

# Second Harvest honored as Nonprofit of the Year

BY ANDREW TURNER

Dozens of volunteers had risen with the sun to begin working in the cabbage fields.

It's a common sight at Harvest Solutions Farm, due north of the Great Park in Irvine. Eager hands — young and old — strap on gloves ready to make a difference against food insecurity.

The farm sits on 45 acres of land, a partnership between Second Harvest Food Bank, the University of California South Coast Research and Extension Center, and Solutions for Urban Agriculture.

Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County and its volunteers received recognition for their collective efforts on Saturday, when Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Irvine) visited the farm to present a proclamation naming it her district's Nonprofit of the Year.

"It makes me very proud to represent such an incredible community," Petrie-Norris said of seeing the crowd that showed up to serve on Saturday. "We call this 'Harvesting Hope,' but it does give me hope. I think we're living in a moment right now where there is a lot of negativity and a lot of cynicism, and moments like this, when you see people coming together to serve our community, to connect with one another, that's really special."

Petrie-Norris, who is nearing the completion of her third term in office, added that she had held four volunteer events over the past year at the farm, helping to harvest more than 25,000 pounds of produce.

Nominations were solicited from the community for the hon-



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**ASSEMBLYWOMAN COTTIE** Petrie-Norris presents a proclamation on Saturday, June 15, recognizing Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County as her district's Nonprofit of the Year.

or.

"Harvest Solutions has provided 5.4 million [in] a little over two years, but the Food Bank is distributing close to 37 million pounds, so the need remains quite high, even this far out from the pandemic," said Claudia Bonilla Keller, the chief executive of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County. "Right now, the need is particularly high due to inflation, the end of COVID-era benefits, and the cost of housing. We all know it's more expensive to live in California, it's more expensive to live in Orange County, and a lot of folks need help accessing food."

Second Harvest Food Bank sends produce to more than 300 points of distribution, Bonilla Keller said.



Courtesy of Salma Elshakre

**VOLUNTEERS WORK** in the fields at Harvest Solutions Farm in Irvine. Food bank officials say the need for food assistance remains high.

ler said. The organization also buys food, takes donations and rescues items from grocery stores that might otherwise be thrown away.

At Harvest Solutions Farm in Irvine, the organization attempts to turn 1 acre a week.

"We're lucky to live in this climate," Bonilla Keller added. "There's never not a good time to plant, so we are basically 50 weeks a year. We close at the end of the year for Christmas, and one week in the summer to give our staff a break, but the crops don't wait, so if we have to pay people to come and harvest it, we will."

Many of the volunteers wore green shirts displaying the words, "Harvesting Hope."

"We're getting close to 9,000 volunteers that have come through here in the whole time that the farm has been open, which is coming close to three years," Bonilla Keller said. "We have a lot of repeats. We have a lot of regulars that are out here two or three days a week that have become kind of a de facto part of the leadership of the staff. ... We also enjoy the labor of ... over 20,000 a year at our distribution center here in Irvine."

Past nonprofit honorees in the 73rd Assembly District during Petrie-Norris' time in office have included Save Our Youth (2019), Families Forward (2020), Pacific Marine Mammal Center (2021), Alzheimer's Orange County (2022) and Trellis (2023).

Those interested in volunteering at Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County can visit [fedo-c.org](http://fedo-c.org).

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