

Food Recovery Helps Bridge Fresno's Food Gap

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Summary

Thanks to the collaboration of the Fresno County Department of Public Health (FCDPH) and Fresno Metro Ministry (Metro), approximately 77,590 residents living in Fresno food deserts now have access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods. Metro's Food to Share program has distributed approximately 157,902 pounds of food at no cost to Fresno County residents at six different sites. Volunteers have come together as champions for the Food to Share program and are fighting hunger in their communities.

Challenge

Research shows that up to 40% of food that is grown, processed, and transported in the United States is wasted. Fresno County is a part of one of the largest agricultural regions in the world, where more than 350 crops are grown, many of them not grown anywhere else in the nation. Ironically, there are more than five times as many fast-food restaurants and convenience stores than supermarkets. This, in combination with extreme poverty and transportation limitations, results in thousands of Fresno residents that lack access to affordable healthy foods. One in six residents does not know from one day to the next whether they will have enough to eat. Hunger hurts everyone, but is especially devastating to children. Getting enough nutritious food is critical to a child's physical and emotional development as well as their academic success.

Solution

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, FCDPH and lead partner Metro created Food to Share, a network of partners who re-direct excess healthy food to distribution locations in six low income Fresno food deserts instead of landfills. A web-based platform raises awareness, matches donors with recipient organizations, and mobilizes volunteers. To insure the new access points increase consumption of healthy foods, demonstrations with the recovered food at the distribution sites teach residents how to prepare healthy meals from the foods they are given.



Your Involvement is Key

Food to Share volunteers are key to successful food distributions.

Currently, 46 volunteers help glean fruits and vegetables, bag food, and transport these items to the food distributions. Food giveaway efforts are made possible by thousands of pounds of donated nutritious foods from community partners who share Metro's vision. You can help fight hunger in Fresno County! Donate food or funding, volunteer, or become a food receiver organization. Visit www.foodtoshare.org to learn more.

Results

Over the past 12 months, six new church and community organization locations have adopted new food distribution practices to offer fresh fruits and vegetables at no cost. A total of 157,902 pounds of mostly fresh fruits and vegetables and other food items were distributed. As a result, 77,590 Fresno residents in communities deemed as food deserts now have access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods. Over 4,000 Fresno residents tasted food samples at 11 cooking demonstrations in the PICH target neighborhoods. The residents left the distributions with both healthy food and recipes to improve their health at home.

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"We used to serve about 60 families a month with our regular distribution. Now with the access to fruits and vegetables, we serve nearly three times that amount. Food to Share has made a tremendous difference for the families in our neighborhood."

- Pastor Henry Lengkeek, Fresno Christian Reformed Church

Sustainable Success

Food to Share is enhancing organizational relationships and neighborhood capacities to sustain increased food recovery distribution. Metro trains recipient organizations how to claim recovered food using the website, run high-volume food distributions, and conduct food demonstrations. Food to Share partners with Fresno Food Security Network (FFSN) who links food production, distribution, waste recovery and education resources to increase food access, nutrition, and cooking knowledge, and healthy food consumption throughout Fresno County. FFSN has proven successful in developing relationships with farmers, growers, and agencies that have the capacity to store and move food to sustain the flow of excess food to communities most in need.