

Our Voice: Feed the hungry

Written by / *The Desert Sun Editorial Board*
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END-HUNGER TELETHON

CBS-Local 2 will host the third annual telethon to raise money for the FIND Food Bank from 5 to 11 p.m. Friday at the Agua Caliente Casino & Spa in Rancho Mirage. To volunteer to answer phones, call (760) 775-3663.

HOW TO HELP

Call (760) 775-3663, visit findfoodbank.org/donate or send a check to P.O. Box 10080, Indio, CA. 92202

SNEAK PEEK VIDEO

Christy Porter, executive director of Hidden Harvest, talks about the new strategy to distribute food in the Coachella Valley. See the interview today at mydesert.com/video and read the Q&A in Monday's Desert Sun.

Food insecurity is a growing problem throughout the world and particularly in the Coachella Valley. Fortunately, the valley has strong organizations dedicated to making sure nobody here goes hungry — at least, not for long.

This year, the Desert Healthcare District has stepped forward to make the operation to feed more than 80,000 people a month more efficient. In January, the district awarded grants of \$629,471 to the FIND (Food in Need of Distribution) Food Bank and \$211,676 to Hidden Harvest to increase consumption of fresh produce, creating our own Access of Healthy Food Project.

FIND expects to distribute more than 3 million pounds of fresh produce this year. To help with that effort, FIND is taking over distribution of produce so that Hidden Harvest can focus on its mission to glean fruits and vegetables left behind by growers in our agricultural fields. More than 100 organizations help hand out food.

The district is placing a stronger emphasis of the “collective impact” of the groups it supports.

“We see that there’s a great value as a government agency being able to bring together our grantees, other outside agencies and other government agencies around particular health care issues,” Kathy Greco, the district’s executive director, told The Desert Sun editorial board. “We want to find ways to really make a difference — a collective impact.”

Food insecurity

Another great resource is the Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC), which tracks health trends throughout eastern Riverside County. The center conducts a community survey every three years. Its 2007 survey found that 4 percent of valley residents needed food assistance. By 2010, that number had more than doubled, with more than 30,000 residents saying they needed help. Nearly 17 percent of respondents said they couldn’t get help.

HARC’s third triennial survey is now under way.

The 2007 survey also found that 55.4 percent of valley adults were overweight or obese. By 2010, the number climbed to 56.6 percent. Given those numbers, the emphasis on fresh produce is essential.

Statewide, about one of every nine residents are food insecure — that is, at least once a year they could not afford to eat. That adds up to nearly 4 million Californians. Nationwide, 50 million Americans are food insecure.

In 2011, state farmers donated 120 million pounds of produce to California food banks, up from 100 million the year before. California Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross set a goal of increasing food bank donations to 200 million pounds by 2015. Farmers get a 10 percent state tax credit for their donations, thanks to legislation enacted in 2011.

FINDing a way

The local FIND Food Bank was established 30 years ago in a garage. Today, it operates in a Costco-size warehouse in Indio — one of 200 FIND Food Banks across the country. It distributes more than 8 million pounds of food from five major sources:

- It is the U.S. Department of Agriculture distributor for Riverside County.
- It gets donations from companies such as Kraft Nabisco, Cargill, General Mills and ConAgra.
- It visits local grocery stores daily to collect food that is close to the expiration date, packed in damaged containers or overstocked.
- It buys large quantities of food at wholesale prices, working with farmers.
- And it distributes produce collected by Hidden Harvest.

“Food insecurity is growing faster than any social service can keep up with,” Lisa Houston, CEO of the FIND Food Bank, told The Desert Sun editorial board. “And the food banks are not keeping up to those demands.”

As part of Hunger Action Month in April, CBS-Local 2 will host the third annual telethon to raise money for the food bank. FIND also is participating in the 16th annual Feinstein Challenge to earn a share of a \$1 million challenge grant.

Every \$1 donated to the FIND Food Bank provides seven meals.

Give what you can

The Desert Sun applauds all the hard work being done by FIND Food Bank, Hidden Harvest and all the other organizations joining the cause.

We’re impressed with the leadership of the Desert Healthcare District to strengthen the collective impact of the overall mission.

We hope the Access to Healthy Food project will convince residents to choose nutritious alternatives to cheap-but-fattening fast food.

And we urge those of you who can help will give all you can.