

CAPSTONE REFLECTION

For my Honors Capstone project I created a business model for a plant-based food truck called Veggie Wonderland. To create this business model, I used the lean launchpad methodology, which primarily focuses on problem solving, and worked through the IMPACT 307 business model. However, the most important thing I did throughout this project was to go out and talk to potential customers to get feedback on every aspect of my business model in order to make it as realistic and successful as possible.

My reason for making this business model was that as someone who eats plant-based it can be difficult to find good, healthy, nutritious food options when going out in Laramie. This is primarily because there are no completely plant-based restaurants or food trucks and the places that serve plant-based options are often not as healthy or nutritious as the other options. And this is something I found that more people are struggling with in Laramie, like for example those with dairy or gluten intolerances. And after talking to potential customers, I found that it is generally difficult to find good, culturally varied, healthy food options in Laramie. And this is the problem I wanted to address with this project. Additionally, I also wanted to address the problem of the large amounts of non-recyclable packaging associated with the food industry. Climate change is a real problem affecting us all today, and therefore I want my business to be as environmentally conscious, sustainable, and responsible as possible.

Based on background research and conversations with potential customers, my product for this business model is a healthy, completely plant-based, environmentally conscious food truck based in Laramie, with the potential of traveling outside the city and the state of Wyoming. My food truck will focus on serving fast, culturally varied, and healthy food that gives options to everyone who struggles with finding healthy, varied, plant-based,

or gluten/dairy free options. Having a food truck instead of a restaurant affords me the opportunity and mobility to enter the food service industry with less associated costs and to meet my customers where they are. The mobility of a food truck also gives me the opportunity to have several customer bases both in Laramie, Wyoming, and outside the state. Furthermore, because of the large amounts of non-recyclable packaging usually associated with the food and restaurant industry I also want to focus on serving food in compostable packaging with the option of composting it by the food truck, resulting in the food truck being as zero waste and sustainable as possible.

However, I encountered several challenges throughout the creation of this business model, the biggest being that I did not have any experience with creating business models. I do not have a background in business, so I had to use a lot of time to go through the different steps and elements that go into creating a business model. Luckily, I worked with two mentors, Fred Schmechel and Meghan Kerley, that guided me through every step of the process and gave me great tools that were very helpful. Another main challenge I faced was the fact that in the beginning I did not have a “problem”, meaning that I did not know the purpose of the food truck, why it should exist, and what problems it can solve for my customers. To solve this problem, I used a lot of time talking to potential customers to find out what they felt was lacking in the food service industry in Laramie in general. I found that a lot of people I talked to wanted more healthy options that were filling and culturally varied, which led me down the path of focusing more on serving healthy, culturally varied food rather than focusing on the food being plant-based, because that would restrict the amount of people, I could solve problems for.

However, with this came the challenge of establishing who my customers would be. Initially I wanted to focus on serving food to students, because I am a student myself and find that there is a lack of healthy, culturally varied, and plant-based food options served at

Washakie dining center and the union, where most students eat. However, the problem with this is that students also, in addition to not always having access to healthy foods, lack the finances and flexible budget to eat at a food truck, making it difficult to make a profit on a food truck directed towards the students. I tried to work around this by talking to Residence Dining to see if my truck could take Dining Dollars, but that was not possible. I still included the students as one of my customer segments, but it was not my main segment. Rather my main segment is adults with a flexible budget that would be motivated to go to a food truck because of the unique food offerings, but also because of its atmosphere, popularity, or reputation. And this segment actually constitutes about 60-65% of the population of Laramie. Furthermore, because I wanted to travel outside the city and state in order to reach other customers, I added a customer segment that is adults going to events, who would be motivated to go to my food truck if the food was good, convenient, and fast. And depending on the event, these people might be more focused on getting something plant-based or something that is served in compostable packaging. As you can see, a running theme throughout the customer segments is the focus on what motivates them. I learned that to properly identify a customer segment you do not only need the general overview of who they are, but what would motivate them to go to a food truck, or specifically my food truck.

When I started this project, I really wanted to address the problem of food scarcity, which is a huge problem, not just among the students at the university, but the Laramie community in general. However, as my mentors pointed out, a food truck cannot really solve that problem. This led me to include a collaboration with the Food Share Pantry in my project, making Food Share Pantry visitors my fourth customer segment. Though it is in my opinion the bare minimum I could do, I felt it was important to include something that addresses this issue. So, I would collaborate with the Food Share Pantry to give their visitors,

which are students that often do not have access to healthy, nutritious, culturally varied foods, a coupon that they could use at my food truck.

Another major challenge I faced was not being able to reach other food trucks to ask them questions about the food truck business or food service industry in general. I throughout my work on this project reached out to several food trucks, both in Laramie, Wyoming, and even Colorado, to attempt to get some tips and information about the reality of owning and operating a food truck. However, I barely got any responses, leading me to have to figure out everything about food trucks myself, which made the process a lot more difficult.

Though I encountered many challenges and problems throughout the process of making my business model I am pleased with the final product, and I know I have learned a lot from making this project. I have been interested in starting a food truck for a while because of my love for food and the lack of plant-based options. Thus, after this project I now feel confident in taking on the challenge of actually starting a food truck and making a positive difference in my community. This project has been amazing and challenging and I am now left with many tools, knowledge, and skills that are based in innovation and problem solving that I think will be very useful, not just in the creation of a similar project or a food truck, but also generally going forward in life.