

CF FEDERAL CUTS MEAN SMALLER FOOD BOXES, And What Second Harvest Food Bank Operators Are Doing To Change the Future

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Food Banks

The federal government manages most of the food assistance programs available to qualifying citizens. Aside from TEFAP, 12 other anti-hunger programs are run by the USDA, including WIC, school lunches and food stamps, at a total cost of \$40 billion a year.

The Clinton Administration decided the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) was a duplicated program which should be curtailed. Willy McCrea, the executive director of the Second Harvest Food Bank, realizes there are many programs which are dependent on government assistance, but feels food assistance shouldn't be held to the vagaries of bureaucratic decision-making.

TEFAP supporters say food assistance is never a place to cut because it has a direct and dire impact on the impoverished. Many people have no available alternatives to federal food assistance, and when food banks can't meet the demand, people

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end up with less food to eat.

"It's a question of whether you've got 20 pounds or 30 pounds of non-perishables in your holiday food box," McCrea said. "It really makes a huge difference."

Preparing for Tough Times Ahead

Winter months often harken an increase in seasonal unemployment. In the South County, agricultural trades slow considerably after the late summer and autumn harvests are over. In the North County, tourism also drops off.

What the food banks collect during the holiday times will hopefully meet the emergency needs throughout the rest of the winter and maybe supply most recipients up through spring.

McCrea mentioned that the foods most needed this season are: soups and stews, tuna and other canned meats, peanut butter, cereal, and rice and beans.

Second Harvest Food Bank serving Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties, the unedited

185 other food banks in the national network. Although it depends heavily on the national network for grocery manufacturer donations, receiving as much as one million pounds of non-perishable donations annually, Second Harvest Food Bank maintains its status as a local independent non-profit organization.

The food bank's operational budget is about \$645,000 annually. They have eight full-time staff and six part-time staff, and they utilize as many as 300 volunteers each month.

The breakdown of the budget shows 26 percent of their funding coming from community contributions; 44 percent through government contracts for service; and 31 percent from member agencies.

As to where it's spent, the food distribution clearing house eats up 57 percent of the budget; federal commodities accounts for 19 percent; the food hotline is 5 percent, as is the volunteers-in-need program; and administration and fundraising account for 14 percent.

Only 10 years ago, McCrea said that Second Harvest handled the direct distribution of food donations. They had two major distribution outlets, but the

demand for food outgrew the support structure in place to contain it.

"We changed our mission about six years ago. It used to be feeding people," McCrea said. "Now it's involving the community in the alleviation of hunger."

McCrea believes this redefinition is a radical change in mission. In the last 15 years, reductions in various social service programs have made hunger in the United States an ironic reality once again, he said.

Collectively through 110 local agencies like shelters and neighborhood pantries that Second Harvest serves, about 4,500 holiday food boxes will be distributed to families this season. Each month the program reaches 36,000 people covering all of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties and including the Pajaro Valley. About 4.5 million pounds of food go through the warehouse each year.

In addition to distributing foodstuffs to neighborhood pantries, soup kitchens, shelters and other similar programs, Second Harvest also serves longer term programs like child care, drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs and senior meals programs.

They distribute their food stocks to the various agencies based on the needs of the groups they are serving.

In the next week, Second Harvest will be kicking off a food drive with the county employees. Second Harvest volunteers have also been working with major computer employers in the area and they have put food collection barrels in all the schools.

"Our big plan is to try to take advantage of this time when people are thinking about other folks, and they collect food to help us get through the winter months," McCrea said. □

WAYS TO DONATE to The Second Harvest Food Bank

Make an annual pledge. Send your donation once a year, quarterly, monthly, weekly, or any way that suits you.

Skip-A-Lunch once a week and donate the savings.

"Go out to dinner" but stay home once a month, and donate the savings.

Keep a piggybank on the kitchen table and drop in a quarter for each meal.

Have your church or service club members make a combined contribution.

Organize your church group or service club to hold a bake sale or raffle.

Make a contribution in the name of a friend or family in honor of weddings, anniversaries, birthdays and bequests.

Have your family donate in honor of your birthday, wedding, etc.

Pledge a percentage of sales, either an item or time period.

Pledge a percentage of your paycheck.

Organize your work place/co-workers to each pledge \$1 or more every month.

Have your employer match a joint-employee contribution.

Share your good fortune, inheritance, lotto, etc.

Organize a special event, BBQ, concert or black & white ball, with the proceeds being donated.

Adopt a Food Bank program, Volunteers in Need, Community Food Hotline, Food Distribution Center.

Donate your proceeds from a yard or garage sale.

Join the "Human Race," and name the Food Bank as recipient.

Donate the money from your sports pools, no matter who wins.

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