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SECOND HARVEST SEES ALARMING RISE IN THE NEED FOR FOOD

Number of people receiving food is increasing along with local poverty rates

SAN JOSE, Calif., December 7, 2015 – Recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that the number of people living in poverty in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties has increased despite the booming local economy. That could be why Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties is seeing an alarming year-over-year increase in the local need for food assistance.

In September and October (the most recent data available) the number of people who receive food from Second Harvest jumped a troubling 6 percent over the same time last year, reaching 257,785 in October.

“The rise in need is very concerning,” said Kathy Jackson, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank. “We had hoped and expected that the numbers would drop significantly as the economy improved, but that hasn’t happened. The recent data shows that more people in our two-county region are living in poverty. We are seeing that reflected in the rising number of children, families, and seniors who need our help every month.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau data, the poverty rate in Santa Clara County is 9.9 percent, up from 8.6 percent. San Mateo County saw a smaller increase, from 7.2 percent to 7.6 percent.

That correlates with the rise in need Second Harvest has experienced. Before the recent spike, the average number of people Second Harvest serves every month reached a high of 253,089 in 2013, reflecting a 55-percent jump from the period just prior to the Great Recession. After a slight decline, the numbers began rising again in March.

Jackson said one reason for the increase is the skyrocketing cost of living – particularly housing – in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. The average rent in Silicon Valley tops \$2,500 a month, up 12 percent over last year, which leaves less money for food each month.

“So even if you are making more money than you were a year or two ago, if your rent has increased \$300 or \$400 a month, that may have been your food budget,” Jackson said. “We already knew that the high cost of living meant more people need to rely on the Food Bank as a regular source of food. Data from a recent hunger study shows that Second Harvest’s clients get food an average of 13 times a year compared to eight times for food banks in the rest of the country.”

Second Harvest is in the middle of its holiday drive, its largest fundraising campaign of the year. The Food Bank needs to raise \$15 million during the holiday season to continue to meet the unprecedented need for food.

“These latest numbers mean it’s more important than ever that we meet our goal this holiday season,” Jackson said. “Our hungry neighbors are counting on us for food every month. Second Harvest raises nearly half our revenues during the holidays, so it’s a critical campaign. But with all the good news about the economy, we are concerned that the community won’t realize there are actually more people struggling to feed their families.”

Second Harvest Food Bank partners with nearly 330 nonprofit agencies to provide food at more than 700 sites throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo counties – including pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, and community centers. Second Harvest is one of only a few food banks in the nation that does not charge its partners for the food it provides, so it depends on donations.

To support Second Harvest’s holiday campaign, visit www.shfb.org or call 866-234-3663. Anyone who needs food should call Second Harvest’s multilingual Food Connection hotline at 800-984-3663.

Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties is the trusted leader dedicated to ending local hunger. Since its inception in 1974, Second Harvest has become one of the largest food banks in the nation, providing food to one quarter of a million people each month. The Food Bank mobilizes individuals, companies and community partners to connect people to the nutritious food they need. More than half the food distributed is fresh produce. In fact, Second Harvest provides more fresh fruits and vegetables than any other food bank in the United States. Second Harvest also plays a leading role in promoting federal nutrition programs and educating families on how to make healthier food choices. Visit www.SHFB.org to get involved.