



SECOND  
HARVEST  
FOOD  
BANK  
ORANGE COUNTY

SPRING 2022



# Celebrating National Nutrition Month!

March is National Nutrition Month, an annual awareness campaign that encourages us to learn about nutrition, develop healthy eating habits and discover the fun of being physically active. At Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County, we strive to provide everyone in Orange County with the nutrition they need to grow and excel in life.

Eating nutritious food is at the heart of the human experience. Our ancestors had the ingenuity to take up agriculture and put our species on the road to growth and success. But not everyone has access to food, even those who need it most. Nearly three in four children receiving CalFresh are 12 years of age or younger. Data shows that there is a relationship between a family's food security and the assurance of a healthy life. Households with food insecurity are more likely to experience reduced diet quality, anxiety about their food supply, increased use of emergency food sources, other coping behaviors and hunger. (Source: **Conditions of Children in Orange County 26th Ed.**)

So let's take some time to appreciate the food we have and to find ways to help those in need. Together, we can tackle food inequality and make a happier, healthier world.

**HELP OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED  
HERE IN ORANGE COUNTY.  
PLEASE GIVE TODAY.**

To donate, call **949.653.2900** or visit **[feedoc.org](https://feedoc.org)**

\*Dareen Khatib is the administrator of health and wellness at the Orange County Department of Education. She is also a member of SHFB Board of Directors and Chair of our Nutrition Advisory Council.



**"By helping everyone to have consistent access to healthy food, we could lift thousands, and by doing so we prepare our entire community for success in school, work and life. Improved health and educational outcomes have a direct link to economic mobility as young people have more opportunity to choose college, career or technical education, and those already in the workforce grow on their path to increase productivity and stability."**

**—DAREEN ABDRABOU KHATIB\***

# Our Expanded Cold Storage is Here!



Last spring, here at Second Harvest we completely revamped our focus to proactively purchase fresh nutrition for those in need, ensuring a steady pipeline of protein, dairy, eggs, fruits and vegetables to over 300 partner and program sites. As a next step, we recently expanded our cold storage by 6,200 square feet, bringing it to a total of 14,550 square feet, and also added two cold docks that establish a “cold chain” at our distribution center in Irvine.

As part of our promise to support our distribution network in its ability to provide fresh and nutritious food to the community, we’ve helped to ensure that it has the capacity to receive this fresh nutrition and store it until it is distributed. For example, we have equipped the Vietnamese

American Cancer Foundation in Fountain Valley with a 2-door commercial refrigerator. This means that food arriving at the food bank will stay in a temperature-controlled environment between 37–38°F that maintains optimal conditions to ensure freshness throughout its entire journey into the hands of those in need.

Second Harvest is dedicated to continually improving our networks. Aside from increasing our food supply and cold storage facilities, we’re actively working to expand our transport and logistics efficiency. We’re grateful for the support we’ve received from the community and our growing list of partners and affiliates. With your help, we can end hunger in Orange County and create a healthier world for all of us.



# Increase the Longevity of Food Through Safe Food Handling Practices!

You are a big part of how long your food can last, as well as how nutritious and delicious it stays over time. Follow these simple food safety tips to maximize the benefits and enjoyment of food:



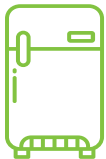
**1. CLEAN** Frequently wash hands as well as surfaces that come in contact with food. Do not use the same platter or utensils that touched raw food to serve it once cooked.



**2. SEPARATE** To avoid cross-contamination, keep raw meat, poultry and seafood separate when handling or storing.



**3. COOK** Ensure your food is fully cooked before eating. One of the best ways to accomplish this is by using a food thermometer to confirm reaching the minimum internal temperature.



**4. CHILL** Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below. Once food is brought home, it should immediately go into the fridge. Bring food out to cook and refrigerate leftovers as quickly as possible after eating.

For more details, visit [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov)



# Outdoor Therapy

Our volunteers keep us going and growing! We are pleased to welcome both familiar and new faces at our Distribution Center and Harvest Solutions Farm on an ongoing basis to help us provide fresh, nutritious food to Orange County residents in need.

While our volunteers choose to dedicate their time for various reasons, the experience they glean from working outdoors alongside members of their community are all a part of what keeps them coming back.

