



SECOND  
HARVEST  
FOOD  
BANK  
ORANGE COUNTY

WINTER



# COVID-19: One Year In



**The pandemic and the hunger crisis that followed created multiple first-time challenges and taught us the importance of looking ahead and being prepared...for anything.**

As the pandemic began to take hold, we quickly implemented COVID-19 health and safety protocols to protect our clients, partners and staff. At the same time, many of our partner pantries and other food distributions began to shut down, leaving thousands with nowhere to turn for help. Early in this fast-developing crisis, our Food Bank team was fortunate to have the foresight to know that schools would soon be forced to close, parents would need to stay home to care for their children, and businesses would shutter leaving many unemployed OC residents with no income. As more and more people lost their jobs, a tsunami of need soon reached peaks never seen before.

We prepared for the anticipated need by purchasing more food, increasing distributions, and brainstorming innovative ways to feed all the suddenly food-insecure people throughout the county.

We formed the Harvest Truck Brigade, using a corps of volunteers to safely deliver boxes of produce and staple items to schools, senior and community centers, and to the doorsteps of quarantined individuals with underlying health conditions and others who were not able to leave their homes. Over the course of 15 consecutive drive through food distributions at the Honda Center, Second Harvest provided 2,036,000 pounds of food to more than 62,000 vehicles/households. And in the single month of June 2020, coming off peak unemployment in California, 7.4 million pounds of food reached hungry people in every city in the county, a 211% year over year increase.

**FROM MARCH 2020-JANUARY 2021, WE AND OUR PARTNERS SERVED AN AVERAGE OF 520,331 PEOPLE EACH MONTH, MOVING A TOTAL OF 54,406,438 POUNDS OF FOOD.**

# Still in a Hunger Crisis

Although hunger may dominate fewer headlines, there is no question that the crisis continues. The “good news” is last year’s lessons have refined our skills of forecasting and preparation. During this prolonged economic recovery, we are working to meet high demand by doubling food distribution from our **PRE-PANDEMIC AVERAGES (UP TO A MILLION POUNDS PER WEEK)** to our Partner Network including pantries, after-school programs, Permanent School Pantries, college pantries, senior centers and transitional housing facilities.



## ONGOING NEED

As we navigate the ongoing need by working to provide food to the community, **A FULL-BLOWN HUNGER CRISIS CONTINUES TO AFFECT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE** including children and their families, seniors on fixed incomes, veterans, people with disabilities, and people without homes in Orange County. Supply chain interruptions and increased demand continue to impact the availability of food and push prices higher. Using current and projected unemployment, **WE FORECAST THE NEED EACH MONTH AND STAY AHEAD OF IT.** While our distribution has leveled at about 5 million pounds of food per month, it is almost twice our Pre-COVID distribution. The funds we’re raising now are crucial to sustaining the current volume of food distribution and to prepare for demand in the months ahead. We need your help to meet that need through the end of this year.

## PLEASE DONATE

Call **949-653-2900** or visit **FEEDOC.ORG**.



# Prioritizing Nutrition



By putting nutrition first, we are contributing to our community's food security and overall community health. In 2019, 29.7 percent of Orange County children and 29.1 percent of OC adults consumed fast food three to four times a week.<sup>1</sup> When budgets are stretched, fresh healthy foods like fruits and vegetables are often replaced with less expensive, less healthy and processed foods.

When children go hungry, their school performance, energy levels and behavior suffer. We must provide consistent access to nutritious foods to our community's children to increase their chances of succeeding in school and becoming productive members of society.

For adults, lack of access to nutritious food can lead to increased risk of chronic disease like obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Poor nutrition impacts their ability to support their families, to find and keep jobs, and to move towards self-sufficiency. Food insecurity and poor nutrition for seniors can lead to illness and diminished capacity to live independently.

With your help Orange County's future can be better for all our residents.

## PLEASE DONATE

Donate today by calling **949-653-2900** or visiting **[FEEDOC.ORG](https://FEEDOC.ORG)**.



<sup>1</sup> 2019 UCI Health Community Needs Assessment

# Consistent Access to Nutritious Food Fuels Community Health And Well-Being

We at Second Harvest are laser-focused on the nutritional content of the food we provide to those in need. We've increased our purchases of truckloads of **HIGH-QUALITY FOOD** (eggs, whole fruits and vegetables, nutritious shelf-stable foods). Providing nutritious food to everyone who needs assistance benefits not only the recipients, but the whole community as well.



