go out and do it. Food Loops' processes make the messy practice of composting much simpler than it otherwise would be, and for that reason they target those people who care to live sustainably, just need easier access to do so. This project fits well within this model, as it works to make composting a more accessible option for residents of Fayetteville apartments- many of whom are college students that fit this target market.

## 3. The Project

### 3.1 Project Overview and Background

The objective of this project was to bring food composting to the University of Arkansas community by crafting a unique deal and targeting apartment complexes with it. I was unaware of the practice of food waste composting and its benefits before I took the Social Innovation Strategies class with Dr. Karl Schubert and Dr. Rogelio Garcia-Contreras. The class was structured so that the students would be able to learn about common strategies to implement social innovation changes within organizations, then to immediately apply what was learned by pairing student groups with companies and assisting the companies in developing a social innovation. At the beginning of the semester, the companies gave presentations on their mission and what they would be looking for in a social innovation. One of the presenters was Michael Kraus, who was presenting about his full circle food waste management company: Food Loops. Michael's presentation piqued my interest as he talked about the practicality of their business model, so I reached out to Michael outside of class with the mind to work with him to create a social innovation. Understanding that the demographic with the highest participation was young adult females, we eventually had the idea to establish a deal that would bring Food Loops' residential services to a local area that has a high concentration of young adults: The University of Arkansas community.

The University of Arkansas community was a prime place for Food Loops to push in to due to its high population of intelligent young adults, many of whom are more passionate about environment than those in older generations. The decision to focus specifically on apartments is

because of the nature of the community, which has a dense concentration of apartment complexes and related student living options as a result of high turnover rates for college students. In order to make sure that apartment complexes and their residents would buy in to this opportunity, we had to create a unique deal that motivated all of the involved stakeholders.

## 3.2 Deal Structure

### 3.2.1 Design

The original model envisioned for this project was to offer Food Loop's residential composting service to apartment complexes as a unique amenity. The three main stakeholders in this deal would be the apartment complex's residents, the apartment complex management, and Food Loops. Food Loops' service allows residents to recycle food waste and compostable products, and the deal would utilize the residential leasing process, allowing the new or renewing resident to sign up for this deal. A strong partnership with the leasing and management office of the apartment complex would be necessary as this specific model would have them handling the management of the deal, consisting of things like advertising, actively seeking to produce new deals, and management of their participating members. Food Loops' part would consist of maintaining excellent service, continually educating both the participants and complexes on the importance of food composting, and continually reviewing the process to make improvements wherever necessary.

The deal would utilize a baseline \$5 per month subscription service that would be run through the apartment complex, and to establish a deal, Food Loops would require a minimum of 12 participants to cover the cost and make their participation worth it. During the leasing process, the apartment complex would in some way present the option for residents to participate in the composting amenity, describing the cost and providing a basic explanation of what the service would do for them and why they should consider participating (this could be adding an additional page/step in the process that would provide a few sentences of basic information on what food composting is and why it is important, and would ask the future resident if they would like to participate). Upon agreeing to participate, they would receive additional information on how and where they can participate, either in an email or in their move-in info packet. From there the apartment complex and Food Loops will work together to make sure the amenity stays useful and relevant for participating residents. Food Loops would handle the food pickup and hauling from the designated spot. Their 64-gallon bins will be located at the spot agreed upon by Food Loops and the apartment complex, most likely near the other dumpsters on the premises.

This deal serves as one answer to the problem of rising demand for better food composting options, and was crafted to benefit the resident. It would provide them with the option to participate in food composting, an alternative to the deal offered by the city. Fayetteville offers its own food waste option, in which city residents can go to one of three locations to drop off their food waste and compostables for no charge. The small fee that this project's deal will charge can be seen as the convenience fee of having a drop off option in the resident's apartment complex- as opposed to hauling their own waste across the city. This project could also indirectly help the city in its effort to reduce landfill waste by 40% in the next 6 years ("Food Waste/Compostables"), as one of the underlying goals is to improve the overall awareness of food waste composting and its viability in the community.

The apartment complex could utilize the deal for advertising purposes, and could also benefit financially from the deal. The baseline cost charged by Food Loops to participate in the deal is \$5 per month, but could be different depending on the specifics of the deal. The most common way presented to apartment complexes was that they could slightly increase the charge

and keep the additional amount for themselves. For example, an apartment complex could charge their participating residents \$7 per month and keep the additional \$2 for themselves. The other commonly presented way would be to allow the apartment complex to keep the first month's payment for themselves. The apartment complex could also use the deal to strengthen their brand and advertise to environmentally conscious students at the university.