**"Our volunteers emphasize that the time they spend with us is very tranquil and**

**therapeutic; for some it's almost a spiritual place." –Hannah Standerfer, Farm/Volunteer Coordinator for Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County**

"For many, it's an exciting opportunity to take in the outdoors and do something physical and active—it gives a lot of people a break from their desk jobs and a chance to switch things up all while giving back to their community."

Please visit [feedoc.org/volunteer](https://feedoc.org/volunteer) for more information.



Hannah Standerfer, Farm/Volunteer Coordinator for Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County, encouraging volunteers at Harvest Solutions Farm



# Growing Food for the Future

Great news: Our 45-acre Harvest Solutions Farm (HSF) in Irvine is making massive contributions to our food supply, having provided more than 500,000 pounds of produce in just over 17 weeks of operation. We're currently growing cabbage, broccolini, broccoli and celery, and the next harvest season is coming up in May.

This impressive feat wouldn't be possible without the approximately 100 volunteers who help make it happen—we are honored to have so many interested in furthering Second Harvest's mission. They are vital to the successful harvest and delivery of produce to our partners and our pantries.

**"It's a wonderful, active opportunity. You get to be outside in the sunshine and you get to meet all sorts of different people. I'm excited about contributing to making something that is going to go into somebody's hands." –Andi Rosenberger, HSF Volunteer**

Most of our vegetables are produced in a 70-day growth and harvest cycle. Currently, we've got watermelons and peppers lined up for harvest this summer. The farm volunteers plant an acre a week and harvest an acre a week, all to keep a steady flow of food to the people who need it most. The fresh produce that the farm brings in



is distributed throughout Orange County. We're eternally grateful to our supporters and volunteers and we look forward to serving the community for years to come.

## **WANT A UNIQUE WAY TO GIVE?**

Donate to or Volunteer at the Harvest Solutions Farm! Call **949.653.2900** or visit **[feedoc.org](https://feedoc.org)**

**"The first time I volunteered on the farm was on my birthday in September 2021. I ended up coming back a few months later and, to my surprise, that day we were harvesting the same plot that I had helped plant back in September. To see the vegetables of my labor and know that each one was going to someone who otherwise wouldn't have access to this kind of quality nutrition was viscerally gratifying. I love getting to know the other groups that come out and have developed quite a few friendships along the way.**

**–DAVE DONALDSON, HSF VOLUNTEER**

# Farm-Fresh Recipes

## ROASTED GARLIC LEMON BROCCOLI

Serves 6

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 heads** broccoli, separated into florets
- 2 tsp** extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp** sea salt
- ½ tsp** ground black pepper
- 1 clove** garlic, minced
- ½ tsp** lemon juice

### DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C).
2. In a large bowl, toss broccoli florets with the extra virgin olive oil, sea salt, pepper and garlic. Spread the broccoli out in an even layer on a baking sheet.
3. Bake in the preheated oven until florets are tender enough to pierce the stems with a fork, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove and transfer to a serving platter. Squeeze lemon juice liberally over the broccoli before serving for a refreshing, tangy finish.

<https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/144346/roasted-garlic-lemon-broccoli/#nutrition>

## ASIAN BEEF, BROCCOLI, AND CABBAGE STIR-FRY

Serves 4

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tbsp** olive oil
- ½ lb.** ground beef
- ½ head** cabbage, finely chopped
- 4 cloves** garlic, minced
- 1 c** broccoli, cooked, finely chopped
- ¼ c** tamari sauce (use less if using soy sauce; low-sodium soy sauce is recommended)
- ½ tsp** ginger
- 1 Tbsp** sesame oil
- ¾ c** water
- 1 Tbsp** cornstarch

### DIRECTIONS

1. Heat olive oil in a large skillet on medium heat. Add ground beef and cook until cooked through. Drain any fat or liquid.
2. To the same skillet, add chopped cabbage and garlic. Cook until cabbage is tender and reduces in volume. Stir in cooked (or blanched) broccoli.
3. Add tamari sauce, ginger, and sesame oil and stir to combine—on medium heat.
4. In a small bowl, combine ¾ cup water with 1 tablespoon cornstarch—and mix it in the bowl until smooth. Add the corn starch water to the skillet, mix with cabbage and cook on medium heat until heated through and sauce somewhat thickens, constantly stirring.
5. Season with salt if necessary.