IT TAKES SUPPORT FROM THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY TO HELP FUND THESE PURCHASES.



# Hunger is a Symptom of Poverty

Even though we may not see it, we know that hunger resides in all 34 cities in Orange County and that COVID-19 put a magnifying lens on the food insecurity crisis we're facing in OC and the nation.

**FOOD INSECURITY AND POOR NUTRITION FUEL INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND CAN CAUSE INSTABILITY IN OUR COMMUNITY.**



# Unemployment=Need

## THE ESSENTIAL PRESENCE OF FOOD PANTRIES

Second Harvest's Partner Network of food pantries and programs throughout OC, including houses of worship, school and college pantries, after-school programs, Permanent School Pantries, senior centers, transitional housing facilities, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters, has been vital in providing food-insecure residents the food they need. Laguna Food Pantry's neighbor-helping-neighbor mentality is grounded in the belief that no one should go hungry, and that everyone has the right to access nutritious food with dignity.



“The pandemic has brought many newly vulnerable shoppers to Laguna Food Pantry: People who never imagined they would need to reach out for help. So many have lost jobs and are struggling. Some may have nice things, but without income ... they find that basic things like food to be their primary concern. Laguna Food Pantry welcomes anyone in need.”

—ANNE BELYEA,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
LAGUNA FOOD PANTRY



## THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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ocregister.com

### PANDEMIC ECONOMY

## Even with a turnaround coming, hunger remains a crisis in Orange County

By Theresa Walker  
thwalker@seng.com

To someone not in the trenches of food distribution in Orange County, or on the other end, receiving help so their family doesn't go hungry, it might seem like the pandemic-driven food crisis of the past 12 months is finally

easing up.

A lot of signs suggest it. Coronavirus case rates are dropping in Southern California, though they're rising elsewhere. Vaccines are common. And a soon-to-arrive financial shot — from the \$1.2 trillion American Rescue Plan signed into law on March 12 — suggests the economy is poised to rebound.

But look again, say operators of the county's two biggest food banks and directors of the pantries and nonprofits who have spent the past year responding to the most harrowing need for food assistance in recent county history.

This, they say, is the micro-level picture: Thousands of people

are still without a job or working fewer hours and for lower wages than before the coronavirus altered their lives. And on any given day, those people continue to queue in long lines, on foot and in their cars, somewhere in Orange County, sometimes waiting a few hours to get a box of food or a bag of groceries.

"Our numbers have just been consistent," said Anne Belyea, executive director of Laguna Food Pantry in Laguna Beach, which serves about 200 people every weekday morning. That's down from a high of 282 the day before Thanksgiving, but it remains twice the number of visitors they had before the pandemic.

### Hunger

FROM PAGE 1

"There's always a new face," Belyea added. "It's the newly vulnerable shoppers that are just so heartbroken and humbled to be in our line."

And if you look further down the road, Belyea and others say, you'll see issues that could continue or even deepen the hunger crisis.

What happens when savings are tapped or unemployment assistance ends? What's the next step for a family that owes pandemic-suspended bills for such things as rent or utilities or credit cards? What happens when forbearance ends and banks push for overdue mortgage payments?

"We're already starting to feel it," said Andre Roberson, co-founder of Power of One Foundation, a grassroots nonprofit that stepped up at the start of the pandemic to run drive-thru food distributions and door-to-door grocery deliveries at apartment complexes in hard-hit neighborhoods of Orange and Los Angeles counties.

Last week, at a Power of One drive-thru in Santa Ana, a line of 2,000 cars stretched for 2 miles. It was one of 10 weekly food giveaways the nonprofit conducts, Roberson said.

"That's what's making us nervous."

#### Second hunger wave

Mark Lowry, director of Orange County Food Bank, and Harald Herrmann, chief executive of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County, both worry about a number of possible time bombs: looming debts accumulated by people hit economically by the pandemic; dwindling private donations to local food banks; the end of emergency government assistance.

"Things are looking better," Lowry said, noting signs that the overall economy is perking up. "But, no, things are not OK."

