



Watsonville City Manager Rene Mendez talks of the importance of feeding the needy Friday at the kickoff of the Second Harvest Food Bank's Holiday Food and Fund Drive at Cabrillo College in Aptos. Photo: Tarmo Hannula/The Pajaronian

Featured News **Local News**

Second Harvest kicks off holiday food drive

By: TODD GUILD 📅 November 6, 2023

It is perhaps one of the greatest ironies within the Santa Cruz County community that many of the people who labor in the vast agricultural fields of the Pajaro Valley cannot afford the food they harvest.

According to the County of Santa Cruz, one in 10 people – more than 26,000 – are considered “food insecure.”

Rising costs at the grocery store, at the gas pump and rent worsens the problem.

“People are being crippled by the cost of food,” said Susan True, CEO of Community Foundation Santa Cruz County.

To help ease this problem, Second Harvest Food Bank has since its inception in 1972 gathered and distributed food – and the resources to purchase food – to the people who need it.

The organization on Friday kicked off its annual Holiday Food and Fund Drive with a rally at Cabrillo College, with the goal of raising 4.5 million meals.

But even as the crowd cheered the announcement, SHFB CEO Erica Padilla-Chavez warned that the crisis is getting worse, despite post-pandemic predictions that the numbers would decrease.

The organization is now serving some 65,000 people per month, 20,000 of whom are children.

Worse, inflation has forced SHFB to reduce its goal from 5 million meals last year.

Still, Padilla-Chavez prognosticates that the community will pull through to help meet this year’s “very, very real goal.”

“We’re going to achieve it, because if there’s anything the Second Harvest Food Bank community does, it makes that goal,” she said. “We are going to do this together, and I know our neighbors are going to be better off because of it.”

Cabrillo College President Matt Wetstein said that the problem is also affecting the state’s community college students. A report released in September shows that 20% said they were homeless, with two-thirds reporting food insecurity.

“That means that they are skipping meals, they’re not sure they can get nutritional meals for the week and they are struggling with finding food for themselves and their families,” Wetstein said.

Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools Faris Sabbah said that the food bank helps bring the community together to care for their neighbors in need.

“(It) is a collection of people in our community that are coming together that are saying, ‘I am going to care not just for myself and my family, I am not only going to care about the people I know, I am going to care not

only about my neighbors, but I am going take a stand to care about anybody who's feeling hunger," Sabbah said. "Any child, any parent, any family member any community member who is experiencing that.' To me that is so beautiful and powerful."

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To make a donation, you can drop food off at any of the Second Harvest food barrels throughout the county, or visit bit.ly/3QnyjAu.

[Link to original story.](#)