<https://juliasalbum.com/asian-beef-broccoli-and-cabbage-stir-fry/>

## CREAMY CABBAGE AND BROCCOLI SLAW

Serves 8

### INGREDIENTS

- 1/2** sweet onion, such as Vidalia, grated (about 1/2 cup)
- 1/2 c** mayonnaise (Greek yogurt can be used as a healthier substitute)
- 2 Tbsp** freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ¾ lb.** Savoy cabbage, cored and thinly sliced
- 1/2 lb.** broccoli crowns, trimmed and chopped
- 1** carrot, grated

### DIRECTIONS

1. Stir together the grated onion, mayonnaise (or Greek yogurt) and lemon juice in a small bowl. Season to taste with salt and plenty of black pepper, constantly stirring.
2. Combine the cabbage, broccoli and carrot in a large bowl and pour over the dressing. Toss gently until evenly coated. Let the slaw sit for at least 30 minutes. Before serving, taste and adjust the seasonings.

<https://www.foodandwine.com/recipes/creamy-cabbage-and-broccoli-slaw>




# Recent News

**CAPITAL & MAIN**

**LATEST NEWS**

**Federal Money Saved Economy as Pandemic Exposed Weak Safety Net**

While \$5.2 trillion brought swift recovery, U.S. workers still lack the security of those in other advanced economies.



Shoppers are loaded into a car at a drive-through food bank in southeast St. April 2020. Photo courtesy Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County.

In March 2020, more than 2,500 cars and trucks wrapped around the Honda Center sports arena in Anaheim, California, as people struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic lined up for free rations of rice, beans, oatmeal, noodles and canned goods. Anaheim is home to Disneyland, and a hub of [low-wage tourism jobs](#). As theme parks, hotels, restaurants and retail stores closed or drastically cut back their operations, their idled workers joined others trying to survive being suddenly without paychecks.

Over the next few months, the line of cars would grow to 6,000. "We had not seen anything like that before," said Claudia Bonilla Keller, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank, which organized the massive food distribution operation. There was, she said, a "whole new layer of people" queuing up for food, people with "nice cars and mortgages."

At the same time in rural Maine, Roxy Kai-Petrovich, who suffers from an autoimmune disorder, had already left her part-time job as a line cook at a breakfast diner in Mechanic Falls out of fear for her health.


And in Boca Raton, Florida, Linda Orlick, who lacked the savings to retire, lost a job she'd been selling jewelry at Neiman Marcus. "I was completely lost. I didn't go out of my house," he said. "It was a very, very, very sad time."

**Federal emergency spending helped make the COVID-19 recession — which caused the loss of 20 million jobs in March 2020 alone — the shortest on record.**

Facing the threat of that kind of dislocation and misery, federal lawmakers would approve massive levels of economic relief over the next two years. They pumped [\\$5.2 trillion](#) into the economy through several bills to keep families afloat while also responding to the health risks caused by the deadly virus. The most significant pieces of legislation were the \$1.8 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), enacted in March 2020, and the \$1.8 trillion American Rescue Plan, which was enacted in March 2021 as the country was rolling out its vaccination program.

The federal government's aggressive response helped restore the country to economic health, according to a broad consensus among economists. Two studies released on Feb. 24 by one by the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) (CBPP), a D.C.-based think tank, and then by [Moody's Analytics](#) — underscore the benefits of the economic aid provided by six bills enacted by Congress between March 2020 and March 2021.

The federal emergency spending helped make the COVID-19 recession — which caused the loss of 20 million jobs in March 2020 alone — the shortest on record, according to both reports. The U.S. economy's rapid recovery was due not just to the scale of the fiscal support according to the Moody's report, but also to how quickly lawmakers responded to the pandemic. The unemployment rate fell from a height of 14.8% in April down to its current 3.6% rate. It "reduced poverty, helped people access health coverage, and reduced hardship like inability to afford food or meet other basic needs," according to the CBPP study. Indeed he expanded child tax credit would briefly cut child poverty nationwide by more than a quarter before it was phased out in December.



Shoppers with Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County load boxes of groceries to be delivered to food insecure households in April 2020.

Even so, the economic and personal lives of American workers have been full of stress over the past two years, as they confronted illness and loss, unsafe work environments and the challenges of balancing work with remote schooling for their kids. The economic distress has been hardest on women and on Black and Latino workers — those with the least economic security and those concentrated in professions that suffered the greatest job loss or offer the least assurances of safety.