There is, he said, less of a "sense of panic" than there was a year ago, when the lockdown started. He cited the current Orange County unemployment rate of 7.4% versus the whopping 18% peak in 2020.

Still, the jobless rate is



Providing help during the pandemic, members of the National Guard load a vehicle with food boxes as part of the Senior Food Box Program at Orange County Food Bank, a program of Community Action Partnership of Orange County, on Thursday in Garden Grove. Inside the warehouse, other soldiers packed bags of potatoes bound for 320 food pantries.

nearly triple what it was pre-pandemic. And if the unemployment figure is adjusted to account for those who have given up and stopped looking for work, thus dropping off official rolls? Then the rate would be closer to 12%, the food bank directors say. Many of those people have trouble buying groceries. And all of them need to eat.

Demand for food, Lowry said, remains "extremely high by any other historic measure."

"This was a once-in-100-years event, and our community has not recovered yet," Lowry said.

Second Harvest, the county's largest distributor of food to the needy, gave away a record 7 million pounds of food in July 2020. By February, the volume was down to about 5 million pounds, but that is still twice the pre-pandemic level.

As a second year of crisis arrives, food banks are hoping money from public and private donors will continue to help finance their efforts. Last year, the county Board of Supervisors awarded

\$6 million in federal coronavirus stimulus funds that the two food banks shared, buying food and distributing it, free of charge, to people in need.

Lowry and Herrmann plan to ask county officials for a slice of what the National Association of Counties estimates is Orange County's \$616 million share of the recent stimulus package. The food banks also hope cities, in line for as much as \$700 million in Rescue Plan dollars, will kick in some backing.

Said Herrmann: "I don't know if we can get the job done without that support again."

#### War on hunger

The shortage extends beyond funds and food.

Volunteers who have become the reliable backbone of the food distribution world — like packaging food boxes at Orange County Food Bank — have yet to return in large numbers. A few people, recently vaccinated, are back at the food bank's Garden Grove warehouse but not enough to keep pace

with demand.

Last year, the food bank, an operation of Community Action Partnership of Orange County, was able to bridge that labor gap with help from Team Rubicon, a mobile group of military veterans who serve as emergency volunteers, and from local members of the California Conservation Corps. But when the Corps members' tenure ended in February, Lowry renewed a request for help from the California National Guard, which has sent troops to most of the state's 34 food banks during the pandemic.

The National Guard also has deployed to hospitals, senior living facilities, and vaccination sites around the state to address the pandemic.

On March 15, the soldiers arrived at Orange County Food Bank, dressed in fatigues and ready to fight a war on hunger.

Last week, their commander, Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Smiley, stopped by for a review. A few of the nine Guard members under the supervision of Sgt. Olinser Diaz

Cebrenos were in the warehouse parking lot, loading up cars for people among the 1,400 older Orange County residents who, on a typical day, get help from a longtime federal nutrition program.

Inside the warehouse, other soldiers lugged 50-pound sacks of potatoes to an assembly line and helped a dozen volunteers pack spuds in smaller bags bound for 320 local food pantries.

"I'm glad we could help," Smiley told Lowry as the two were introduced.

Andrea Kunihira, a first-time volunteer at the food bank, also was glad for the presence of the soldiers. "They're very helpful," said Kunihira, 66, who lives in Cypress. "And strong."

During a tour of the facility, Smiley asked about the number of people who need help from the food bank.

"I suspect it's going up," he said.

"Oh, yeah," Lowry responded. "It's been crazy."

Later, during a huddle inside the warehouse, Smiley reminded his troops of how crucial their help is, whether

at a hospital or a food bank. "Everything that you're doing is saving someone's life," he said.

#### Box program teetering

Another pandemic-related food program, one in which the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture connects county food banks with truckloads of vegetables, fruit, dairy and meat, is tenuous. There's no word if the coronavirus food box program will continue past April.

Since late last year the number of boxes delivered as part of that program has been tapering off, Roberson said. The new year started with a severe shortage across Southern California, and Roberson reached out to partners in Northern California, who sent an extra half dozen truckloads — 172,800 food boxes — that will keep Power of One distributing food through April.

