Between 30 and 40 percent of all the food that could be eaten in the United States is wasted. It takes a while for that to sink in. When it does, ethical people reach for solutions.

Pittsburgh is blessed to have such people. But their solutions are operating within a broken system. Ethical business practices would go a long way toward fixing it.

A new documentary coming out of the business school at the University of Pittsburgh makes a case for market-driven solutions that are socially responsible. Called “Rescuing Abundance,” the 15-minute film will premiere at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Frick Fine Arts Auditorium, 650 Schenley Drive, Oakland. It is free and open to the public. A discussion will follow.

“Rescuing Abundance” resulted from a project initiated by students in the certificate program of the David Berg Center for Ethics and Leadership in the College of Business Administration. From their research, they created an index to better define the term “food desert.”

The index measures the abundance, diversity, affordability and quality of food resources in neighborhoods and people’s access to these resources.

“Waste not” and “want not” are the two puzzle pieces here, and they’re big. You may not waste at home, but that doesn’t feed a hungry person. You can take food you might waste to a food pantry, but this is a problem of scale that needs a systemwide solution.

Joe Bute, managing partner of Hollymead Capital, described in the film the concept of a food infrastructure and the need for “affordable logistics for moving food,” from production to distribution to sales.

He said a solely local infrastructure is possible, considering the amount of arable land and this region’s population.

“We could feed ourselves if we had to — if we care about resilience. Hunger and food insecurity have an impact on business,” he said.

Jamie Moore, director of sustainability and sourcing for the Eat ‘N Park Hospitality Group, is filmed saying the future may see “an aggregating of producers to keep the small farmer alive.”

Waste results in large part from what Audrey Murrell, associate dean and professor of Business Administration and director of the Berg Center, called “leakages in the supply chain.” One message to future business leaders is the necessity of protecting the supply chain, she said. This makes solid economic sense.
Meanwhile, organizations such as 412 Food Rescue try to plug the leaks, moving the food themselves. Volunteers pick food up — including produce that grocery stores deem unsalable and leftovers from caterers — and deliver it to churches, public housing complexes and community centers for the needy public.

Students in a Pitt chapter of the Food Recovery Network similarly rescue food from dining halls on campus and deliver it to a food pantry on campus.

Penn’s Corner is a collaboration of small farmers in the area who take orders for delivery to specific community locations, creating scale they would not have working alone. It is a balance between wholesale and retail, said Neil Stauffer, Penn’s Corner’s general manager, giving farmers “access to markets they might not have.”

Penn’s Corner, of which I am a regular customer, has a succinct model. It allows for a direct transaction without a middleman, who is responsible for much waste after food leaves a farm. The farmers get an aggregate of customers without having to drive to the city.

“Rescuing Abundance” is intended to raise consciousness, to recognize problem-solvers and to spur more people to action.

“We want to have an impact beyond the benefit to students,” Ms. Murrell said.

She said she hopes that “Rescuing Abundance” leads to partnerships “between business, nonprofits, government, colleges and volunteers to drive socially responsible food practices and policies.”

The film is entered in six documentary competitions, and the Berg Center is compiling case studies to be packaged with the film for other colleges and universities to use, she said.

The heart of the solution is for society to be better stewards of its resources, she said.

“We should not waste,” she said. “This is not out of anybody’s reach. That there are solutions is a big deal. And you can find yourself in them.”

People who want to take action in their communities may contact the Berg Center for more information at 412-624-4054.

_Diana Nelson Jones: djones@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1626. Twitter@dnelson-jones._