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Too Hungry to Learn

Summit Examines How to Nourish the Next Generation of Innovators and Entrepreneurs

Hunger Index Shows Only Slight Decline in Meal Gap

SAN JOSE and SANTA CLARA, Calif., March 15, 2016 – One in three kids struggles with hunger in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. Studies show that kids who don't get enough nutritious food to eat have a harder time concentrating and doing well in school. Unfortunately, the inability to perform due to hunger often translates into lower academic achievement, compromised job opportunities, and a diminished future. Making sure kids can eat could help to close the academic achievement gap that exists between less-advantaged kids and their wealthier counterparts.

That was the premise of today's Hunger Action Summit, an annual forum designed to spark conversation and inspire action to end local hunger. Organized by Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties and Santa Clara University, the summit is sponsored by Santa Clara University's Food and Agribusiness Institute, part of the Leavey School of Business, and held at the university's Locatelli Center.

The summit, titled "Too Hungry to Learn," brought together education leaders who are focused on closing the academic achievement gap and anti-hunger advocates and food policy experts. Celebrated author, educator and [Chef Ann Cooper](#), known as the "Renegade Lunch Lady," also spoke to the group. She has been on a mission to make school meals healthier.

"With all the local energy around STEM education, where is the recognition that nobody can do math well on an empty stomach?" said Kathy Jackson, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank. "Hunger needs a seat at the table when we talk about improving educational outcomes and closing the academic achievement gap. Education is the key to earning a decent living, but hunger is depriving kids of a good education. Too many local kids aren't getting enough to eat, and it's hurting them academically and threatening the future viability of our workforce."

Fueling Future Innovators

Summit speakers addressed what it will take to ensure that the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs has access to the nutritious food they need to succeed academically. Discussions focused on expanding current efforts to feed kids and their families as well as increasing the use of federally

funded food-assistance programs such as the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and CalFresh (food stamps).

Second Harvest Food Bank has sharpened its focus on partnering with schools in recent years, launching its Tailored School Solutions initiative in 2015. Through this initiative, Second Harvest works with high-need school districts to offer wraparound services to kids and their families, which could include a school pantry, nutrition education, and outreach services to connect families to food-assistance programs, including CalFresh. Second Harvest provides food and other services to kids and their families at 75 schools in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

Second Harvest has also stepped up its efforts to make sure kids get enough to eat during the summer, a particularly challenging time for families because kids don't have access to the free and reduced-price meals they receive at school. Second Harvest is partnering with community groups and libraries to expand its summer pilot project that provides meals to kids and their parents or adult caregivers. Second Harvest pays for the adult meals while the federal Summer Food Service Program covers the kids' meals. Adults are more likely to bring their kids when they can also eat, and it provides a more positive experience for kids.

But the reality is these and other efforts to feed local families are not keeping pace with the need for food. Second Harvest serves about a quarter of a million people every month – including 85,000 kids – and that number is rising in spite of the booming economy. Even those who are earning more money than they did during the Great Recession are finding that an increasing percentage of their income is needed just to pay for housing and other expenses, leaving little left over for food.

“The high cost of housing is making it difficult for low to moderate-income families and individuals to pay their bills and put food on the table,” Jackson said. “Second Harvest continues to distribute more and more food every year, but as the Hunger Index shows, it's doing very little to close the meal gap. That's why we are looking beyond the amount of physical food we can distribute to focus on public-private partnerships and community collaborations that will increase access to nutritious food.”

Hunger Index Unchanged Despite Economy

Despite the soaring economy, the 2014 Hunger Index was virtually unchanged, with a meal gap of 175 million meals in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties compared to 176 million meals in 2013. Released during the summit every year, the Hunger Index measures the gap between how many meals are needed for low-income residents in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties to eat three meals a day and how many meals they purchased on their own or acquired through federal food-assistance programs such as CalFresh or local organizations like Second Harvest. The difference is known as the “meal gap.”

For the purposes of the Hunger Index, a household earning less than \$50,000 annually is considered low-income. It takes more than \$82,000 per year for a family of four to pay its bills and put food on the table in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties (Insight Center for Community Economic Development).

According to the 2014 Hunger Index, the number of low-income households declined from 256,000 in 2013 to 226,000 in 2014. As a result, the number of estimated meals needed by low-income households declined, from 813.5 million meals in 2013 to 733.4 million meals in 2014. The number of meals they purchased also went down, from 417.1 in 2013 to 339.5 in 2014 – far short of what was needed. Second Harvest increased the amount of food it provides, from 43 million meals in 2013 to 46 million meals in

2014, but total food assistance decreased overall, from 220.6 million meals in 2013 to 218.8 million meals in 2014.

“The Hunger Index hardly changed at all despite the robust economy and the significant decline in the number of households earning less than \$50,000,” said S. Andrew Starbird, director of the My Own Business Institute at Santa Clara University and co-creator of the Hunger Index. “The cost of living increased, including the cost of a meal, so low-income households were able to purchase much less food than they needed. Second Harvest increased its food assistance considerably, but could not compensate for the reduction in federal and state programs.”

The drop in food assistance from government programs may be due in part to the reduced number of households that qualify. However, the decline in households earning less than \$50,000 didn't have a huge impact on the meal gap because many of these households still don't earn enough to put food on the table.

“The bottom line is it's not getting any easier for these families to feed their kids, and it's getting harder for many of them,” Jackson said. “We know how critical good nutrition is for proper development, so we have to pull every lever available to us to connect kids and their families to healthy food.”

The [Hunger Action Summit program](#) provides more information about the presentations.

About Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties

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.

About Santa Clara University

Santa Clara University, a comprehensive Jesuit, Catholic university located 40 miles south of San Francisco in California's Silicon Valley, offers its more than 8,800 students rigorous undergraduate curricula in arts and sciences, business, theology, and engineering, plus master's and law degrees and engineering Ph.D.s. Distinguished nationally by one of the highest graduation rates among all U.S. master's universities, California's oldest operating higher-education institution demonstrates faith-inspired values of ethics and social justice. For more information, see www.scu.edu.

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