But the nonprofit must cover the cost of refrigerating and delivering that food. Northgate Market has donated warehouse space, but Roberson said he has depleted all \$20,000 of his own savings to keep delivering the food.

One volunteer is hoping a GoFundMe campaign he launched in mid-March will generate enough money for Roberson to buy a forklift and a refrigerated truck. John Luciano, a former entertainment writer who now works as an interior designer and events coordinator, said he learned about Power of One two years ago, when a close friend did court-ordered community service with the group.

Luciano, who has homes in West Hollywood and Laguna Beach, began helping with food distribution. The pandemic opened his eyes about the hunger crisis. Twice last year, he said, someone he knew came through the line.

An encounter that particularly troubled him involved a woman he knew of through his niece. Luciano spotted the woman at a food distribution event at the Orange County Fairgrounds. He said he pulled his hat low to remain unrecognizable behind his face mask. He did not want her to be embarrassed.

This was in December. "I worry about these people," Luciano said. "Are they ever going to make it back?"



# Recent News

## Daily Pilot

### As COVID-19 cases decrease, hunger still looms in Orange County



Employees unload boxes of frozen food in November at Second Harvest's distribution facility in Irvine. (Kevin Chang/Times OC)

By BEN BRAZIL, STAFF WRITER  
MARCH 24, 2021 2:48 PM PT

Though COVID-19 cases continue to decline, a potential hunger crisis still looms in Orange County.

The county's two major food banks — Second Harvest Food Bank and the [OC Food Bank](#) — are expecting to deliver millions of pounds of food this year, but they will need to raise millions of dollars in order to fill the county's needs.

"We've still got a food marathon ahead," said Harald Herrmann, chief executive of Second Harvest. "People are going back to work and vaccines are happening. There's a general optimism and confidence that we're starting to turn the corner. But there are still many people that have been economically impacted by COVID, and we're going to be living with that for a while."

"There's a lot of debt, there's a lot of back rent, utilities, there's lost income, lost savings. The need for a food bank and pantry network, not just in Orange County but really throughout the country in every market, will be very, very much needed, because there are many newly vulnerable families."

Herrmann said during a phone interview that they will need to raise \$3.9 million in donations in order to have enough food to meet the increased need. However, the nonprofit's food plan is tied to unemployment, so if those rates improve, then they may not need as much food to fill the county's needs.

The OC Food Bank, which is run by the Community Action Partnership of Orange County, projects that it will need to deliver 45 million pounds of food this year and will need \$5 million worth of funding. CAP President and Chief Executive Gregory Scott said they delivered about 63 million pounds of food last year. The food bank delivered about 23 million pounds of food in 2019.

Scott said the group will get some of the funding from government contracts but will likely have to raise about \$3 million.

"Recovery from COVID-19 is going to be long and hard for a lot of families, so even though we are getting less COVID cases, the unemployment rate is still 2½ higher than it was a year ago," Scott said. "And so along with that comes people taking on more debt or going deeper into debt."



The Community Action Partnership of Orange County runs the OC Food Bank. (Courtesy of CAP OC)

Unemployment could improve as vaccines continue to be administered and the economy opens back up. Orange County is now able to [reopen](#) gyms, movie theaters, museums and indoor dining at reduced capacities after entering the less-restrictive red tier of the state's reopening system.

Herrmann said Second Harvest is moving about a million pounds of food a week. Before the pandemic, the nonprofit was administering half that amount of food. Second Harvest delivered about 54.4-million pounds of food between March 2020 to January 2021, about an 82% increase in food served compared to 2019.

Second Harvest and the OC Food Bank will need donations to meet their funding needs.

Scott said that the OC Food Bank had several corporate sponsors and donors step up last year to provide donations. He's hoping those sponsors return this year. Scott said that 60% of the donors from last year were new. They'll also utilize food drives and online donations.

Scott said there is a risk that the OC Food Bank can't secure the necessary funding.

"Many corporate partners came out to help during COVID, and we have to count on those partners to duplicate what they did," Scott said. "Some of them are in a position to do so, many of them can't. And so, it is a risk ... And then still shaking every tree and talking to the county about additional Cares Act funding to be able to supply more food is also on our strategy."



