

# EcoPlate MVP: TYE OC 2026

## Name and slogan

**Name:** EcoPlate

**Slogan:** *Freshly rescued meals. \$3-\$5 dinner. Right on campus.*

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## Two-liner

Every night, campus dining halls throw away safe, prepared food at closing while students still skip meals because food is too expensive or inconvenient. EcoPlate lets dining staff pack that surplus into “Rescue Boxes” that students reserve by QR code and pick up in a 90-minute window for about \$3 to \$5 per meal.

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## One-liner and Unique Value Proposition

**One-liner:** EcoPlate rescues end-of-day dining hall meals and sells them as \$3 to \$5 Rescue Boxes students reserve by QR, cutting campus waste while helping students eat affordably.

### Unique Value Proposition (UVP):

- **For students:** Affordable meals, on campus, no stigma.
  - **For dining services:** Less wasted food, smoother end-of-day flow, measurable impact they can report. Dining can recover some value from food that would've been discarded
  - **Future:** optional campus delivery once a dining-approved pickup pilot is proven.
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## Problem (with credible sourced evidence)

Food waste is no small issue. The **USDA estimates 30% to 40% of the U.S. food supply is wasted** ([USDA](#)). When food is landfilled, it produces methane, a greenhouse gas that worsens climate impacts ([EPA](#)). At the same time, many college students struggle to consistently afford meals. The **U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)** has noted that published studies show **college food insecurity rates vary widely, roughly from single digits to over 50%**

**depending on campus and methodology** ([GAO](#)). Regardless of the exact number, the pattern is consistent: campuses produce surplus food and students struggle to afford meals at the same time.

**Why now:** Three trends are converging. First, universities are under increasing pressure to meet ESG and sustainability commitments, with many setting zero-waste targets within the next decade. Second, student food insecurity has become a mainstream policy conversation, with the GAO publishing reports and colleges launching task forces. Third, mobile-first reservation and QR systems are now so cheap and easy to build that a student team can prototype one in a week. Two years ago, this would have required a funded startup. Today, seven high school students can prove it works with one dining hall and a QR code.

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## Solution

EcoPlate is a campus program that turns end-of-day surplus into **Rescue Boxes**.

**How it works (pilot version):**

1. **Dining staff packs and labels boxes** at closing using their normal food safety process. EcoPlate does not handle food.
2. EcoPlate posts a “drop” for that night: how many boxes are available, the pickup location, and the **60-90-minute pickup window**.
3. Students reserve a box using a **QR code (or app)** and receive a pickup code.
4. At pickup, staff confirm the code and hand the box to the student. If a student does not show up, the box can be redirected to campus-approved donation or disposal, or released back to the app for other students to claim during the remaining pickup window.

**Why students use it:** The food is branded “fresh food (freshly) rescued,” not leftovers. It feels normal, smart, and sustainable.

**Why dining services can approve it:** Dining stays in control of food handling and safety. EcoPlate adds the reservation flow, pickup organization, and reporting.

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## Wedge (your simple advantage)

**On-campus + dining-partnered + stigma-free.**

Other options are off-campus, donation-based, or informal. EcoPlate is built to work inside the campus dining environment and feel normal for students.

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## Moat (your long-term advantage)

Your “wedge” helps you start. Your “moat” helps you stay.

- **Partnership stickiness:** Once Dining runs EcoPlate smoothly, they do not want to rip it out and retrain staff.
  - **Campus playbook:** One proven, repeatable operating manual: packaging rules, pickup flow, no-show rules, signage, messaging.
  - **Data advantage (your mentor’s AI idea, integrated correctly):** EcoPlate builds a dataset of drops, pickup rates, and times. That lets you add **EcoPlate Forecast**, a forecasting feature that predicts demand and likely surplus so dining can pack the right number of boxes and reduce overproduction over time. Start simple (rules + averages), then improve with machine learning once you have data. Forecast v0 (rules-based) launches with the pilot using simple averages. Forecast v1 (ML-assisted) targets semester two, once we have 60+ days of drop data.
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## ICP (Ideal Customer Profile)

**Student ICP (who uses it):**

- Lives on or near campus
- Feels food cost pressure or lacks time to cook
- Will walk 5 to 15 minutes for a \$3 to \$5 meal
- Cares about convenience and does not want stigma.
- Students WITH meal plans use EcoPlate for late-night meals after dining closes.
- Students WITHOUT meal plans use it as a primary affordable option.

