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## Guest Commentary | Second Harvest Food Drive: Feeding hope and nourishing community



By SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL |  
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By Erica Padilla-Chavez, Cindy Larive, and Susan True

Shelly and Marty Hernandez go big on their annual Holiday Open House. Shelly, who has a passion for cooking, starts prepping weeks ahead. Over the years, the Hernandez open house has raised tens of thousands of meals for the community because it's also a benefit for Second Harvest Food Bank's Holiday Food & Fund Drive. The Hernandez family encourages guests to bring in both food and monetary donations along with their holiday spirit. "I want to feed people in my home and throughout the community," says Shelly.

This year, the Hernandez's efforts are even more appreciated as the reality of inflation hits our wallets every time we go to the grocery store. Many local people and families who were already working hard to recover from the health and economic challenges of the pandemic are continuing to struggle to make ends meet, especially with the rising cost of food.

Right now, one in three residents is food insecure in Santa Cruz County. That means 75,000 people each month – children, seniors, veterans, homeless, working folks, and more – are missing meals, running out of groceries, or not having enough money to purchase food when they need it. For some, food insecurity is temporary during a tough time. For others, it's a chronic result of poverty and can lead to a host of physical and mental health problems in both children and adults including diabetes, hypertension and depression.

Luckily, there is a trusted way to help our neighbors make it through tough times. By giving to Second Harvest Food Bank during the Holiday Food & Fund Drive, we can make sure no one goes hungry in Santa Cruz County. One hundred percent of the funds raised during the drive go to providing food to distribute to 150 food pantries, schools, soup kitchens, group homes, youth centers and Second Harvest program sites throughout the county. Second Harvest can provide four healthy meals for

every \$1 donated thanks to our extensive relationships with farmers, retailers and food bank networks, and our dedicated volunteers. We source over 11 million pounds of food each year from farms, grocery stores, food manufacturers, distributors and individuals, and much of the food we distribute is fresh produce, making Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County one of the healthiest food banks in the nation.

This year, UCSC and the Community Foundation are proud to team up to lead the effort to raise enough money to serve 5 million meals. During the Holiday Food & Fund Drive, businesses, organizations, religious institutions, schools and even neighborhoods band together to form teams. Shelly and Marty, for example, are part of the food drive team at Twin Lakes Church in Aptos.

The Holiday Food & Fund drive runs from Nov. 10 through Jan. 15. The easiest and most direct way to help is to donate through the Second Harvest website at [www.thefoodbank.org](http://www.thefoodbank.org). During the drive, you'll also see over 150 big blue barrels at grocery stores, and businesses across the county. When you shop you can pick up some extra high-protein foods like peanut butter and canned tuna or cans of fruit, vegetables, and soup and drop them in the bins on your way out of the store. Or, if you are shopping at a Raley's/Nob Hill or Safeway in the county, check to see if you can add a donation to your final bill.

For the Hernandez family, their open house and contributions to the Holiday Food and Fund Drive are a joyous way to help make sure no one goes hungry in Santa Cruz County. Marty says simply, "It's neighbors helping neighbors. That's what we do."

We hope you can join us in feeding hope in Santa Cruz County, as we nourish our community, together.

*Erica Padilla-Chavez is the CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County. Susan True and Cindy Larive are co-chairs of the Second Harvest Food & Fund Drive. Susan is the CEO of Community Foundation Santa Cruz County and Cindy is the Chancellor of UC Santa Cruz.*