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SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK OF ORANGE COUNTY BREAKS GROUND ON NEW PROCESSING ROOM WITH $1.1 MILLION LEAD GIFT FROM J.W. AND SANDRA MITCHELL FOUNDATION

New Processing Room will expand the types of nutritious food Second Harvest can accept and is expected to add 500,000 pounds to annual fresh produce distribution

IRVINE, Calif. (September 22, 2026) – With one in eight Orange County residents experiencing food insecurity, Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County today broke ground on a new temperature-controlled Processing Room within its Irvine Distribution Center. The project is moving forward with a $1,113,011 lead gift from the J.W. and Sandra Mitchell Foundation.

The new space will allow Second Harvest to safely receive and process a broader range of nutritious and perishable food that requires specialized handling, potentially including produce transported on ice and root vegetables that need to be cleaned before storage and distribution. With the added capacity, Second Harvest expects to distribute an additional 500,000 pounds of fresh produce annually.

Further Expanding the Volume and Variety of Nutritious Food

The 2,934-square-foot Processing Room will close a critical gap in Second Harvest's infrastructure for fresh and perishable food. While the Food Bank has significantly expanded its refrigerated storage and cold dock capacity over the years, some temperature-sensitive foods still require specialized receiving, inspection, cleaning or processing before they can be safely stored and distributed.

The new 50-degree Processing Room will provide a dedicated environment for that work, giving Second Harvest a food-handling capability that remains uncommon among food banks nationwide.

"When nearly 400,000 people in Orange County are experiencing food insecurity, we have to pursue every opportunity to bring more nutritious food into our community," said Claudia Bonilla Keller, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County. "The J.W. and Sandra Mitchell Foundation's extraordinary investment is allowing us to take an important step forward today. Most importantly, this Processing Room will allow us to convert previously inaccessible food into consistent, nutritious support for the community members we serve, expanding both the volume and variety of fresh produce reaching our network."

Once operational, the Processing Room is expected to increase Second Harvest's annual fresh produce distribution by approximately 500,000 pounds and create opportunities for partnerships with 10 new food donors. The controlled environment will also support Second Harvest's existing food safety and compliance standards while improving efficiency by providing dedicated space for the inspection and handling of temperature-sensitive food.

Food Insecurity Continues to Rise Across Orange County

The groundbreaking comes as food insecurity continues to rise across Orange County. According to the latest *Map the Meal Gap* data from Feeding America, 387,370 Orange County residents—one in eight—experienced food insecurity in 2024 (the most recent year of data available), a 6% increase from the prior year. Among children, the increase was even greater, rising 27% to 112,420 children, or approximately one in six.

A Lead Investment in Long-Term Capacity

The J.W. and Sandra Mitchell Foundation's $1,113,011 lead gift helped make the Sept. 22nd groundbreaking possible. The investment follows a visit by trustees to Second Harvest's Distribution Center and Harvest Solutions Farm (a partnership with Solutions for Urban Agriculture and the University of California South Coast Research & Extension Center) where they saw firsthand the scale of the Food Bank's operations and the reach of its community partner network.

"Seeing Second Harvest's operations gave us a clear sense of both the scale of food insecurity in Orange County and the opportunity this project represents," said **Cecilia Goodman, a trustee of the** J.W. and Sandra Mitchell Foundation. "We are proud to help Second Harvest through this investment that will strengthen its infrastructure for years to come and allow more nutritious food to reach community members throughout Orange County."

The build out of the Processing Room is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. The total project cost is approximately $1.8 million, including construction and three years of operating support. Thanks to the generosity of lead donor J.W. and Sandra Mitchell Foundation, an impactful gift from the Roberto Foundation, and other supporters, the campaign has made significant progress toward this goal—though the campaign has not yet reached its full funding goal, and additional support is needed to close the gap.

Community members who would like to help close the gap can make a financial contribution, volunteer at the organization's Distribution Center or farms, host a virtual food drive or learn other ways to get involved by visiting feedoc.org/get-involved.

About Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County

At Second Harvest Food Bank, our vision is an Orange County with food and nutritional security for all. In collaboration with our partners, we provide dignified, equitable and consistent access to nutritious food, creating a foundation for community health. Our partner network includes schools, after-school programs, colleges and universities, senior centers, houses of worship, shelters for the unhoused, soup kitchens and transitional housing facilities, with sites at almost 400 locations throughout the county. In fiscal year 2025-2026, we distributed 43.3 million pounds of food to an average of 453,271* neighbors in need each month (duplicated). Approximately 39,000 pounds of produce are harvested each week on up to 40 acres at Harvest Solutions Farm in Irvine, a collaboration with Solutions for Urban Agriculture and the University of California South Coast Research & Extension Center begun in August 2021. Second Harvest is a member of the Feeding America network. For more information, visit feedoc.org.

**Duplicated. Those seeking food assistance often visit a pantry more than once per month.*

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