**Dining partner ICP (who must approve pilot):**

- One dining location with regular end-of-day surplus
  - A manager open to a small controlled pilot
  - Campus has sustainability goals and wants measurable results
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## Business model (pricing options included)

**Student plans (locked and judge-safe)**

- **\$15 per month:** up to 7 Rescue Credits per month
- **\$30 per month:** up to 15 Rescue Credits per month + early access (reserve first)

- Credits redeem when drops are available.
- Unused credits roll for **30 days**.

## **Fairness policy (prevents the “I got scammed” moment)**

If a subscriber redeems **less than 50%** of their credits for **two months in a row** because supply is low, they can **auto-downgrade** the next month. Simple and fair.

## **Daily cap (pilot logistics)**

Start with a cap you can actually fulfill: **30 to 50 Rescue Boxes per location per day**.

Pilot month one starts at 30 boxes per day maximum. If the pickup rate exceeds 85% for two consecutive weeks, increase the cap by 10 boxes per day.

## **B2B revenue (optional in the pitch, strong in Q and A)**

EcoPlate can charge Dining Services for:

- Sustainability reporting and dashboards
  - Forecasting feature (EcoPlate Forecast) as it matures
- Pricing later can be “per location per month” or “per box processed.” Keep it simple until you have pilot proof.
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## **Business Model Canvas (filled, not overfilled)**

### **Key Partnerships**

- Campus Dining Services (or dining vendor operator)
- Campus sustainability office
- Campus environmental health and safety (process approval)
- Packaging supplier (containers, labels)
- Campus marketing partners (student orgs, resident advisors)

### **Key Activities**

- Run nightly drops (post availability, manage reservations)
- Pickup flow management (codes, no-show rules)
- Student acquisition (campus marketing)
- Basic reporting (boxes claimed, pickup rate, food diverted)
- Feedback and iteration

## **Key Resources**

- Reservation system (web app + QR)
- Brand and messaging (“freshly rescued”)
- Dining partner relationship and SOP (standard operating process)
- Data from drops and redemptions (for forecasting)

## **Value Propositions**

- Students: \$3 to \$5 meals, convenient, stigma-free
- Dining: reduce waste, smoother close, measurable impact
- Campus: visible sustainability action students like

## **Customer Relationships**

- Self-serve reservations (QR)
- Membership plans
- Quick feedback loop after pickup (one-tap rating)

## **Channels**

- QR posters at dining hall exits
- Dorm and student center flyers
- Student org social media
- Sustainability office endorsement
- Referral rewards

## **Customer Segments**

- Primary: budget-sensitive college students
- Secondary: dining services administrators and operators
- Future: sponsors funding “Rescue Credits” for student support

## **Cost Structure**

- Containers and labels
- Minimal software hosting and tools
- Marketing materials
- Insurance and compliance support (as required by campus)

## **Revenue Streams**

- Student memberships: \$15 and \$30 per month
- Optional pay-per-box for non-members (later)

**Sponsored Credits:** Campus organizations, alumni donors, or corporate sponsors can purchase Rescue Credits in bulk and distribute them to students in need. This creates a gifting layer that turns EcoPlate into both a marketplace and a support channel without adding stigma, because the pickup experience is identical for paid and sponsored credits.

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## Competitor analysis and differentiation (judge-simple)

### Competitor categories

1. **Off-campus surplus apps (example: Too Good To Go)**  
Good for restaurants and stores. Usually not built around campus dining operations and student pickup windows.
2. **Food donation and pantry programs (many campuses)**  
Helpful but often inconsistent and can carry stigma.
3. **Nonprofit campus food recovery groups (example: Food Recovery Network)**  
Strong mission, but often volunteer-run and not designed as a consistent student purchase experience.
4. **Meal swipe donation programs (example: Swipe Out Hunger)**  
Great for support, but it is not a system for end-of-day prepared food recovery and resale.
5. **Campus mobile ordering platforms (example: Grubhub Campus, Transact)** These serve regular-priced meals during operating hours. They do not address surplus or end-of-day recovery.