The deal would benefit Food Loops by allowing it to expand its presence in the NWA area by keying in on the most important community in Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas. Gaining traction with the University of Arkansas community will not only benefit Food Loops' bottom line, but will also serve to increase awareness of the company and, more importantly, awareness of food composting. In the short term, Food Loops will be able to gain new partnerships with a community that is becoming increasingly concerned with the environment. In the long term, successful establishment and maintenance of apartment complex deals could be a starting point for Food Loops to create a relationship with the University of Arkansas dining halls and its sporting events.

### 3.2.2 Comparing to similar model

Though there are many strengths and reasons that this specific deal was designed, a similar deal was considered and could be easily envisioned. This other deal would allow the apartment complex to allow all of their residents to participate in the composting program.

In comparison with the model utilized in this project, this other model could be cheaper for the residents if the apartment complex paid for it by adding a flat rate for all residents. The downside for the residents would be the likely lack of push to participate from the apartment's management, which could lead to less and less involvement. This other model would still create potential gains for the apartment complex, namely allowing it to benefit in advertising efforts. This model would also not require them to manage their current participants, which could make this structure more desirable for the apartment complex. With regard to Food Loops, this model could either speed up or hinder its ability to grow in the University of Arkansas community. The benefit or drawback of this other model would be dependent on the buy in of the apartment complex and its residents; this other deal has more risk to lose traction within the first few years in comparison with the original model, which has more potential for growth based on the required buy in both of the residents (voluntary subscription) and of the apartment complex (management and active advertisement).

Additionally, there is a main issue with this model that would affect all stakeholders: when every member is allowed to participate, the free rider problem would be present. There would be no process of education or buy-in for the resident participating in the deal due to every resident automatically being a participant and paying for the amenity. Consequently, many residents would likely misuse the bin meant for food compost, rendering the process less efficient (Lee and Jung 2017). On top of this, the apartment complex would not have to engage beyond its desire to utilize the deal for advertising. Having the residents pay a subscription fee by choice would increase the likelihood of proper practices regarding food waste. The free rider is the reason the original plan includes specific subscription costs instead of making the amenity available to all residents for a lower cost. However, Food Loops does meet its clients wherever they are and if this other model is the one they prefer then we would likely agree to establish that kind of deal. The issues would be discussed but ultimately it is more important that any deal is established, as improvements can be made to each agreement in the coming years.

## 3.3 Implementation

### 3.3.1 First Steps

When I began work on the project in early January, Michael and I started with the creation of a timeline and establishing the goals for the partnership. The timeline consisted of rough deadlines that we could use to track our progress and focus on things such as meetings scheduled and number of apartment complexes reached out to. The initial timeline can be seen below in the appendix. The goals were created using an Impact Filter- a process used by Food Loops to set their goals, consisting of the general explanation of the project and its purposes, listing out the best case and worst-case scenarios, and eight specific goals that are necessary to accomplish the main purpose. The specific goals included generating enough interest to have five in-person meetings and eventually had the project generating a deal with at least one Fayetteville apartment complex. From there the goals included using those deals to generate interest with other apartment complexes through the fear of missing out and gaining student champions (participants who are very bought in and can be influential for Food Loops in the sales process).

Once we had our plan of action, I immediately got to work reaching out to apartment complexes in Fayetteville that are known to be common spots for students to live. I started by reaching out to four apartment complexes that I was confident in due to proximity to campus and individuals. After I had reached out a couple of times to the initial apartment complexes, I expanded my contact list to a total of 17 Fayetteville apartments that are heavily used by and advertised to university students. For all the apartment complexes that I contacted I used traditional sales techniques: cold calling and email prospecting. I utilized both of these strategies for each complex as together they can prove more efficient than using just one at a time would be. I would call to make first contact, and during that call I would attempt to get a manager's email if I was unable to immediately speak with the manager (which happened in every instance). Then using the email addresses, I was able to craft and send an introductory email that would provide basic information about the project, Food Loops, and the specific deal we were hoping to create. The email would end with a prompt to schedule an in-person meeting with the manager. I reached out to each apartment complex weekly, either by phone, email, or both, and kept a call log with necessary information and notes for each (Appendix). As established in the goals, the main push in the calls and emails was to set up in person meetings with managers of the apartment complexes.