It's not like everything is totally rosy," noted Heidi Shierholz, president of the D.C.-based Economic Policy Institute, who also gives the federal relief effort high marks. "We still have a long way to go. So I don't want to make it seem like I'm trying to convince people who are saying in what is a difficult time that everything is great. But our recovery is much faster than what it would be if Congress hadn't acted."

The government's response, however aggressive, was hampered at every turn by the weakness of its social welfare system.

When COVID arrived, the U.S. was without the kind of [safety nets](#) seen in most advanced industrialized economies. The country has the highest percentage of people living in relative poverty among the 37 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Indeed, it was the absence of a strong social insurance system that in part motivated lawmakers to launch such a large fiscal policy response when the economy shut down.

The relief plan also had to rely on creaky state unemployment programs that had been carved of funds for decades and, in some cases, were designed to restrict people's access to benefits. The underinvestment in the unemployment system left it open for abuse by [sophisticated cybercriminals](#), and also kept people waiting weeks for unemployment checks.

**During the first year of the pandemic, more than one in four workers received at least one unemployment payment.**

Meanwhile, the Paycheck Protection Program, a forgivable loan program for small businesses, benefited large businesses more than small ones and [wealthier neighborhoods](#) more than poorer ones. It "was essentially untargeted because the United States lacked the administrative infrastructure to do otherwise," according to the [National Bureau of Economic Research](#).

During the first year of the pandemic, more than [one in four workers](#) received at least one unemployment payment, with benefits expanded to cover gig workers and the self-employed.


Nowhere was the fight to wrest those benefits from overwhelmed state agencies more intense than in Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis blamed his Republican predecessor Rick Scott for designing a system intended to [discourage people](#) from collecting unemployment insurance. Vanessa Brito, a political consultant for both Republicans and Democrats at the time COVID struck, left that week behind to help connect Floridians suddenly out of work to services.

Brito's [Facebook page](#) reads like a catalog of pandemic assistance programs and includes posts about rental assistance, mortgage assistance, utility assistance, the child tax credit and, of course, unemployment insurance. Her Facebook and Twitter accounts became a major source of information, at times attracting as many as a million views, she said.

Brito hopes the new awareness of the problems with the safety net will lead to change. "I think we're entering the phase where we can actually achieve real reform," she said. People want their unemployment system to work, they want their SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance) programs to work. They realize how hard it was."

One of the people she helped navigate Florida's unemployment insurance system was Linda Orlick, 76, who lost a job selling jewelry at Neiman Marcus during the pandemic. It took her Boca Raton resident six weeks to collect unemployment insurance from Florida's state agency. "I don't want to say that I was depressed. But I was sad all the time," said Orlick, who was also grieving the loss of her ex-husband, one of the early casualties of the pandemic. He died from COVID in a Riverdale nursing home in the Bronx on her son's birthday in May of 2020. Later, Brito would help Orlick fight off a false claim by the state employment agency that she'd been overpaid, Orlick said.

Roxy Kai-Petrovich, who is 50, lives with her husband and 9-year-old daughter in Oxford County, Maine, where one in five children live in poverty. He says hers is a "paycheck to paycheck" family.



Roxy Kai-Petrovich, right, with her husband and 9-year-old daughter.

When COVID kept her husband, a line cook, from working for two weeks in spring 2020, he applied for unemployment insurance. But it took him several months and hours waiting on hold to collect his benefits.

It wasn't our knight in shining armor," she said. Her first stimulus check was, though.

Her husband had been in an accident and their car was totaled. With her check, "We were able to get a title heater off the side of the road. And that's what we currently drive," she said, referring to their Ford Fusion. With the family living in an area with "minimal public transportation," That was a huge stress relief for us."

One of the workers hardest hit by the pandemic was [excluded](#) from most pandemic relief. There are an estimated 7 million undocumented workers in the United States, and 74% of them are essential workers, employed in fields like meat processing, agricultural work, child care and health care. Many, like Natali, a 37-year-old single mother of three, were employed in tourism when that industry became one of several particularly hard hit by the pandemic in March 2020.

He was laid off from her job as a hotel housekeeper in Beverly Hills that March. The hotel, where she had worked for nine months, did not provide her any severance. For several months, she subsisted by selling face masks that she made. "It was so hard for me," she said. Her landlord gave only a two-month break on her rent. "This country offers a lot of help, but some people don't take advantage because, like me, they are scared," said Natali, who asked that only her first name be used. Her youngest son, who is autistic, struggled with online schooling.