### EcoPlate differentiation

- Built for **inside-campus dining**
  - **Dining-operated food handling** for credibility and safety
  - “Freshly rescued” brand makes it normal, not charity
  - Membership credits create predictable demand without promising guaranteed inventory
  - Roadmap includes forecasting to reduce waste upstream
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## Product-market fit (how you prove you are not just “a nice idea”)

You have product-market fit when:

- Students keep coming back (not just trying once)
- Dining wants to expand to another location

- You can predict supply and demand well enough to run drops smoothly

#### **Early PMF signals to aim for:**

- 25%+ of survey respondents join a waitlist (email opt-in)
  - 10%+ of waitlist converts to paid membership for the pilot
  - 70%+ monthly member retention after the first month
  - Dining agrees to extend pilot or add a second pickup day
  - Weekly active redemption rate above 50% (meaning more than half of active members redeem at least one credit per week).
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## **Traction (honest and competition-friendly)**

#### **Current traction (what you can truthfully say now):**

- Team aligned on one model, one script, one pricing system
- Practice pitch recorded and refined
- Survey and pilot workflow designed

#### **Near-term traction targets (what wins TYE):**

- 30 student interviews with quotes
  - 200+ survey responses with clear pricing willingness
  - Working prototype demo (QR reserve, pickup code, redemption)
  - One meeting scheduled with a dining decision-maker at a UCI dining hall.
  - One pilot proposal document delivered.
  - Instagram or landing page with waitlist signup live and collecting emails.
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## **Key proofs and metrics to collect (what judges want to see)**

### **Proofs**

- **Demand proof:** students will reserve and pick up
- **Operational proof:** dining can run it without chaos
- **Safety proof:** dining-operated handling and clean workflow
- **Impact proof:** food diverted and satisfaction improvement

### **Metrics (keep these as your pilot scoreboard)**

1. **Pickup rate:** % of reserved boxes actually picked up
2. **Student satisfaction:** quick 1 to 5 rating after pickup
3. **Food diverted:** boxes and estimated pounds diverted from disposal

Optional add-ons (nice to have):

- No-show rate
  - Time per box to pack and label
  - Membership conversion rate
  - Forecast accuracy (once you add prediction)
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## Survey questions (final, non-leading)

1. What year are you? Freshman / Sophomore / Junior / Senior / Grad
  2. Do you currently have a meal plan? Yes / No / Used to
  3. In the last 2 weeks, how many meals did you skip? 0 / 1–2 / 3–5 / 6+
  4. What is the main reason? cost / time / long lines / location / options / other
  5. If EcoPlate launched at your campus this quarter, how likely are you to try a Rescue Box in the first month? Definitely / Probably / Not sure / Probably not
  6. If you selected 'Definitely' or 'Probably,' which plan sounds right for you? \$15/month (up to 7 boxes) / \$30/month (up to 15 boxes + early access) / I'd rather pay per box / Not sure yet.
  7. What is the max you would pay per Rescue Box? \$2 / \$3 / \$4 / \$5 / \$6+
  8. How far would you walk from your dorm or usual campus location for a \$4 Rescue Box? 0–5 / 6–10 / 11–15 / 16+ minutes
  9. Best pickup time: 4–5 / 5–6 / 6–7 / 7–8 / late
  10. Would you still use it if friends saw you picking it up? Yes / Maybe / No
  11. Want to be part of the first pilot group? email + checkbox "I want to be part of the first pilot group."
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## Roles for a 7-person team

1. **CEO and Pitch Lead:** owns story, deck, delivery, and judges Q and A. Delivers final pitch deck and leads all judge interactions.
2. **Partnerships Lead:** outreach and meetings with the Dining and Sustainability office. Delivers one signed or verbal pilot agreement with a dining location
3. **Ops and Safety Lead:** pilot workflow, no-show rules, pickup plan, SOP writing. Delivers written SOP for nightly drop and pickup flow.
4. **Product Lead:** owns user flow and MVP feature decisions. Delivers user flow and feature spec for MVP.