### 3.3.2 Apartment Meetings

In person meetings are always heavily sought after in sales natured roles and projects, and were especially important in this project due to the nature of Food Loops' business and the potential uniqueness of each deal. In contrast to most other businesses that utilize cold calling and email prospecting, Food Loops is a company providing a relatively new service, and because of this, there was often resistance on the part of the apartment manager receiving the call due to a lack of awareness or understanding regarding food waste composting and the potential gains involved; in person meetings helped us to better control the narrative in sight of this. There was a base model that we used for each initial conversation to get the ball rolling, but knowing that each apartment complex might operate differently and that Food Loops wants to meet its clients wherever they are at, we wanted to make sure each apartment complex's deal was the best deal possible for their specific apartment complex. I was able to meet in person with five apartment managers: Hill Place Apartments, Eco Modern Flats, Specialized Real Estate, The Avenue, and The Cottages on Hollywood. In addition, I was able to discuss beyond a cold call with three other apartments: The Spectrum, Atmosphere Apartments, and The Academy at Frisco, though

these discussions are still in the early stages. The in-person meetings are detailed in the following sections.

### ***Hill Place Apartments***

After three weeks of emails and calling, I was able to schedule an in-person interview with Hill Place Apartments. Michael and I met with property manager Cole Stocking on February 1, and discussed Hill Place's interest in making this an amenity. I acted as both a facilitator and a member in the discussion as we discussed the structure, the related financials, and the location of a bin for participating members in an attempt to increase interest in Food Loops' service. We concluded the first meeting by agreeing to get back together to discuss the results of a short survey that I had created to gauge the interest of current residents.

The survey consisted of a short description of Food Loops and food composting, and 2 questions with "Yes", "No", and "Maybe, need more info" answer options: 1) Would you be interested in participating in this new program?, 2) Would you be willing to pay for this service-less than \$10 a month?. I sent the survey to Cole to share with Hill Place residents a couple days after the meeting, but he did not send it out. I attempted to reach Cole through calling, email, and in person, but was unable to connect to remind him to send out the survey and potentially discuss why he hadn't. As a result, it was decided that it would be best for Michael to reach back out at the beginning of the summer.

### ***Eco Modern Flats***

In the third week of calling, I was able to schedule an in-person meeting with Shannon Field at Eco Modern Flats for February 5. In contrast to other local apartments, this apartment complex is much more environmentally conscious, and for that reason the meeting went a little different. Shannon conveyed that Eco Modern Flats were very interested in the service that Food Loops was hoping to provide, so the discussion was more focused on the details of an agreement in terms of financials, location, and the related logistics of the project. Key notes taken included that it might be stressful for management to facilitate the deal moving forward and from that there was a desire to offer the deal as an amenity to all residents. The next steps to be taken at the end of the first meeting included Michael figuring out some of the more specific costs associated with setting up the deal, and Shannon talking to her management group, Specialized Real Estate Group about the potential of a deal.

The second meeting with Eco Modern Flats happened one week later on February 12. More specific financial details were established and it was confirmed that ownership was interested in the deal that Michael and I were offering. The main note from this meeting was a concern with the large size of the buckets each resident would have in their apartment. The meeting ended with the goal of having smaller bins selected for use by March 1.

By the time March 1 had come, Michael and I had not heard back from Shannon, but reached out a couple of times and heard back about which of the specific in-unit bins were going to be used. However, because of the initial costs of setting up the program, Eco Modern Flats decided to hold off on confirming a deal for now. Though they rejected this specific deal, management was still excited about the prospect of working with Food Loops, and a meeting was scheduled with their ownership group, Specialized Real Estate Group Inc., for March 16 to discuss opportunities outside of the Fayetteville area.

### ***Specialized Real Estate Group Inc.***

The discussions for Eco Modern Flats lead to a larger discussion with Specialized Real Estate Group Inc., its managing group, on March 16. The details of this meeting were mainly about ideas for proper implementation at the Brick Avenue Lofts in Bentonville, and in other

areas that were being developed by the group. The meeting notes also included conducting a food waste audit on Eco Modern Flats, suggestions for other businesses to target in Fayetteville, Specialized events that could be zero waste, and a discussion on streamlining the communication about the waste compost bins to residents in common areas. Though none of these deals will be established by the end of my participation in this project, Food Loops should stay in constant contact with this real estate group to ensure their services will be used in these future projects.