By the summer of 2020, Natali had found full-time work as a cook nearer her home at a restaurant that had developed a brick takeout business. She was eventually able to take advantage of a [California-funded stimulus program](#) aimed at helping undocumented immigrants. She used it to pay off bills. Natali, who lives in a one-room apartment with her three children, is upbeat about the future. "We will be fine," she said of her family.

**Nationally, the caseloads for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), an indicator of food insecurity, were 12% higher in November 2021 than they were in February 2020.**

But Orlick and Kai-Petrovich are afraid to return to their previous jobs for fear of getting sick. Orlick is looking for online work but has so far come up short. Kai-Petrovich dreads an impending expense: upgrading her septic system, which is failing.

Over the past two years, Keller, who runs Second Harvest, the food bank network in Orange County, saw the number of households her organization serves every month balloon to 40,000 in the summer of 2020 and then steadily decline. But then she saw an uptick in November as inflation began to rise. "Prior to COVID, we had been serving about 249,000 individuals [per month] through our pantry network," she said. Currently, Second Harvest is serving about 340,000 per month, a 38% increase over the number served prior to the pandemic.

Nationally, the caseloads for SNAP, another indicator of food insecurity, were 12% higher in November 2021 than they were in February 2020, according to the CBPP study.

Some economists [argue](#) that the size of the American Rescue Plan, signed by President Joe Biden in March, significantly contributed to inflation, now at a 40-year high, by jacking up consumer demand just as supply chains became stressed. But not all experts agree. On a conference call in late February, Mark Zandi, the chief economist of Moody's Analytics and an author of the recently released study, argued that "the real uncomfortably high inflation happened beginning last fall and into this year and that's related to the delta wave of the pandemic, which significantly disrupted ... global supply chains."

And he contends that a less robust response to the COVID recession would have lengthened it. "There would have been many more business failures, personal bankruptcy. There would have been a lot more scarring in the labor market," he said.

Of course, the argument that it could have been worse is slim comfort for those struggling in an economy where jobs have become less safe, inflation is on the rise, and the future still looks uncertain. Sharon Parrott, president of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, is hoping to see some of the programs that were part of the economic relief bills — like the child tax credit and rent support — included in federal legislation, known as Build Back Better, now stalled in a closely divided Congress because of opposition from two Democratic senators. The relief has "dramatically reduced hardship," she said. "We should learn from those lessons and apply them both to a compromise Build Back Better legislation and to future crises," she said.



## THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

COMMUNITY



PHOTOS BY PAUL BERSEBACH — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Volunteer Amber Gonzales packs apples at Second Harvest Food Bank, Orange County, at their facility in Irvine on Friday.

# Cold is key when goal is fresh food for people

By Lou Ponsi  
Correspondent

The Second Harvest Food Bank wanted to increase the amount of fresh produce it was distributing in the county, even starting to grow its own fruits and vegetables on a 45-acre farm.

But the next step was having enough cooling space to accommodate the added volume of produce, along with other perishables such as milk and butter, that it would be making available to Orange County's underfed residents.

Second Harvest's newly unveiled 6,200-square-foot cold storage room and two cold docks will serve the purpose, aiding in the nonprofit's mission to provide nutrition for nearly 500,000 residents who are struggling with food inse-



Claudia Keller, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank, Orange County, stands in the cold storage area that has 14,550 square feet of space.

curity. When trucks pull in, "They are pulling into a continuous cold chain," Second Harvest CEO Claudia Keller said of the food bank's ability now to preserve the freshness of its supplies. "The temperature doesn't

drop when those doors open, and that is why it is state of the art."

With the addition of the cold storage room and cold docks, Second Harvest now has 14,500 square feet of cold storage space in its Irvine warehouse,

up from 8,350 square feet.

"We are outputting about 40,000 pounds of produce every week," Keller said. "We didn't have the capacity to be able to do that in a way that delivered optimum freshness, but now we do."

Since planting began last summer, its farm harvests have been bountiful, yielding about 160,000 pounds of produce per month.

Second Harvest also is making sure its partners on the receiving end have adequate refrigeration space to store the fresh food.

