

Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz Feeds Local Needs

California's first food bank has helped residents of Santa Cruz County for more than 50 years.

BY SHARAN STREET PUBLISHED NOV 16, 2023 11:40 A.M.

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Working together with many volunteers, this crew feeds 65,000 people in Santa Cruz County every month.

COURTESY OF SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK SANTA CRUZ

Across this state, replete with agricultural abundance, one in five Californians face a problem that shouldn't even exist here: food insecurity.

In all 58 counties, families and individuals juggle household budgets that don't cover all the necessities—and sometimes there's not enough left over to pay for healthy, nutritious meals.

That's where local food banks come in.

In every community where California Local is active, a regional food bank is working to seek out food resources and distribute the bounty to a network of food pantries and other programs. It seems like a natural way to fight hunger—and yet the concept has only been around since the late 1960s.

And the second-ever food bank in the United States was created right here in California.

Back in 1972, before more than 60 percent of Santa Cruz County's population was even born, the foundations were laid for Second Harvest Food Bank. Michael Alexander, a 26-year-old volunteer with a federal program then known as VISTA, got a call from a Watsonville farmer looking to offload 40 tons of frozen cauliflower.

Alexander began looking around for more donations, collecting 300,000 pounds in the first year. As he told the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* in 2012, "It has grown from that little food bank in Harvey West to that wonderful, monstrous operation in Watsonville that serves thousands of people."

The team at Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County provided some information on the organization, which states its mission thusly: "to inspire and support Santa Cruz County to provide nourishment for all community members. In our community's efforts to ease food-insecurity, we recognize our donors, we celebrate our volunteers, we're thankful for our partners and staff, and we truly see all our neighbors."

Through many locations—its own sites as well as food pantries, schools, soup kitchens, group homes and youth centers—Second Harvest brings in more than 10 million pounds of food from farms, grocery stores, the food industry and individuals, feeding 65,000 people in Santa Cruz County every month. It is also part of a national network called Feeding America.



Spreading the word on CalFresh, a federal food program.

Photo courtesy Second Harvest Food Bank

How can members of the community help with this gargantuan task? The Second Harvest team has some suggestions.

Through January 15, 2024, the [Holiday Food & Fund Drive](#) is under way—an annual fundraising effort that supports year-round programs and food distribution activities.

Other events throughout the year also raise funds. In June, local wineries participate in Sip for Second Harvest. September is Hunger Action Month, and October brings the Chefs Dinner, where local culinary wizards raise money to ensure that every child in Santa Cruz County has access to nutritious meals.

In addition to coveted cash donations—every \$1 donated provides three healthy meals—Second Harvest also accepts groceries from the community, veggies from backyard harvests, and food crops from large-scale ag operations.

Volunteers are [also most welcome](#) to perform various tasks:

- Weekday and Saturday volunteers to sort and pack food
- Special event volunteers to support fundraising activities
- Tabling volunteers to help promote the Food Bank
- Site location volunteers to help distribute food

To learn more about Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County, read California Local's [interview with CEO Erica Padilla-Chavez](#).

[Link to original story.](#)