### *The Avenue*

I initially received an email from Rachel Stevens of the Avenue declining the deal I had presented, she cited low budget as the reason. In response I reached out to schedule a meeting to better understand the reason they declined, and we scheduled a meeting for February 18. In the meeting it was clarified that the rejection was due to current budgeting, but that they are interested in providing composting as an amenity at some point in the future. The meeting notes included the related financials, the deal as a marketing opportunity, distinction between valet trash services and Food Loop's composting service, and the burden of selling the service to residents. Rachel did agree to send out a survey to gauge the interest of the Avenue's residents, and that was the next step at the end of the meeting.

The survey asked the same questions as those in the survey sent out to Hill Place's residents, and it was sent out to the Avenue's residents on March 10. There were 40 responses, and of the 40, 33 responded that they were interested in participating in a food composting program, 5 said they would need more info to do so, and only 2 said that they weren't interested. When asked about the price, 15 said they would be willing to pay around \$5 a month to participate, 16 said they would not pay that much, and 8 would need more info to decide. The immediate takeaways from this survey suggest that even with as few responses were received from the residents, there is already enough interest for the Avenue to consider establishing a deal in the future due to Food Loops only requiring roughly 12 participants to set up the program. I reached back out to Rachel with this information, and have suggested that Michael continue talks with them in the future.

### *The Cottages on Hollywood*

Similar to the way I was able to meet with the Avenue, I was able to schedule a meeting with Hannah Coffman of the Cottages on Hollywood after initially receiving a "no" to the service. Richard Ims, another employee of Food Loops, and I met with Hannah on March 16. The meeting notes included the reasons for initially saying no (uncertainty due to COVID and business of leasing season), discussions on what food composting is and how Food Loops provides a useful service, the presence of a trash valet service and its potential to partner with Food Loops. The next step established at the end of the meeting was for Hannah to share the survey I had created with the residents at the Cottages to gauge interest in the service. I recommended contacting Hannah and the Cottages again later in the year to Richard and Michael.

## **3.4 Next Steps and Future Possibilities**

Though some of the main goals have been met, this project is not considered complete as of the writing of this paper due to the finalizing of certain deals and continuing contact with some apartment complexes. The next step for Food Loops is to continue to generate interest with apartment complexes in the Fayetteville area. It is necessary to maintain the momentum created during this semester since I will be moving away following my graduation in May. Once a deal is established, proper implementation and maintenance of the deal by Food Loops will be necessary; this will consist of providing excellent service and an open line of communication

with management. Active partnerships will need to be reevaluated each year to ensure each complex's deal has the best possible structure.

With regards to the continuing discussions with apartment complexes, persistence is necessary. While continual contact would be best, a short break will be necessary due to the deal made between Food Loops and the NCAA regarding making the men's college basketball March Madness tournament a zero-waste event, as this deal will require most of Food Loops' time and resources until mid-April. It would probably be best to attempt to reengage in discussions during the early summer or fall months, due to those being the least busy for leasing. Assuming a deal utilizing the design detailed in this paper is made, it can be used as a model to present to the other interested apartments. It will also serve well to get more statistics on the interest of college aged adults to present as part of the conversation process; this can be done through surveys at each individual apartment or through the university. With persistence, additional figures to prove the interest is present, and the knowledge that another apartment complex is already partnering with Food Loops, the company should be able to get more apartment complexes to agree to deals.

Due to the foundational nature of the project, it has the potential to aid Food Loops' growth for many years to come. Looking further into the future, Food Loops can reasonably expect to expand to as many apartment complexes as are interested due to the lack of competition in composting services in the Fayetteville area. Based on the interest generated in this semester and number of suitable apartments in the University of Arkansas community, I think a realistic goal that the company could set is deals with five apartment complexes in the next three years. Once Food Loops is established as a good provider for this service, they could utilize it as a steppingstone to pursue deals with the University of Arkansas. These deals could include, among other things, deals with dorms, with the dining halls, and even work on large group events hosted by the university. In general, the university provides ample opportunity for Food Loops to continue seeking growth in the Fayetteville area due to its number of clubs, events, and partnership.