"A big part of our work is making sure our network is able to absorb the produce, and eggs and milk, that we were putting out," Keller said. "So, we are going systematically through the network and assessing their

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## Storage

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cold storage and their freezer space and working with them to provide those coolers and freezers that they need."

The Orange County-based Vietnamese American Cancer Foundation, started by Vietnamese cancer survivors and physicians who saw a need to address cancer in their community, discovered homebound cancer patients needed nutritious food.

The Fountain Valley-based foundation started taking in donations

of canned food and dry goods and Second Harvest began providing it fresh produce, a vital source of nutrition for cancer patients, Executive Director Becky Nguyen said.

Soon the foundation was providing food not only for the patients but also for anyone in the community in need. And during the pandemic, the need only grew.

The small refrigerator the nonprofit had purchased for the program was no longer enough.

So Second Harvest provided the funding to install a commercial cooler large enough to store produce for the 350 monthly meals the foundation provides. "We are so very thankful," Nguyen said. "It's so great

to see another organization who saw the need of our community, especially during COVID, especially with those who are medically fragile and low-income. I appreciate Second Harvest so much, and other donors along the way."

In 2021, Second Harvest provided 69 tons of food to pantries, schools, houses of worship, senior centers and homeless shelters.

Second Harvest had hoped to have its new cooler in place by November in anticipation of its farm's first harvest, but that didn't happen because of supply chain issues.

"It's a lot longer than anticipated," Keller said, "but we are thrilled that it is done."

# Recent News

## Los Angeles Times

### Omicron wave leaves U.S. food banks scrambling for volunteers



Volunteer Ana Willis fills a bag with food items for the backpack program at Feeding America food bank in Elizabethtown, Ky., on Monday. Food banks across the country are experiencing a critical shortage of volunteers as the Omicron variant frightens people away from group activities. (Michael Chubb / Associated Press)

BY ASHRAF KHALIL | ASSOCIATED PRESS  
JAN. 22, 2022 10:44 AM PT

WASHINGTON — [Food banks](#) across the country are experiencing a critical shortage of volunteers as the Omicron variant frightens people away from their usual shifts, and companies and schools that regularly supply large groups of volunteers are canceling their participation over coronavirus fears.

The end result in many cases has been a serious increase in spending by the [food banks](#) at a time when they are already dealing with higher food costs due to inflation and supply chain issues.

"Food banks rely on volunteers. That's how we keep the costs low," said Shirley Schofield, CEO of the [Food Bank of North Alabama](#). "The work still gets done but at a much higher expense."

The extent of the problem was highlighted this past week during the national holiday for Martin Luther King Jr. Day, when many food banks have traditionally organized mass volunteer drives as part of a day of service.

Michael Altfest, director of community engagement for the [Alameda County Community Food Bank](#) in Oakland, called it "without fail, our biggest volunteer event of the year."

But many food banks chose to cancel their plans this year or continued with radically lower numbers than pre-pandemic years.

Altfest said his food bank's King Day event drew 73 people spread out over two shifts, when previous years had drawn more than 200 people with all volunteer slots booked up before New Year's Day. The food bank did not attempt an event last year.

In Tallahassee, Fla., plans for a volunteer-driven event on the holiday were abruptly canceled when all the volunteers dropped out. Schofield said executives at her food bank in Huntsville, Ala., are debating whether to cut back on their mobile food pantry distributions because they simply do not have enough volunteer-packed food boxes to hand out.

The shortage of volunteers is not universal.

Michael Manning of the [Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank in Louisiana](#) said his volunteer numbers have remained strong and his MLK Day event proceeded normally with two shifts of more than 50 people.

But several food banks have reported a similar dynamic: minimal volunteers for most of 2021, then a surge last fall through November and December before falling off a cliff in January.

Food banks generally use volunteers to sort through donations and to pack ready-made boxes of goods for distribution. It is common practice to arrange for local companies or schools to send over large groups of volunteers, but that has left the system vulnerable to those institutions pulling out all at once.

At the [Second Harvest of the Big Bend](#) food bank in Tallahassee, the volunteer numbers have remained solid through the Omicron surge. But CEO Monique Van Pelt said she was forced to cancel her MLK Day plans because the volunteers all came from a single corporate partner that "didn't think it was safe for them to gathering as a group in such tight quarters."

Jamie Sizemore had planned for 54 volunteers from three corporate groups at the [Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland food bank](#) in Elizabethtown, Ky. But two groups canceled and the third sent less than half its promised number.