An employee rolls out boxes of frozen food to be sorted in November at Second Harvest's distribution facility in Irvine. (Kevin Chang / Staff Photographer)

Herrmann said his organization hopes to get grant funding. The nonprofit also takes online donations.

The food banks work with community organizations — churches, senior centers and schools, among others — to distribute food to 34 cities in the county.

But some of these smaller organizations have become strained by the increased need. Herrmann said about 17% of Second Harvest's partners remain closed.

"We're just delivering that now to the partners that have been able to remain open, they've picked up the additional demand," Herrmann said. "So still a full court press for the county."



The Community Action Partnership of Orange County runs the OC Food Bank, one of the largest food banks in the county. (Courtesy of CAP OC)

In November, Second Harvest, CAP and [Waste Not OC](#) formed the OC Hunger Alliance. Among other objectives, the partnership is meant to foster collaboration between the groups by leveraging purchasing power and strategizing distribution efforts.

Scott said it's important for the food banks to work together to end hunger in the county.

"We are really strategizing around where we see the potential hunger gaps are—how are we distributing the food, how do we share resources and make sure we are able to get the food out to the right people," Scott said. "We really show up together as collaborative planning partners to address the issue."

To donate to Second Harvest, visit <https://hcvu.feedoc.org/donate-now/>. To donate to OC Food Bank, visit [www.capoc.org/food-bank/](http://www.capoc.org/food-bank/).



# Recent News



## Second Harvest Food Bank and Laguna Food Pantry work to fight food insecurity in OC

By DIANNE RUSSELL  
Photos by Mary Hurlbut

Laguna Food Pantry has a long history as a network partner with Second Harvest Food Bank – 21 years to be exact. However, this past year has been one of unprecedented challenges with regard to food insecurity in Orange County.

Second Harvest Food Bank set a record for the amount of food provided last year with an 81.9 percent increase from March 2020 to January 2021 – over the same period the year before.

"The Laguna Food Pantry is part of the network that we need to be very aware of for the next 12-18 months as people cycle out of the fallout from COVID-19," says Harald Hermann, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County. "There are vaccinations, the sun is shining, and people have aspirations, and it's fantastic, but there is still the real issue of food insecurity in the county. We want to make sure that it remains very much at the top of our minds."



Click on photo for a larger image

### Enlarged space at The Laguna Food Pantry to accommodate cooler

Executive Director of Laguna Food Pantry Anne Belyea says, "When we transitioned to outdoor distribution in March of last year, the number of shoppers went from 80-100 a day to 180-200 a day, with the highest being right before Thanksgiving with 282 shoppers," says Belyea.

Of course, the growth in the number of shoppers meant the food supply needed be increased. "In March of 2020, the amount of food we got from Second Harvest and food rescue totaled 10,000 lbs, and in February of 2021, it was 100,000 lbs," she says. "Second Harvest has really stepped up to the plate. They have a phenomenal team."

Second Harvest is doubling its countywide food distribution from its pre-COVID averages. An additional 3.9 million dollars is needed for the increased demands in OC for the rest of the year.

"That figure is a moment in time," says Hermann, "as it is constantly refreshed, but the numbers come down to food demand – which is generated by unemployment and the newly unemployed – and with that, our marching orders."



Click on photo for a larger image

### Second Harvest Food Box

"We solicit experts to vet forecasts, tied specifically to unemployment. In January, the unemployment figure of 7.4 percent may be low – another 4 percent could be added to take into consideration those who still haven't received benefits, or received the first round, but not the second, and those who just didn't apply for benefits."

"The entire network has been focused on this need," says Hermann, "and has acted as a safety net to help Orange County get back on its feet."

Before the surge of shoppers in March of last year, Pantry volunteers picked up the food at Second Harvest. But because the amount of food increased 10-fold, it was necessary to add two weekly Second Harvest deliveries (on Monday and Thursday) to Laguna Food Pantry, and the deliveries would need to be on pallets.

Belyea says, "We needed more space, so we went to the city to get planning commission backing for an easement – to pour concrete – and to move the fence which would take up a small portion of the dog park. On July 4, a crane dropped an 80 by 20-foot cooler on the property. In addition to Second Harvest, we have also partnered with more grocery stores to pick up food – from the original seven markets, we now have 14 participating."