## 4. Evaluation

### 4.1 Project Evaluation

Once the original idea had been formed, the first step was the creation of a rough timeline and a set of goals. Creating the timeline was an invaluable part of the process as it helped me to keep the necessary pace to reach the goals that had been set. The main improvement that could have been made for this step is to have the goals established before creating the timeline, so it can be more centered around completing the goals themselves. Specific to this project and in the context of the thesis writing process, it also would have been helpful to set deadlines to keep that part of the process up to date with the project. It would have also helped to have tailored the goals to account for the short timeline of the project. The next step in the process was brainstorming the design of the deal. Though the initial design of the deal was the reason that I decided to pursue the process in general, I found that fleshing out the details of the deal was incredibly useful for initial talks and generating interest with the apartment complexes that I reached out to; the apartment complexes were very interested in at least some of the details of any deal they would agree to meet about. It was also beneficial to layout the benefits of each of the stakeholders involved as that process allowed for optimization of the deal. One thing that should've been included in the brainstorming process was laying out the costs or downsides that each stakeholder would face. Conducting a more complete cost-benefit analysis

for the stakeholders would have shown, among other things, that there is a cost for Food Loops early on in the process if only a few apartments sign up as they could experience high costs coming all the way down from Rogers just to collect waste from a few complexes. Once the goals and timeline were set and deal was designed, I began reaching out to apartment complexes in Fayetteville by phone and email. Due to its difficulty, the cold calling and emailing step was the weakest and most difficult strategy employed in the implementation of this project. If more time is available, Food Loops could have considered another strategy: targeting one to two apartment complexes based on familiarity (a place where you have contacts already established) and seeking to make the events that the complex holds for its residents zero-waste events. This alternative strategy would have made the partnerships with Fayetteville apartment complexes more organic and would likely have a higher success rate. However, based on the available resources and restrictions due to COVID, cold calling and emailing were the best possible options to generate interest in a deal. The immediate takeaways from this step in the process were that while cold calls are the best way to make first contact, persistent emailing was the best way to get consistent responses and set meetings.

The meetings with apartment complexes also provided valuable insights toward the project. The main insight gained throughout all of the meetings was that the financials are the most important aspect of considering implementation of Food Loops' residential composting service. While I had anticipated this challenge and tried to address it by designing the deal to be based on opting in, I found that most of the complexes preferred to offer it as a base amenity to all of their residents, as this would minimize the necessity of their managing the participating residents. The importance of conveying the residents' interest in a food composting service was found to be the other main insight gained through the meetings, as it was touched on in every meeting. This shows that ideal implementation of this project would begin with understanding the interest of the residents of a given complex, and basing the discussion off of that. One useful thing learned from the meetings is that many of the apartment complexes have a trash valet amenity. This provides an opportunity for the implementation of Food Loop's service as it can partner with the trash valet provider and make the process for residents even easier.

The common underlying theme of the challenges faced in the implementation of this project is the timeframe that it operated in. The semester-long time period placed many restraints on the practices and strategies used to generate interest, and this was highlighted by many of the issues described in this section. The issues based on timing were compounded by the issues presented by the COVID-19 pandemic; the lockdowns hurt my ability to speak with the apartment complexes, and many of them were less open to adding a new amenity due to the uncertainty that the virus had created. In hindsight, understanding everything that will be necessary to establish a deal plus the unique challenge of COVID-19, I believe that this project would have been most successful if it had operated on a 1–2-year timeframe. If this project was to be maintained or implemented elsewhere, this project can serve as a template for success in those other places, and the lessons detailed in this evaluation should aid in successful implementation.

## 4.2 Personal Reflection

One of the specific goals that Michael and I established was that I would learn five personal and professional lessons from this project. The five lessons that I learned are that food composting is a viable practice for Food Loops, businesses, and individuals, that it is necessary to understand and account for all of the stakeholders in a deal, that persistence in sales is necessary, that my theoretical economics background is incredibly useful, and that honesty in

sales is invaluable. Before this project, I had hardly ever heard of food composting as a practice, but throughout this process I have learned about its role in fighting environmental degradation, its viability as a business practice for both service providers like Food Loops, and the ease of actually participating in a food composting service such as the one that Food Loops provides. Work on this project has allowed me to view the practice of composting from many different angles, and from my impression I expect the practice to increase rapidly in the United States in the next few years as a response to the increase in demand for sustainable options. The different angles I considered included the perspectives of the three main stakeholders- Food Loops, the apartment complexes, and the apartment complexes residents- and their roles in the establishment of this deal. This process taught me how necessary it is to fully consider each stakeholder in a project or deal, and to provide value to each of them; in this project, the creation of value for the apartment complex was surprisingly the most important aspect of doing so, as it is largely the middleman in the transaction. Another valuable experience that I gained as a part of this project was being persistent in my sales efforts. Though persistence is probably the most commonly talked about aspect for successful sales, I found it to be much easier said than done. Because of this experience, I truly believe that a deal could be perfectly crafted and still be rejected just because the difficult nature of selling something that is not well understood, as composting is. The fourth lesson I learned, though less predictable than the third, is no less valuable: lessons learned in the classroom can be utilized in the real world. One of the many specific lessons that I found present in this project is that the free rider problem is present not just in economic textbooks and tests, but that it is a very real problem that many service providers have to handle every day; much of the brainstorming that went into the deal I designed for the apartment complexes came as a response to potential free riders. The fifth lesson I learned is that honesty in sales is often a great strategy. When selling something, there is often pressure to over sell or hype something up, or to downplay or ignore the issues that a given idea or deal has. I found that being honest with the managers during talks resulted in much more interest created in terms of the deal, as most people can tell when they are being lied to and don not respond well to doing so. These lessons are some of the most valuable that I have learned as a result of this experience, but they aren't the only ones. I will remember and utilize the lessons learned in this project for many years to come.

