

THE SUN-GAZETTE

Local nonprofits receive grants to address food insecurity

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By: The Sun-Gazette Staff



With inflation making food more costly, food banks and community organizations need help feeding families who were already struggling to put food on the table

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The Central Valley contains more than 1.4 million acres of productive pasture and farmland. Yet, according to the Central California Food Bank in Fresno, hunger levels were 25% higher in the Valley in 2021 than in 2019. In addition, California produces nearly half of the nation's fruits and vegetables, yet 1 in 5 Californians do not know where their next meal will come from.

Those startling statistics are likely worse this year as families are unable to stay ahead of record inflation which continued to climb to 8.3% in April. Food insecurity, when there is not enough food or when local diets lack quality or variety, is a major issue for Valley families, especially those on fixed incomes and single income households. Research has shown that food insecurity is linked to many adverse effects for overall health.

"Hunger and health are deeply connected," said Martha Santana Chin, Medi-Cal President of Health Net. "People who are food insecure are disproportionately affected by diet-sensitive diseases such as asthma, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and high blood pressure. We invest in access to nutritious food because it improves the health of individuals and boosts the long-term wellness of communities."

In its ongoing effort to combat food insecurity, Health Net granted more than \$350,000 to 10 community-based organizations (CBOs) in the Central Valley that are dedicated to improving food access and health equity. Nearly one-third of that funding announced on May 24 went to Salt + Light Works, a local nonprofit advocating for homeless housing. The Tulare County nonprofit received \$100,000 to support its innovative project, The Neighborhood Village is a partnership with Self Help Enterprises to build a 52-unit community that will rent fully-furnished homes to people facing chronic homelessness. Salt + Light Works hopes to break ground on the permanent supportive housing project.

The first of its kind in California, The Neighborhood Village will be located on 6.5 acres next to Self-Help Enterprises' Sequoia Commons multifamily housing project, phase one of which opened in 2020, at Road 76 and Avenue 310 south of Florence Ave. in Goshen, adjacent to the city of Visalia.

The community will also include a 5,000-square foot unity hall, a dog park and a memorial garden. The unity hall will not only be a community gathering place it will also have a state-of-the-art community kitchen, which will provide meals for residents and a Farm-to-Table Culinary Training Program. It will also include work space for residents to start their own micro business and offices for local service providers to meet with residents privately.

Other Tulare County organizations to receive funding were CityServe Tulare/Kings and FoodLink of Tulare County. CityServe provides lunches for children at school. FoodLink promotes equitable and dignified access to nutritious, healthy food while also addressing the root cause of hunger through education, advocacy and food systems change.

Other grantees who received funding to expand their initiatives to combat food insecurity include:

- Central California Food Bank, which provides food to over 220 partner feeding sites including churches, community centers, and other organizations so they can feed the hungry in their respective neighborhoods.
- CityServe Bakersfield, which purchases and transports food into some of the hardest to reach neighborhoods across Kern County.
- Emergency Food Bank Stockton/San Joaquin, which provides fresh produce to community centers, senior centers, and schools, as well as community cooking demonstrations.
- Nourish California, which aims to remove barriers for Californians accessing programs like CalFresh by simplifying the application process for seniors and working with community partners to collect and organize stories in support of the Food4All Campaign to remove the immigrant exclusion policy.
- Second Harvest of the Greater Valley, which serves families, seniors, and individuals struggling with food security in Stanislaus County through their Mobile Fresh program.
- The Salvation Army, Modesto Corps, which supports medically tailored diabetic food programs within shelters through buying fresh produce, nutritionist supported meal planning for guests, and community outreach.
- United Samaritans Foundation, which serves approximately 1,500 lunches a day throughout Stanislaus County in 11 communities at 57 stops.

The grants are part of Health Net's ongoing commitment to improve community health by addressing chronic food insecurity. With more than 85 percent of their members enrolled in a government sponsored plan, Health Net has launched innovative programs which leverage local partnerships to combat food insecurity. This includes:

- Food Pharmacies, which support community organizations, offering nutrition classes, cooking demonstrations and direct access to healthy foods.
- Medically Tailored Meals, which reach vulnerable members and improve nutrition.
- Food Rx Programs, which reduce in-patient readmission and drive long-term cost savings.

With decades of experience providing care for California, Health Net continues to lead the charge to improve health equity with multi-faceted, collaborative and culturally relevant programs and interventions at the statewide and local level. For more information on Health Net's programs, visit BridgingtheDivideCA.com or follow them on Facebook and Twitter.