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Social Venture Innovation Challenge Written Summary - Sustconscious

The issue of food and water waste has become a major issue around the globe, especially in the United States. According to the USDA, about 31% of our food is thrown out and wasted (Jensen). For some people, throwing out food has become a habitual practice. However, food waste has a large footprint; throwing out food wastes the water used to make it, the land and fertilizer used to grow it, and the oil used to transport it (“The Environmental Impact of Food Waste”). In total, food waste can add 3 billion tons of greenhouse gases to the Earth’s atmosphere every year (“Food waste harms climate, water, land and biodiversity – new FAO report”). These high levels of greenhouse gases can lead to global warming and perpetuate climate change, which can have devastating effects on the world. Entire cities could flood, droughts could occur, and natural disasters could worsen.

Water waste is also a major problem because although freshwater is a renewable resource, humans are using it faster than it can be replenished. In the US, 1 trillion gallons of water are wasted each year, just from leaks. Most people do not realize how a leaky faucet could waste so much water, but calculations show that every faucet that leaks one drip per minute wastes 34 gallons of water each year (Mooney). If we continue to use water so wastefully, there will be significant consequences regarding the availability of sufficient freshwater in the future.

Many people could benefit from the reduction of food and water waste because it is such a large-scale issue. People who worry about food security and water scarcity could benefit if some of the normally wasted food and water were given to them. Additionally, people who waste food and water would save money if they learned how to change their behavior and use their resources more sustainably. Globally, the reduction of waste would result in less greenhouse gases being added to the atmosphere.

The leading cause of food and water waste is that people are not aware of the impact it can have because it has become such a subconscious part of daily life. Additional contributing factors are that people worry about food poisoning from food that has passed its expiration date or food that looks “ugly” or “imperfect.” However, people are not often educated about how to read expiration dates and store their food properly, so there is no way for them to change their behavior. Some current solutions to this issue involve donating extra food to soup kitchens, helping people understand expiration dates, and using food waste to make compost (Chandler). Although these ideas are positive and helpful, they do not all make individual people take responsibility for their actions. They focus more on changing the effects of food waste issues from business standpoints instead of making the average person aware of these issues in the first place.

My vision for solving this issue is to make people aware of the impacts that their daily actions can have on the world around them by using an app called Sustconscious with a reward system. Most people in the United States constantly use their phones anyway, so using an app along with positive reinforcement might make people more willing to pay attention to the issues of food and water waste. One similar example is the Amazon and Bing partnership, which rewards users with Amazon gift cards for using the Bing search engine. Sustconscious also rewards users with gift cards and other prizes; however, it is more difficult to earn points. It is also more meaningful to earn points with Sustconscious because each point represents a small action that individuals have taken to be more sustainable.

The seven sections on the app are the community group, education, kids, my progress, redeem, community progress, and settings. The community group is one of the most important parts of the app; it allows nearby people, businesses, and nonprofits to interact with each other and share extra food and other goods instead of letting them go to waste. This group initiates important conversations between people about how to live sustainably. It also contributes to community building in a simple, positive way. In addition, the education section is beneficial because it teaches users how to read expiration dates and store food properly, how to minimize water usage, and how to buy locally-sourced food. Some ways that users can earn points are by sharing or receiving goods in the community group, watching videos and answering questions in the education section, lowering their water bill from month to month, participating in a food log in the “my progress” section, having a water technician repair leaky pipes in their home, and inviting friends to join the app.

This solution takes a huge problem and breaks it down so it is easier for people to understand. It allows individuals to feel like they are making a difference and doing something to contribute positively to the world around them, even if it is by simple means. As users earn points, they will likely tell their friends about it, which will make even more people aware of the issues of food and water waste. The most difficult part of creating this app would be finding sponsors to provide the gift cards and prizes. However, the app would be beneficial for the sponsors because it would associate them with sustainable practices and, in turn, make more people want to support them.

Sustconscious allows people to become more conscious of the impacts that their daily actions can have by helping them cut back on food and water waste. It also broadens connections between users, educates them about important issues, and helps them create and spread change in the world.

Works Cited

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