



Contact:

Caitlin Kerk
408-266-8866 ext. 368
408-858-9208 cell

DRY JANUARY AND RECENT WARM WEATHER RAISE DROUGHT CONCERNS FOR SECOND HARVEST

Food Bank distributes more fresh produce than any other food bank in the nation

SAN JOSE, Calif., February 18, 2015 – With a record-dry January and the snowpack at 25 percent of average, concerns this may be another drought year in California could spell trouble for Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties and the families who depend on it for food. More than half the food Second Harvest provides is fresh produce. In fact, Second Harvest distributes more fresh fruits and vegetables than any other food bank in the United States.

“Despite the recent rain, water supplies are low and it could impact our ability to provide food to our hungry neighbors,” said Kathy Jackson, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties. “Second Harvest depends on the abundance of fresh produce we receive from California growers. If that flow of fresh fruits and vegetables slows down, we will have to find other sources. Nearly 250,000 people are depending on Second Harvest every month to put food on the table.”

According to a statement released by the California Department of Water Resources when it announced snowpack levels last month: “The absence of precipitation in January, normally California’s wettest month, has combined with warmer-than-average temperatures to produce a dismally meager snowpack for a drought-stricken state. In normal years, the snowpack supplies about 30 percent of California’s water needs.”

Last year, Second Harvest distributed nearly 30 million pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables. That produce comes through a partnership between growers and the California Association of Food Banks.

“The produce we receive through this partnership may have cosmetic issues or be close to the end of its shelf life, but it’s perfectly fresh and nutritious,” Jackson said. “If the drought

continues, and yields are drastically reduced, stores will have to stock their shelves with some of that imperfect produce and there won't be much left over for food banks."

Much of the produce received through this partnership is grown in the Central Valley, which the National Drought Mitigation Center classifies as being in an "exceptional drought," the most extreme category.

Fewer Row Crops

Growers have said they won't be planting some of their row crops this year because they need to allocate water to trees and vines. That means a possible shortage of crops like cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, watermelon, onions and tomatoes. It could also mean higher food prices for both Second Harvest and the families it serves.

"The families we serve are already struggling with the rising cost of living," Jackson said. "Last year's hunger study showed that two-thirds of our clients purchase cheap, unhealthy foods to stretch their dollars. They know it's unhealthy, but it's what they can afford. That's why the fresh produce Second Harvest provides is so critical."

It's too early to tell the real impact, but another year of drought could cost Second Harvest millions of dollars if it has to purchase fruits and vegetables or pay to ship them from out of state.

"We met our holiday fundraising goal this year, which is great news," Jackson added. "We are grateful for the community's generosity. But it won't cover the cost of purchasing what we were getting for pennies on the pound, and that's what will happen if California farmers can't grow enough fruits and vegetables."

More than half of the nearly 250,000 people who receive food each month are children and seniors. To ensure that everyone has access to the nutritious food they need to thrive right in their own neighborhood, Second Harvest Food Bank partners with more than 330 nonprofit agencies to provide food at more than 770 sites throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, including pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, and community centers.

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 nearly 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.

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