5. **Tech Lead:** builds QR reservation MVP and admin drop tool. Delivers working QR reservation prototype.
  6. **Design and Brand Lead:** “freshly rescued” identity, slide visuals, signage, UI design. Delivers brand kit (logo, signage templates, slide visuals)
  7. **Finance and Analytics Lead:** pricing, fairness policy, unit economics, metrics dashboard. Delivers unit economics model and survey results analysis
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## **Web or app MVP (Design Thinking based, with your mentor's AI ideas included)**

Design thinking is a loop: **Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test**. The slides also remind you that you are not the user and you should watch and listen, ask about the last time they struggled, and ask “why” multiple times to find the real reason. Use interviews, observation, and journey mapping to understand behavior and context.

### **MVP goal**

The MVP is no perfect app. It is a proof machine that shows:

- Students will reserve and pick up
- Dining can run it in a short window
- The experience feels normal and easy

### **MVP principle: first-time user experience**

The TYE slides say reduce friction, learn by doing, and celebrate wins, because every extra tap increases drop-off and users need fast “time to value”. They also highlight “try before you buy,” where you show value first and delay account creation until after the first successful use.

### **MVP scope (student side)**

Keep it extremely simple:

- Scan QR
- See tonight’s drop (location, window, price, boxes left)
- Tap “Reserve”
- Get pickup code
- One-tap rating after pickup

No account required until after the first reservation. After a student's first successful pickup, they're prompted to create an account to track credits, get notifications for future drops, and join a membership plan. The prompt says: 'You just rescued your first box. Want to make it a habit?' with a one-tap signup. That is "try before you buy."

## MVP scope (dining/admin side)

- Create a drop: number of boxes, pickup window, location
- Mark "picked up" by code entry or simple scan
- See a mini dashboard: boxes posted, boxes picked up, pickup rate

## AI integration (done correctly)

Do not claim you have ML integrations on day one. Instead:

- **EcoPlate Forecast v0:** simple rules-based prediction using past drop data to suggest how many boxes to pack tomorrow.
- **EcoPlate Forecast v1:** after you collect enough data, upgrade to machine learning that improves prediction over time.

This shows "we understand the future" without pretending you already built it.

## Testing plan (non-negotiable)

The slides say testing is education, not validation. Give users the prototype and watch where they tap and where they quit. Ask "what were you expecting?" and iterate quickly, ideally within 24 hours. They also emphasize failing fast with rough prototypes and polishing later.

Run tests with **5 to 8 representative users** and use task-based scripts, then observe and document confusion points.

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## Prompt to generate your MVP (copy and paste)

You are a product designer and UX writer. Design a mobile-first web app MVP for "EcoPlate."

Goal:

Students reserve an end-of-day "Rescue Box" in under 10 seconds after scanning a QR code.

Constraints:

- No account required before the first reservation (try before you buy).
- Reduce friction: minimal taps, big buttons, clear labels.
- The pick-up window is 60-90 minutes.
- Include a friendly "freshly rescued" tone that avoids stigma.

- Include a simple admin flow for dining staff to create a nightly drop and redeem pickup codes.
- Include a one-tap post-pickup satisfaction rating.

Deliverables:

- 1) A user flow diagram (student and admin).
- 2) A list of 6 to 8 screens with names, purpose, and key UI elements.
- 3) Draft microcopy of main buttons and messages.
- 4) A simple data model (drop, reservation, redemption).
- 5) A short usability test script with 3 tasks and 5 interview questions.

MVP demo for competition: Even before the web app is fully built, the team can demo the flow live using a clickable Figma prototype or a simple HTML page. The demo should show: (1) scanning a QR code, (2) seeing tonight's drop, (3) reserving a box, (4) receiving a pickup code. A 30-second live demo during Q&A is more convincing than any slide.

