



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Forum to Help Boost Local Food Aid, Economic Benefits

Watsonville, CA—Like other parts of the country, the Central Coast has poverty and social challenges, but when it comes to hunger, it stands out from most other places in one key way: it's leaving many more resources that could relieve hunger sitting on the table.

That's the backdrop for the **CalFresh Forum, taking place on Friday, May 12th from 8am-2pm at the Watsonville Civic Plaza**. Organized by Second Harvest Food Bank and Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, the forum will feature experts, experienced outreach workers, community supporters, and elected officials from the tri-county area (Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey counties) sharing how CalFresh fights hunger and malnutrition locally and helping community organizations increase participation in this critical program. The event is not intended for the general public but media are encouraged to attend.

CalFresh helps low-income households meet their food and nutrition needs and is a key piece of the social safety net. Yet California has one of the lowest participation rates in SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the federal program). And while Santa Cruz County has increased its outreach efforts in recent years, it has one of the lowest rates of CalFresh participation. About 45,000 county residents qualify, yet only 57% of them (25,530 individuals) participate in the program (4th quarter, 2016). Statewide, about 67% of eligible people are enrolled. Reasons range from inadequate awareness to difficulty signing up or renewing, issues of social stigma or pride, and more.

There are numerous reasons **food security and health are important to overall community health**—hungry children can't learn, hungry adults can't work, and the harmful social effects ripple outwards. Plus, when residents do not claim the food benefits they are entitled to under the program, the funds do not revert to county or state budgets—they remain unclaimed. So not only do people in need miss out on needed food and nutrition, but the county misses out on the resulting economic benefits, which are large.

According to Joel Campos, Second Harvest's Director of Community Outreach, "When CalFresh recipients purchase food in markets and grocery stores, it begins a chain reaction of economic activity, from grocers to farmers, distributors, workers, vendors, and more. **If everyone who is qualified (but not currently enrolled) signed up for CalFresh, Santa Cruz County would enjoy an extra estimated \$50 million in economic benefits.**" The tri-county area together is leaving \$61.3 million on the table annually, which spent locally would generate about \$110 million in economic stimulus for the Central Coast.

Kim McCoy-Wade from the California Department of Social Services will present the keynote speech, State Senator Bill Monning is Featured Speaker, and Jessica Bartholow, Policy Advocate at the Western Center on Law & Poverty, will present the Changing Immigration Climate. Link to the full lineup is below. Other local officials are also expected to attend.

For more information please visit

www.thefoodbank.org/need-food/calfresh3 (general info)

[Link to agenda](#)

[SC County Human Services Dept--CalFresh.](#)

About Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County

Founded in 1972, Second Harvest Food Bank was the first food bank in California and the second in the nation. Its mission is to end hunger and malnutrition by educating and involving the community. Its network of 200 local agencies and programs feeds 55,000 people in Santa Cruz County every month. For every dollar donated, it provides four healthy meals. Second Harvest has a four-star rating from Charity Navigator in recognition of its effective stewardship. "Together we fight hunger all year long."

www.thefoodbank.org

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