"We did manage to pick up some last minute individuals for a total of 12 volunteers for the day," said Sizemore, the executive director. She added that a long-term contingent of eight assigned Kentucky National Guardsmen frequently help fill the volunteer gaps.

Even outdoor volunteer work, with seemingly less exposure risk than warehouse work, has suffered.

In Irvine, the [Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County](#) has launched an ambitious farm project on 45 acres of land provided by University of California. So far, 22 acres have been planted with cabbage and broccoli, and it's harvest time. The plan was conceived with the intention of using up to 300 volunteers per week, organized in groups from corporate partners such as Walt Disney. But most of the partnering organizations have suspended their volunteer drives amid the Omicron surge.

"It's a bummer because it's a great outdoor experience," said Claudia Keller, the food bank's CEO. "We're crossing our fingers that this is a short-term thing. We know many of the volunteers are chomping at the bit to get out there."

The sudden absence of volunteer labor forces most food banks into more expensive choices. When the farm runs short of volunteers, paid laborers are employed.

At the [Capital Area Food Bank](#) in Washington, D.C., CEO Radha Muthiah has to order truckloads of prepackaged boxes of mixed goods to distribute because there aren't enough volunteers to pack.

"When it's prepackaged, that tends to increase the price significantly," Muthiah said.

A truckload of produce on pallets costs about \$9,000, but a truckload of ready-to-distribute care packages can cost \$13,000 to \$18,000, she said.

In addition to the financial costs, some executives point out a more subtle effect.

"Volunteerism is about more than just getting the boxes packed," said Schofield, from the Alabama food bank. "It builds camaraderie and a sense of community. It's a sign of a healthy community at large."

Vince Hall, government relations officer for [Feeding America](#), which coordinates the work of more than 200 food banks, said the volunteer numbers are partially a reflection of long-term emotional fatigue and burnout. As the nation endures a second pandemic winter and the Omicron variant rolls back some of the progress people expected from the vaccine, longtime volunteers are wearing down.

"These people who are really part of the bedrock of our volunteer workforce, They've been doing this since March of 2020," Hall said. "It takes an emotional toll on people."



# Recent News

CBS NEWS

## Inflation has more Americans counting on food banks to eat

BY KATE HARRIS  
JANUARY 20, 2022, 11:46 AM • WASHINGTON



As the cost of nearly everything surges, more Americans are turning to food banks to eat. And as hunger-relief organizations face long lines of folks in need, the nonprofit groups are having to pay more for food to supplement donations.

From hurricane-ravaged Louisiana to the scenic coastal views of California's affluent Orange County, the fastest price inflation in nearly four decades is making pretty much everything people buy more expensive, and food is no exception.

Some are able to pay mortgages, rents and other fixed costs but fall short when it comes to putting food on the table.

"Inflation impacts families on a fixed budget," Claudia Keller, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County, told CBS MoneyWatch. "For a family, the most fungible part of your budget, the part you can cut back on, is food," Keller said.



Pop-up food distribution run by Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County in Anaheim, California.  
SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK OF ORANGE COUNTY

Families squeezed by higher housing and fuel costs have less – or in some cases nothing – to spend at the grocery store, where prices are 6.3% higher than they were a year ago, according to the latest inflation data.

"People who had gotten out of the line are now coming back in," said Mike Manning, president and CEO of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, which serves an 11-parish area in Louisiana. Rising gas prices make getting to jobs more of a financial burden, especially for the working poor, he noted. "It's affecting their ability to put food on the table," Manning said.

Inflation reduces the purchasing power of everyone, but it is hardest on the poor and middle class, who spend a bigger share of their income on food and other necessities, a reality being touted by the GOP ahead of midterm elections.

Rapid price hikes in low-cost goods sold by Amazon, Wal-Mart and Dollar General are "disproportionately hurting lower-income Americans," Jackie Benson, an economist who works for Republicans on the Joint Economic Committee, noted in a recent analysis.

The Capital Area Food Bank in Washington, D.C., said it can't quantify how much increased demand stems from inflation, "largely because we continue to see such an increase in demand overall due to the pandemic's economic impacts," a spokesperson emailed. "We are, however, seeing more demand for specific items from our nonprofit partners (who we supply with food, namely animal protein – chicken, beef, etc. – because it has become so much more expensive."