Click on photo for a larger image  
**Twice a week, on Monday and Thursday, Second Harvest delivers five pallets consisting of 240 boxes weighing 8,800 lbs. Driver Joe McCree deposits them in the new cooler.**

"It's our model that a percentage of the food is provided by Second Harvest and the rest is food rescue," says Hermann, "which is a service. It keeps food from going to waste, prevents it from reaching the landfill, and reduces our carbon footprint."

The Pantry's inventory includes the rescued groceries, food purchased from wholesale grocers, donations from regional food banks, local markets, and private donors.

There is also another cause for concern, which directly affects children who were in the school meal programs. "Because schools have been closed the past year – breakfast and lunch, and the goody food bags children would take home have all stopped," says Belyea.

It's not difficult to imagine that during a normal year, for some, these school meals might be their main source of food.

"Children are having to cope with being hungry while at the same time trying to learn and facing the difficulties of online classes," says Hermann.

These aren't isolated situations or specific to big cities.

"This seems like a far-removed problem, but this could happen in any city in OC," says Hermann. "It lives in the shadow of every corner of Orange County. No child should be hungry."

Belyea gives an example of the dire situation one family faced.

"We received a message on the website in the middle of the night from a single mother with four children who said, 'I lost my job and we're hungry. How can we qualify for food?'"



Click on photo for a larger image

### Operations Manager, Board Member Cynthia Carson

For shoppers at the Pantry, there are no qualifications.

To add to the stress, families might have to go to several food source locations to get the nutritious groceries that they need.

Second Harvest remains focused on quality. In navigating its bulk food purchases, nutrition is prioritized.

"In February, we fed over 4,000 families," says Belyea. "That figure has doubled from this time last year – going from 2,167 families in February of 2020 to 4,128 families last month."

Hermann calls The Pantry, "Small but mighty. They are committed, effective, and efficient. It's a credit to the ability of their team to be able to feed that many households."

### Volunteers

"We have a great team of volunteers," says Belyea. "We've been networking with the volunteers and some are coming back. The response has been incredible to see. We couldn't do this without them, they're family. One of our longtime volunteers Marianna Hoff just returned, and the shoppers were so happy to see her."

This is an indication of the level of dignity that the Pantry has in terms of relating to the shoppers who come for food.

"Some of the shoppers say that never in their wildest dreams did they expect to be in line for food," says Hermann. "It's not a hand-out, it's a hand-up. It's an emotional investment. The volunteers are friendly and gracious. Before the store closed, it was like a mom-and-pop store. The volunteers have been able to carry that warmth to those coming to the drive-thru in the parking lot."



Click on photo for a larger image

### Volunteer Appreciation Tree

As a strange coincidence, Belyea mentions that her grandfather owned a mom-and-pop store, so she already had a sense of what it's like to shop in that kind of friendly atmosphere.

"Last March, with all the craziness as the pandemic hit – it was like a sprint, and now we're in for the long haul, and it's settled into a marathon pace," says Hermann. "But we can't become desensitized as a community."

Belyea adds, "Now that parents may be going back to work, they are also faced with the costs of childcare."

### Underemployed population

"The newly vulnerable are the underemployed population – those who are paid hourly, and now work only two to three days per week," says Hermann. "The lower middle class is becoming the working poor and have never had to ask for food before. They are only five to 10 paychecks away from that situation. This is another fallout from the pandemic. It's going to take a long time to get them back on their feet – mentally, physically, and financially."

Many have accumulated debt over the past year in the form of rent deferrals and unpaid utilities – and have resorted to using credit cards in addition to draining their savings.

"Now they are trying to climb out of debt," says Hermann. "The Laguna Food Pantry provides an additional measure of support for these families – a bridge as they get back on their feet. When you hit rock bottom, those who are rebounding need help. We are true partners in getting that job done. We're at the ready to get OC back on its feet, but we will need the community's help."

Laguna Food Pantry is located at 20652 Laguna Canyon Rd, open for drive-thru shoppers from 8-10:30 a.m.

Monday – Friday

For more information about Laguna Food Pantry, go to [www.lagunafoodpantry.org](http://www.lagunafoodpantry.org).

For more information about Second Harvest Food Bank, go to [www.feedoc.org](http://www.feedoc.org).



# Thank You

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