

Board gets update on food bank

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Changes in who controls Second Harvest Food Bank in Watsonville are "happening very rapidly," the manager of the food bank told Santa Cruz County supervisors this morning.

Manager Willy Elliott-McCrea said an interim board of directors met Friday and yesterday and plans to switch control of the food bank by Oct. 1. The food bank provides food to the needy in Santa Cruz, San Benito and parts of Monterey County.

Food and Nutrition Services, which has operated the food bank for nearly 20 years, announced last week it will relinquish control rather than continue a struggle with Second Harvest's headquarters in Chicago.

Second Harvest requires its member food banks to have an independent board of directors. When Food and Nutrition ran it, decisions were made by Food and Nutrition's directors, who also oversee a half-dozen other social service programs. Food and Nutrition, a non-profit agency, is based in Aptos.

Food and Nutrition's decision to stop operating the food bank came after a new group, Food Bank Services, was formed this year. The new group said it could run the food bank at lower cost than Food and Nutrition was doing.

Supervisors offered the services of the county staff to assist in the change of power, but said they don't want to force themselves on the food bank.

Supervisor Gary Patton said it would cause "bad blood" for the county to impose itself. "We're happy to make ourselves available," he said.

A letter delivered to supervisors this morning expressed concern about how much control Food and Nutrition is willing to give up.

The letter, signed by representatives of 7 "food pantries" that serve food to the poor provided by the food bank, said, "it distresses us greatly that the current transition team has representation from the Food and Nutrition Board of Directors but not Food Bank Services."

Supervisor Ray Belgard said he believes Food Bank Services should be represented.

Elliott-McCrea, who will continue to manage the food bank, said he expects Food Bank Services will be represented on the permanent board.

"I'm optimistic we can work out" disagreements, said Elliott-McCrea, who said food distribution is continuing as usual.