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.¹ 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.

¹ 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
By Theresa Walker
Managing Editor

To someone not in the trenches of food distribution, in Orange County, or on the other end, receiving help, it might not seem like the pandemic-driven food crisis of the past 12 months is finally easing up.

A lot of signs suggest it. Coronavirus cases are dropping in Southern California, though they’re rising elsewhere. Vaccines are common. And a non-trivial financial boost from the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan signed on March 12 — about $120 billion in Orange County — is poised to rebound.

But look again, say operators of the county’s two biggest food banks and directors of the 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-picture: Thousands of people are still without a job or working fewer hours and for lower wages than before the coronavirus run-along caused their financial ruin.

And any gain from those people queuing in long lines, on foot and in their cars in Orange County, sometimes waiting for hours to get a bag of groceries.

Hunger

“Their always a new face,” Belylea added. “It’s the newly vulnerable shoppers that are hardest. People are broken and humbled to be in line.”

And if you look further down the road. In fact, no one else has a use issues that could continue or even deepen the hunger crisis.

What happens when surge are tapped or unemployment assistance runs out eventually funds for the families that oversee panemind financia meals for even things as rest or utilities or credit cards? What happens when forerun ends and banks push for overdue mortage payments?

“We’re already starting their food,” said Andy Roberson, executive director of Power of One Foundation, a 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 neighborhouds of Orange and Los Angeles counties.

Last week, at a Power of One drive-in in Santa Ana, a line of 2,000 cars stretched for 2 miles. It was one of 20 weekly food giveaways the nonprofit conducts, Roberson said.

“That’s what’s making us nervous.”

Second hunger wave

Mark Lowry directs Orange County Food Bank and Fare Hermann, chief executive of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County, a nonprofit with a possible future home bound for 320 local food banks, said there is a need for emergency funding.

“Things are looking bit better,” Lowry said, noting signs that the overall economy is picking up. “But, no, things are not OK.”

First, he said, less than 2 months ago as the lockdown started. He cited the county Orange County unemployment rate of 7.4% versus the national peak at 15%.

Still, the jobless rate is Petsmart; the food bank issued stimulus checks to 1,300 households.

So far, 1,000 people have signed up for the food bank’s online program, which will help those in need.

The pandemic has been a difficult time for people.

As the coronavirus cases decreased, food banks were caring for more people than ever.

But, for those who have not recovered, the need has not gone away.

“Even with a turnaround coming, hunger remains a crisis in Orange County,” said Belylea.

“We need to keep our eye on the ball,” Lowry said. “We need to keep our eye on the ball.”

The shutdown of restaurants, bars and grocery stores is expected to lead to an increase in food insecurity.

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Recent News

**Daily Pilot**

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

By Nirmalendu Majumdar, [email] ngmajumdar@ocean.com [Online Date] 11/12/2021, 2:49 PM

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 more donations of all kinds in order to help the county’s needs.

“We’re still in a food distribution phase,” said Randi Hermann, chief executive of Second Harvest. “People are going back to work and wages are increasing. There’s a general optimism and sense that we’re starting to turn the corner. But there are still a lot of people that have been economically impacted by COVID, and we’re going to be living with that for a while.”

“The number of people on food stamps, utilities, home rentals, is still high, and the need continues to increase. The need for food banks and pantry networks, not just in Orange County but really throughout the country, is everywhere, very, very much needed, because there are many, many vulnerable families.”

Hermann said last year’s food bank had to raise $9.2 million in donations in order to have enough food to meet the increased need. However, the organization’s food plan is to avoid unemployment, so if these rates improve, then they may not need as much food to feed the county’s needs.

The OC Food Bank, which is run by the Community Action Partnership of Orange County, projects that it needs to deliver 45 million pounds of food this year and will need $5 million worth of funding. CEO President and Chief Executive Officer Greg Scott said they delivered about 46 million pounds of food last year. The food bank delivered about 28 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 $5 million.

“Even though COVID is going to be long and hard for a lot of families, we are doing things better. As people get back to work, the unemployment rate is still higher than it was a year ago,” Scott said. “And we’re going to see people taking on more debt outstanding, and the food banks will be helping.”

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

**Daily Pilot**

Hermann said Second Harvest is moving ahead with a million pounds of food a week. Before the pandemic, the nonprofit was delivering half that amount of food.

Second Harvest delivered about 34.9 million pounds of food between March 2020 and January 2021, about a 3.5% increase in food served compared to 2019.

Second Harvest and the OC Food Bank will need donations to restock 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 listed last year are new. They’ll still utilize food banks and solicit 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 aren’t. And we’re it. And then we’re still reaching out to and telling to the county about additional CORE Act funding to be able to supply more food to our country.”

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

In November, Second Harvest, CEO and Granite Bay OC formed the OC Hunger Alliance. Among other objectives, the partnership is meant to better collaborate between the groups by leveraging purchasing power and streamlining distribution efforts.

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

“We are really struggling around who we are and what our 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 saw it as an opportunity to change the paradigm of how we deliver food.”

To donate to Second Harvest, visit [https://www.secondharvest.org](https://www.secondharvest.org). To donate to the OC Food Bank, visit [ocfoodbank.org](http://ocfoodbank.org).
Recent News

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

Laguna Pantry has a long history as a neighborly family 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 8% percent increase from March 2020 to January 2021 – over the same period the year before.

"The Laguna Pantry is full of the network that we need to follow very aware of for the next 15-15 months as people cycle out of the fall from COVID-19," says Josephinese, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County. "We support local pantries like us and we are working hand in hand to get food to the people who need it most."

There is a critical issue of food insecurity in the country. We all know that it remains very much of the top of our minds."

Winter 2021 | FEEDOC.ORG | 10

Volunteer Appreciation Time

For more information about Laguna Pantry, go to www.lagunapantry.org. For more information about Second Harvest Food Bank, go to www.feedoc.org.
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