In Louisiana, Manning's organization is still helping people in the wake of 2021's Hurricane Ida, which disrupted life in much of its service area. "We're having to purchase the donated food we're not receiving," said Manning. The area is largely devoid of farms and poultry operations that frequently donate to community relief groups. "We're much more dependent on retail donations than a lot of food banks across the country," he explained.

Food pantries were already facing greater need due to COVID-19, with the pandemic also reducing the number of volunteers that help pick up, sort and distribute products – and in Keller's case, those who provide labor at its 45-acre produce farm.



Volunteers on farm in Irvine, California, in fall 2021.  
SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK OF ORANGE COUNTY

Further, "the rising cost of food has impacted our bottom line," said Keller of her Orange County nonprofit, which, in addition to soliciting donations from food producers and retailers, also buys food from wholesalers to distribute throughout the county. "Compounding that is our commitment to provide eggs, milk and protein, which are seeing some of the greatest impact from inflation," she added.

The Laguna Food Pantry purchases milk, produce and occasionally meat to supplement deliveries from Second Harvest, and its volunteers pick up donated food from 16 local grocery stores. The pantry orders 800 gallons of milk weekly from a wholesaler, with those per gallon prices rising 16 cents since January and 40 cents since October, according to its executive director, Anne Belyea.

The pantry is also seeing increased need. "It used to be minimum-wage workers struggling with their several part-time jobs to make ends meet, now it's truly from all walks of life," Belyea said.

In recent days, that's included two florists who ran thriving small businesses prior to the pandemic, but have now found themselves in line for food after running through their savings, Belyea said. Another looking for help: a laid-off medical writer "down to pasta, a can of beans and some cheese in the refrigerator, but not as concerned about herself as her dog," she said. "We don't normally receive pet food in our grocery rescue, but a 50-pound bag of dog food arrived the day before she came in."

Pantry volunteers sort and distribute boxes of food to lines of mostly motorists five days a week. Some aid recipients walk, bicycle or take the bus to get food. "We see a lot of neighbors pick up for one another," Belyea said.



Laguna Food Pantry drive-thru distribution in May 2020.  
SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK OF ORANGE COUNTY

Before the pandemic hit in March 2020, the Laguna pantry offered free food in "this charming little grocery-store type setting," catering to roughly 80 to 100 people a week, according to Belyea. The outfit transformed to a drive-through as a safety measure when COVID-19 hit, a model that's also helped the pantry keep up with demand, which now numbers about 150 "shoppers" a day, she added.

In 2019, the Laguna pantry has about 23,000 grocery pickups, with the number rising to more than 40,000 in 2020 and 43,000 last year.

"COVID put many more people into our food lines, many who'd never been in a food line before," Keller said. "As we come back, there's a mix of people still in precarious situations."

Still, turning to a food pantry can be an embarrassing and humbling experience that many avoid until desperate.

"Some are ashamed of being in the situation," said Manning, who notes hesitancy among clients to be interviewed by his group or appear in news stories. "They don't want friends to know."

"We hear over and over, people who donated their time, donated their money, and now they're in that line. People have said, 'I've driven by, I've driven by, and I couldn't stop. It's because of my children that I finally did,'" Belyea said.

# Recent News



## Kickass Women of O.C.: 2022 Edition



Claudia Bonilla Keller.  
PHOTO BY EMILY J. DAVIS.

### Claudia Bonilla Keller

CEO at Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County; planning commissioner in Placentia

**BONA FIDES:** Her two years at the county's largest food bank—first as chief mission officer and as CEO since January—started right as COVID-19 arrived to drive unprecedented need among the county's most vulnerable residents. Second Harvest's pantry network continues to feed more than 490,000 people monthly. Keller is the daughter of immigrants to Los Angeles who worked hard to provide a life of what she calls modest but relatively privileged means. A self-described "health, education, and social justice advocate," she moved in 2005 from a successful career in the retail clothing industry to nonprofits. At Second Harvest, the main mission is addressing food insecurity, the daily uncertainty of a next meal. Keller also aims to ensure that what people eat is nutritious, whether she's negotiating the bulk price of fresh eggs or helping plan the next harvest at a farm in Irvine.

**IN HER WORDS:** "I guess I've refined my worldview. I always believed that food is a human right, but now I believe food is a necessity for human advancement, however one defines advancement. To me, that can change the course of an individual, that can change the course of a community."



# Thank You

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