

One Focus. Many Possibilities.

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Brief Description:

Shelf life extension of fresh meals can be the one factor that solves so many challenges that are inhibiting us today, allowing us to meet the nutritional needs of all of our nation's seniors.

This submission was selected as part of a national challenge issued to leaders in all communities seeking new "best practices" and "best possibilities" for the future of nutrition and aging.

Every goal comes with inevitable challenges. Meeting the nutritional needs of our nation's seniors has proven to be a road with many obstacles to overcome! But I don't need to tell you all about your challenges. You know them inside and out. What you want to hear more about is how to overcome them. And I think, I HOPE, that by the end of this discussion you'll be excited! Excited about the very real possibility of knocking down some of these road blocks for good. Our idea will help programs like Meals on Wheels:

1. Consolidate production schedules allowing for more meals to be produced and stored during one production run.
2. Consolidate delivery schedules saving on fuel costs and maximizing volunteer power.
3. Allow programs serving frozen meals to GO FRESH, offering better quality AND taste to the people they serve
4. Get nutritious, fresh meals to MORE SENIORS and eventually ALL SENIORS—which is why WE ARE ALL HERE!!!

For the next few minutes, I am going to lead you through a few different scenarios—all of which are very real and occurring right now amongst programs out there that are trying to figure out ways to serve our senior population more effectively.

Imagine a program in the middle of rural America. This program knows that there are hundreds of seniors still suffering from hunger within a 200 mile radius, but it has no way of helping them for several reasons: 1. The cost of fuel has limited travel ability and when the distance between houses can be 10, 20, even 30 miles reaching these

people becomes difficult, 2. The man-power needed to reach that many people so spread out is impossible with the limited number of volunteers available each day, 3. The meals currently provided to this program's seniors last 2 days. So, a constant turnaround of fresh meals would need to be provided on a nearly daily basis in order to keep up with each senior's nutritional needs. Again, with the high cost of travel and lack of man-power, this is just not possible. Is there one factor that could be changed that would help this program solve these multiple issues? Our discovery is that longer shelf life on this program's fresh meals would allow it to send a volunteer or two one day per week with fresh meals that will last several days. We have now just lowered the money spent on fuel, freed up more volunteer time to serve more people, and provided fresh, healthy meals to those seniors who would not otherwise be reached.

Imagine now a city program that is so beyond its capacity that it has begun turning down new requests to provide seniors with meals in its community. The current process of packaging fresh meals allows for a very limited shelf life, therefore, meals must be produced and delivered the very same day, every day. Increasing the shelf life of this program's fresh meals to 10 days will help it to create a new efficient production schedule. Meals can now be produced a few days in advance, delivered to customers on a weekly basis instead of daily, and still remain fresh for a week or more. Production and delivery schedules have now been maximized, the program is able to answer higher demands, and more seniors are being fed!

In another scenario, a program is constantly talking to the seniors it is serving to find out how to improve the quality of their lives. One consistent piece of feedback is to get rid of the frozen meals it is serving and offer freshly prepared meals. The seniors do not want to eat "TV dinner"-type meals on a daily basis. They want a fresh meal with home-cooked quality and all of the nutritional benefits that come along with that. But, due to the volume of meals this program produces each day, they need the shelf life that freezing provides. Again, a longer shelf life for the program's meals would mean it could answer the demand of its seniors and give them quality, fresh meals they want with no setbacks to their operation's production capacity.

So, you've figured out by now the common theme: focus on one major component-- extending the shelf life of the meals that are being served-- and provide multiple benefits to each program. Now we get to the exciting part....THE ANSWER IS ALREADY OUT THERE!!!

There is a food packaging technology now available in the United States that increases the shelf life of fresh foods by several days, weeks and, and in some cases, months.

This tray sealing equipment includes a patented method by which a gas flush process takes place just prior to the sealing of the tray. It is otherwise known as Modified Atmosphere Packaging, or MAP. The idea is not new, but this specific patented technology is new to the United States. During this 100% natural process, the oxygen-rich atmosphere inside the food tray is gently flushed out and replaced by a mixture of Nitrogen and Carbon Dioxide. Nitrogen is an inert gas and just fills up space, while a small amount of Carbon Dioxide acts as a deterrent for bacteria and deterioration of the food product. This process can safely increase the shelf life of chilled ready meals to 10 days or more. Lab conducted shelf life studies have shown up to 21 days of shelf life on certain elements of various ready meals, but our research into the MOWAA organization has shown us that 10 to 14 days of shelf life is more than enough to increase most programs' impact on their community. In addition, this natural way of increasing the life of these meals eliminates the need for preservatives like sodium and other additives that are unfavorable for anyone's optimum health much less our senior demographic.

Beyond this, benefits of this process to an organization like MOWAA are groundbreaking and absolutely thrilling to discuss. For the next few minutes, I am going to lead you through a few different scenarios—all of which are very real and occurring right now amongst programs out there that are trying to figure out ways to serve our senior population more effectively.

Is this that easy? Well, yes. And no. As with any potentially game-changing idea, there will be a challenge to overcome in order to implement this type of system where it can be most effective. The packaging equipment that supplies this technology, of course, costs money. This may be a hurdle for some not-for-profit organizations that are dependent on donations and government funding. However, it is important to understand how the long term savings and benefits to each program will truly counterbalance, and even outweigh, the actual cost of equipment. This is also where we all need to remember the power of a great idea, motivated people, persistent belief and loud voices! We believe that with the right knowledge, information, and people, we can approach the government for funding directed toward this specific system for every program trying to make a difference to our senior population.

If you're listening to this presentation, you likely agree that a simple idea from motivated people can evolve into a reality so impactful that it can change the way people live and think. And you're looking for that idea. Organizations like Meals on Wheels Association of America were born from this type of idea and these types of driven individuals. But a constantly changing world has created demands that require a continuous need for fresh ideas. We believe in this unprecedented idea. We believe it is THE game-

changer for programs like Meals on Wheels that are out there trying to end this senior hunger epidemic. We believe it will provide the ability to accomplish goals that have been set, a security to seniors being served, and more importantly, the capability to finally help those out of reach today. What's most exciting is that once this idea catches on, once we come together to act as the driving force that implements this idea where it matters most, it can spread quickly nationwide and have an almost immediate impact.

Saying this technology is an answer to help our seniors is a major understatement. Our research into this system, the way it works, the result it creates, the ease of running the equipment, and the potential it has to make the difference we are all searching for makes this **THE best possibility** to meet the demands of our seniors' nutritional needs. Not just some of them—ALL OF THEM. ALL SENIORS. NOT ONE UNACCOUNTED FOR. This very goal is one that many people have been pouring their lives into for years to attain. It's ambitious and amazing and so are the people that are working toward it. But that idea, "not one senior left behind", is a huge picture that is hard to imagine as a reality in the current situation. The goal that would change the world if accomplished is now more achievable than ever.