

Recovered Food Helps Feed Thousands of Fresno Families in Need

by: Leila Gholamrezaei-Eha

SUMMARY

Over the past two years, Food to Share's partnerships with schools, donors, retail stores and residents have yielded nearly 500,000 pounds of excess nutritious food. Food to Share redistributes this food through a network of over 80 organizations, including churches, pantries, and wellness centers. A variety of fruits, vegetables, healthy snacks and hot meals have benefitted more than 5,000 people who live in low income food deserts. With increased access to healthy foods, multiple issues, such as hunger and chronic diseases, can be prevented.



CHALLENGE

Fresno is one of the top-producing agricultural counties in the nation, yet it ranks as the fifth most food insecure metropolitan city in the nation. Nearly 25% of residents are unable to consistently put adequate nutritious food on the table due to poverty, lack of access, and other related factors.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, Fresno County has 93 food deserts where thousands of residents lack access to a full-service grocery store. As a result, many residents resort to eating the cheapest food they can find— processed food high in calories, fats, sugars and sodium, and low in nutrition. The lack of nutritious food and lack of exercise contributes to negative health outcomes such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease among residents. According to the Fresno County Department of Public Health, 75% of all adults in Fresno County are overweight or obese.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Your involvement is key to ensuring that edible food that might otherwise be thrown away is recovered to feed our community. If you have a connection to schools, farmers, packers, grocers or other organizations with excess food, please refer them to www.foodtoshare.org for information about how they can be a part of this movement. All of us can play a role in addressing hunger by spreading the word about Fresno's growing food recovery efforts.

"Food deserts exist, even here in one of our nation's largest agricultural production areas. They contribute to poor health inequitably in our community, but Food to Share is helping eliminate them."

- Dr. Ken Bird, Fresno County Health Officer

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SOLUTION

The Food to Share Program is a strong network of partners who re-direct excess healthy food to distribution locations in nine low-income Fresno food deserts. Food is recovered from schools, retail stores, growers, packers, farmers' markets, supermarkets, food distributors and gleanings. The food is redistributed through church pantries, senior centers, and wellness centers in low-income food desert neighborhoods.

Partnerships with school administrators led to a district-wide policy at Central Unified School District and a written agreement with Fresno Unified School District that allows Food to Share to recover and distribute food to benefit thousands of families in need.

RESULTS

On average, Food to Share recovers 5,000 pounds of healthy food per week from 22 schools. From May 2016 to June 2017, Food to Share has recovered and distributed 499,347 pounds of food from schools, backyard gleanings, retail grocery stores and other donors to 5,456 individuals. That is about 50 large moving trucks of food that is provided to families that live in food desert neighborhoods in Fresno. Volunteers are also instrumental to the process and its success. Food to Share has recruited and trained more than 800 volunteers to help with promotion and implementation of the distributions. This number continues to grow as the word gets out.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Food recoveries have proven to be a remarkable and quick success. Each of the different sectors- schools, retail, donors, and gleanings- are critical to ensuring that Food to Share can help meet the community's need and sustain this work.

Funding, volunteers and capacity building among partners is also critical. Recently, Food to Share received a grant from Kaiser Permanente to continue and expand the project and will be launching a fundraising campaign to help continue food recovery and distribution efforts, as well as train and build the capacity of network partners and volunteers.



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