## 5. Conclusion

Understanding that food composting is a viable practice that benefits the environment by keeping wasted food out of the landfill, this project was established with the objective of reducing inefficient food waste in the Northwest Arkansas region by utilizing food composting; specifically, this would be done by focusing on introducing student living apartment complexes in Fayetteville to food composting. I partnered with Food Loops in an attempt to craft a deal and establish partnerships with these apartment complexes. The deal worked to benefit each of the involved stakeholders, especially the apartment management, and it was presented to a number of complexes in the University of Arkansas community in Fayetteville. As of the writing of this paper, no deals have been confirmed for next year, but the interest generated in deals gives reason to think that the practice will be adopted in multiple complexes in the coming years. The nature of this project is foundational and it will not end with the completion of this thesis; the next steps involve Food Loops maintaining consistent contact with the interested management groups. It might also be advantageous for Food Loops to explore different service options with these apartment complexes due to the significant interest generated.

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## Appendix

### Thesis Timeline: Spring 2021



Date	Planned Activity	Deadline
Jan 5	Meet with Michael to discuss goals and set up a rough timeline	
Jan 15	-Have targeted apartment complexes selected -Begin cold calling and emailing	<b>Have goals and timeline established</b>
Jan 20	Meet with Michael to discuss developments	
Jan 25-29	Initial apartment meetings	<b>Reach out to at least 15 different apartments</b>
Feb 1-5	- Check in with apartments about meetings - Remind unresponsive apartments	
Feb 8-12	Reach out to apt(s) about first meeting	<b>Reach out to as many apartments as is necessary to schedule a meeting</b>
Feb 15-19	Have second meeting with apt(s)	
Feb 22-26	- Check in with apartments about meetings - Remind unresponsive apartments	<b>Meet with the complex(es) that agreed to meet</b>
March 1-5	Have at least 1 apartment complex agreed to working with Food Loops	
March 5	Use confirmed deal to generate interest with unresponsive apartments	<b>Have initial meetings with at least 5 different apartments</b>
March 8-26	Continue generating interest by reaching out to apartments	<b>March 15- If no interest, talk to Michael about shift/response</b>

# Call Script & Notes



Food Loops  
NOTHING WASTED

Davis Ehlers- senior at the university of Arkansas, working on thesis project for a business degree.
Food Loops, waste management solutions; <a href="https://foodloops.net/">https://foodloops.net/</a>
My plan: bring food loops' residential services to Fayetteville's apartment complexes.
<p>Unique plan in that no one else is doing it in the area yet.</p> <p><b>Food Loops: Mission: Nothing Wasted.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We are closing the food loop by <u>recycling food waste</u>. We reduce the amount of food that enters the landfill and produce sustainable fertilizers for local growers and residents.</li> <li>2. We are reducing our waste footprint in NWA by selling <u>compostable products</u> to local restaurants, events, and businesses.</li> <li>3. We are making <u>zero-waste events</u> easy. We bring our simple Waste Station System and solutions to any event to make it waste free.</li> </ol>
My contact from Food Loops, Michael Kraus, and I, would love to meet in person. If I could get an email- 1) to send a more detailed proposal, and 2) to possibly schedule an in person/zoom call
Our initial plan is to have it like a complex offered renter's insurance deal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This means working with food loops to offer the deal to residents through the leasing process</li> </ul>
Food Loops deal:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ \$5 per month per participant</li> <li>○ Bins that they collect their own food waste in, then Food Loops will have a large bin they can dump it at, which Food Loops will haul</li> </ul>
Incentive for apartment complex:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can make it a lot of ways, 2 ideas:</li> </ul>

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You would receive first month's rent</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You could charge over true cost and take those earnings off the top (ex: charging \$8 instead of 5 and keeping the \$3 per month)</li> </ul> |