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## **90-second elevator pitch script (v0.2)**

Every night on college campuses, prepared dining hall food gets thrown away at closing. That same night, students skip meals because food is too expensive or inconvenient. Same campus. Same day.

EcoPlate turns end-of-day surplus into Rescue Boxes students are proud to carry. Dining staff pack and label boxes under their normal food safety process. Students reserve through a QR code or app and pick up during a 60 to 90-minute evening window on campus.

And because we brand it “freshly rescued” instead of leftovers, students treat it like a smart move, not a last resort.

Our model is simple: \$15 per month for up to 7 Rescue Credits per month, or \$30 per month for up to 15 credits per month with early access. That makes each box about \$3 to \$5, and students save real money. Dining services get measurable waste reduction they can report to administration, without changing how the kitchen operates.

We are launching a pilot at one dining location this fall. One campus. One dining hall. One partner to prove this works. That is all we need.

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## **Q&A section (judge-proof answers)**

During Q&A, each team member answers questions in their domain. If a judge asks about pricing, Finance Lead answers. If a judge asks about the dining partnership, Partnerships Lead answers. The CEO redirects but does not answer everything. This shows the team is real, not one person carrying six titles.

### **Q: Is this safe?**

A: Dining staff pack and label under their existing food safety process. EcoPlate does not handle food. We only handle reservations and pickup codes.

### **Q: What if there is not enough surplus to fulfill subscriptions?**

A: We use credits, not guaranteed meals. Credits redeem when drops are available. We cap memberships based on supply and have a fairness policy so students can downgrade if supply stays low.

### **Q: Why would Dining Services agree to this?**

A: It reduces waste, improves student satisfaction, and creates simple reporting they can share with administration. The workflow change is small and controlled.

### **Q: How is this different from Too Good To Go?**

A: Too Good To Go is mostly off-campus restaurants and stores. EcoPlate is built for campus dining operations and student schedules, with on-campus pickup windows.

### **Q: What if students reserve and do not show up?**

A: We track no-shows. Credits can be returned only if cancelled before the window. Repeat no-shows lose early access. Dining can redirect unclaimed boxes.

### **Q: How do you scale beyond one campus?**

A: The system is repeatable. One SOP, one QR flow, one dashboard. Once you have data, EcoPlate Forecast improves planning and makes the program more reliable.

**Q: What happens when you graduate?**

A: The system is designed to be simple to hand off. Dining benefits from the reporting and waste reduction, so they have incentive to keep it running.

**Q: What about food allergies or dietary restrictions?**

A: Rescue Boxes contain whatever surplus is available that night, so contents vary. We label all boxes with ingredients and common allergens based on dining hall records. Students with severe allergies can check contents before reserving. We're clear that this is surplus, not custom meals, and students make informed choices.

**Q: What's your tech stack and how much does the app cost to build?**

A: The MVP is a mobile-first web app, not a native app, so there's no App Store approval needed. We can build and host it for under \$50 per month using standard tools. The QR code links to a simple reservation page. We're not building complex technology. We're building a simple workflow that works.

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## Risks and Mitigations

**Risk 1:** Dining says no to the pilot. **Mitigation:** Start with sustainability office intro, bring survey data showing student demand, propose a 2-week trial with zero commitment.

**Risk 2:** Low student adoption. **Mitigation:** Cap memberships low, use waitlist to create scarcity, launch with campus org partnerships for built-in audience.

**Risk 3:** Inconsistent surplus supply. **Mitigation:** Credits not guaranteed meals, fairness policy, start with dining locations known for high surplus.

**Risk 4:** Food safety incident. **Mitigation:** Eco Plate never touches food. Dining follows existing protocols. Liability coverage in place.

**Risk 5:** Tech fails on launch night (QR system goes down, codes don't work). **Mitigation:** Have a paper backup list. Print reservation names and pickup codes as a fallback. The pilot runs even if the tech breaks. This is a process first, software second.