## Contact History & Notes

### Hill Place (10am): (501) 708-2777

- Jan 15- talked to Stacy, expect a call back from manager
- Jan 19- Email: [Alex.campbell@hillplaceapts.com](mailto:Alex.campbell@hillplaceapts.com)
- Jan 25- talked to Mariney (sp?), said Alex would get back to me
- Jan 28- Want to meet today or sometime soon, get in touch with Michael to set up meeting time with Hill Place
- Feb 1- Meeting with Cole at 12:30. Email: [cm@hillplaceapts.com](mailto:cm@hillplaceapts.com)
  - Get Cole a quick google form by Wednesday night to gauge interest at Hill Place (Michael thinks 1-2 questions, check with him before sharing with Cole)
  - Other local complexes under cardinal management (champions club, spectrum, gather Dickson) are in different side of the company that has different process to approval
  - Feedback: try not to lean into finance side of it unless they ask to. Make sure to get an understanding of their approval process with their management group, helps the question asking process to be more top down
- Feb 15- Sent a reminder to Cole to send survey to residents
- Feb 24- sent reminder email to Cole
- Mar 9- sent reminder email to Cole

### Frisco (10 am): [info@theacademyatfrisco.com](mailto:info@theacademyatfrisco.com) (479) 935-8888

- Jan 15- send email to email given, they said manager would be expecting a call
- Jan 19- Leslie forwarded it to managers, including property manager, prepare to hear back
- Jan 25- manager had busy week, will review and get back to me soon
- Jan 28- manger on call, will get back to me soon
- Feb 1- email Anthony Blok [ablok@theacademyatfrisco.com](mailto:ablok@theacademyatfrisco.com)
- Feb 8- sent email to [ablok@theacademyatfrisco.com](mailto:ablok@theacademyatfrisco.com)
  - Emailed back- email on the week of 22<sup>nd</sup> to make meeting for thesis notes
- Feb 24- Emailed Anthony to set thesis meeting
- Feb 25- emailed Anthony questions to gauge interest and his reason for initially saying no.
- Mar 9- sent reminder email
- **Cardinal: (479) 935-9375**
  - Jan 15- email manager at: [cburch@creimail.com](mailto:cburch@creimail.com)

- Jan 19- big NO from the property manager (said no space on premises, I think they're just not interested)

### **Atmosphere (10 am): (479) 225-9250**

- Jan 15- email [live@atmosphereapts.com](mailto:live@atmosphereapts.com)
- Jan 19- manager on a call, said to follow up with another email
- Jan 28- emailed again
- Feb 1- no answer
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [live@atmosphereapts.com](mailto:live@atmosphereapts.com)
- Feb 15- got no from Alyssa Pruitt, asked to meet so I could have something for my thesis
- Feb 24- remind Alyssa that you still want a thesis meeting
- March 9- sent Alyssa reminder email

### **Cottages (10 am) -(479) 249-8847**

- Jan 25- busy sound, call back at noon
- Feb 1- Kendall said to email: [info@cottagesonhollywood.com](mailto:info@cottagesonhollywood.com)
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [info@cottagesonhollywood.com](mailto:info@cottagesonhollywood.com)
- Feb 15- sent reminder email
- Feb 24- ask Hannah for a thesis meeting
- Mar 9- sent Hannah a reminder email

### **The Vue (10 am)-(479) 239-1042**

- Jan 25- emailed leasing manager Emily - email: [ehaak@tmo.com](mailto:ehaak@tmo.com)
- Feb 1- Adrian -> Emily can't speak, wants more info on the email and they will reach back out
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [ehaak@tmo.com](mailto:ehaak@tmo.com)
  - Not interested, sent email asking to meet anyway and discuss what I could include I'm my paper.
- Feb 24- send reminder for additional meeting
- Mar 9- sent Emily a reminder email

### **Eco-flats (12 pm)- specialized group- (479) 935-2996**

- Jan 25- Shannon email: [shannon@specializedreg.com](mailto:shannon@specializedreg.com)
- Feb 1- meeting Friday at noon
  - Notes from meeting
- Meeting again- Friday Feb 12
- Feb 25<sup>th</sup>- sent email asking Shannon why she declined meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February
- Mar 9- asked Shannon where they were with picking a bin size

### **Mountain ranch (8:30 am)- (479) 439-8224**

- Jan 25- no one answered, left voicemail
- Feb 1- email manager: [Mariah.rose@bsrreit.com](mailto:Mariah.rose@bsrreit.com)
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [Mariah.rose@bsrreit.com](mailto:Mariah.rose@bsrreit.com)

- Feb 15- Sent reminder email
  - Got good response, find out when Michael thinks it would be good to meet (guessing this Friday)
- Feb 24- check in to set up meeting
- Mar 9- sent Mariah reminder email

### **Varsity house (10am) - (479) 251-1042**

- Jan 25- manager's email: [brandon.tibbs@assetliving.com](mailto:brandon.tibbs@assetliving.com)
- Feb 1- Brandon is busy, will get back after today
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [brandon.tibbs@assetliving.com](mailto:brandon.tibbs@assetliving.com)
- Feb 15- sent reminder email
- Feb 24 sent reminder email
- Mar 9- sent Brandon a reminder email

### **The Marshall (10 am) - (479) 435-9948**

- Jan 25- manager's email: [genna.fisher@assetliving.com](mailto:genna.fisher@assetliving.com)
- Feb 1- will get back in the next hour or so
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [genna.fisher@assetliving.com](mailto:genna.fisher@assetliving.com)
- Feb 15- sent reminder email
- Feb 24- sent reminder email
- Mar 9- sent Genna a reminder email
- **The Links at Fayetteville (aka Lindsey Management) (8 am)- (479) 521-6686**
  - Jan 25- Scott's (manager) voicemail- left message with number
  - Stopped contact for number of concerns with management based on word of mouth and reviews
- **Aspen Heights Fayetteville (9:30)- (479) 316-4800**
  - Jan 25- Braden (manager), no property because they're not operational email: [bmwillis@myaspenheights.com](mailto:bmwillis@myaspenheights.com)
  - Stopped contact for lack of physical complex

### **The avenue (10 am)- (479) 318-1322**

- Jan 25- shawn/sean, managers in conference call until 4-5ish could email- [rachel.stephens@theavenuefayetteville.com](mailto:rachel.stephens@theavenuefayetteville.com)
- Feb 1- will email me back "sometime today"
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [rachel.stephens@theavenuefayetteville.com](mailto:rachel.stephens@theavenuefayetteville.com)
  - Not interested, sent email asking to meet anyway and discuss what I could include I'm my paper.
    - Meeting next Thursday at 2pm, 18<sup>th</sup>
      - Notes: in finance notebook
- Feb 24- sent survey to Rachel
- Mar 9- sent survey reminder to Rachel

### **Champions club apartments (10 am)- (479) 439-1030**

- Jan 25- William (associate), Mackenzie (property manager is leaving Friday will forward email on to next , email: [cm@livechampionsclub.com](mailto:cm@livechampionsclub.com))

- Feb 1- new manager starts tomorrow, associate will let them know to email me back
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [cm@livechampionsclub.com](mailto:cm@livechampionsclub.com)
- Feb 15- sent reminder email
- Feb 24- sent reminder email
- Mar 9- sent a reminder email

### **Spectrum apartments (10 am)- (479) 250-1233**

- Jan 25- Katie (associate), jake (leasing manager) do have valet trash service, email: [lmtl@livethespectrum.com](mailto:lmtl@livethespectrum.com)
- Feb 1- nick/nate answered, Jake will email me back
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [lmtl@livethespectrum.com](mailto:lmtl@livethespectrum.com)
- Feb 15- sent reminder to jake (who had initially said no)
- Feb 24- ask jake for meeting again
- Feb 25- sent some answers to jake's questions, and asked to meet in person
- Mar 9- sent Jake ([jake.deen@livethespectrum.com](mailto:jake.deen@livethespectrum.com) ) reminder email

### **Beechwood Village (9 am)- (479) 279-7987**

- Jan 25- email: [manager@ozarkvillas.com](mailto:manager@ozarkvillas.com)
- Feb 1- no answer, sent second email
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [manager@ozarkvillas.com](mailto:manager@ozarkvillas.com)
- Feb 15- sent reminder email
- Feb 24- sent reminder email
- Mar 9- sent reminder email

### **Gather Dickson (10 am)- (479) 439-1045**

- Jan 25- Lauren (associate) email: [info@gatherdickson.com](mailto:info@gatherdickson.com)
- Feb 1- busy week, said they would check in with it
- Feb 8- sent reminder email to [info@gatherdickson.com](mailto:info@gatherdickson.com)
- Feb 15- sent reminder email
- Feb 24- sent reminder email
- Mar 9- sent reminder email