



Memorandum

TO: NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES
AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**SUBJECT: FOOD AND NECESSITIES
DISTRIBUTION & FOOD
INSECURITY AMONG YOUTH,
FAMILIES AND SENIORS**

DATE: September 27, 2021

Approved

Date

10/6/21

RECOMMENDATION

Accept this update on the assessment of food insecurity and overview of City programs and partnerships addressing food insecurity among youth, families and seniors as part of the approved City Roadmap.

BACKGROUND

According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, “food insecurity” is defined as “the disruption of food intake or eating patterns because of a lack of money or other resources.” Food insecurity has proven to have a disproportionate impact on at-risk populations; including seniors, single parents, low income families, communities of color, homeless, and/or the medically at risk. Research conducted in 2017¹ by Dr. Drew Starbird demonstrated that Santa Clara County saw an increase in the number of vulnerable households and the need for food as a result of the 2008 Great Recession. The shortfall in meals provided and meals needed peaked in 2010, reflecting a 50% gap in the number of meals provided versus the number of meals needed. Over the decade of recovery that followed, Santa Clara County’s most vulnerable populations never fully recovered from the lasting impacts of the Great Recession and the food insecurity gap stood at 23.4% prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, Santa Clara County issued an emergency public health order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The City of San José took control of countywide feeding and necessities distribution efforts on behalf of Santa Clara County to support the response. This work was led by the Food and Necessities Branch within the Operations Section of the San José Emergency

¹ <https://www.scu.edu/media/leavy-school-of-business/cfie/Hunger-Index-2017-Summary-FINAL-color.pdf>

Operations Center (EOC). Upon forming the Food and Necessities Branch, the team performed a Countywide Assessment to understand the developing needs of the community and to deliver on the responsibility to feed at-risk populations across Santa Clara County. At that time, the team identified that Santa Clara County was facing five major pressures impacting food security and resiliency, resulting in a rapidly increasing meal gap for at-risk populations. In response to these pressures and food insecurity throughout the region doubling, the Food and Necessities branch set the following objectives to guide its work:

- Feed our most vulnerable;
- Maximize Existing Food Networks; and
- Scale for a Widespread Food Crisis.

By October 2020, the Food and Necessities Branch scaled quarterly efforts from a pre-COVID-19 scope of 32,000 meals through the Senior Nutrition Program and the St. James Homeless Meals Distribution program, to over 33,000,000 meals with over 30 partners. Historical data shows that peak food insecurity occurred during the winter of 2020, as COVID-19 cases surged and Public Health Orders were issued to Shelter-in-Place (which limits the number of options for people in need), compounded by decreased household purchasing power due to winter related expenses. By March 2021, the number of COVID-19 cases began to subside resulting in the loosening of Public Health Orders. In parallel, Federal and State entities began to introduce more sustainable programs for at-risk populations with continued need; this resulted in a slow, downward trend on the dependence of the City of San José's food emergency response efforts.

As the City of San José pivoted from emergency response to recovery, the Food and Necessities branch transitioned to the Administration Services Division of the Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services department. The team continues to monitor and track the ongoing food needs of the community, as well as support community-based organizations to provide meals to our most vulnerable residents and advocate for sound food policy. This memorandum serves to provide a summary of the pressures impacting our vulnerable populations, an update on the City's Food and Necessities efforts, food program initiatives across federal, state, and regional entities, and to further describe our next steps in supporting our at-risk populations.

ANALYSIS

Summary of the Pressures Impacting our Vulnerable Residents

The COVID-19 pandemic and public safety response placed unprecedented pressure on communities of color, low income families and children, seniors, medically at risk, and homeless populations. These vulnerable populations often suffer from conditions that create poverty and food insecurity such as wage gaps, under or low employment, and high cost of living. In March 2020, City staff and private sector partners worked together to connect with community-based food network providers, school districts, and senior nutrition programs to assess the capacity of

the existing food safety net. Through this effort, the team identified several pressures that were rapidly increasing food insecurity throughout the county for our most vulnerable residents.

These pressures include:

- 1. Rapid decrease in individual and family purchasing power due employment disruption.** This was especially true for low-income families and seniors, gig economy workers, and the newly unemployed and led to spikes in demand for food pantries and prepared meal providers as a result of business closures and job losses.
- 2. Strained supply chains resulting in shortages and rising costs of goods.** These additional costs are initiated through business-to-business vendor transactions but are ultimately passed down to consumers. Additionally, consumer behaviors such as panic buying and hoarding have led to shortages at stores for basic goods. These logistical pressures drive up prices and reduce availability for items.
- 3. Decentralized food provider network leading to a lack of coordination to connect vulnerable populations with sustainable solutions.** The decentralized nature of the food provider network leads to inconsistencies in terminology, data measurements, and strategies which inhibit the ability to prescribe the right solutions for the challenges at hand.

These pressures continue to be prevalent within our communities and have proven to have lasting impacts as we pivot from emergency response to recovery. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to surge with new and evolving variants, it is yet to be fully understood what lasting impacts this will have on our communities and what the new food insecurity baseline will be throughout our City.

Update on the City's Food and Necessities Efforts

As of August 2021, the City of San José has supported the distribution of over 180 million meals to vulnerable populations since the beginning of the pandemic. All efforts center around providing meals to the most vulnerable and impacted residents, specifically: communities of color, low income families and children, seniors, medically at risk, and homeless populations. At peak, this effort included contributions from over 30 different food network partners across more than 10 programs. Below is a summarized table of the 7 most impactful programs and the number of meals provided since the onset of the pandemic.

Program	# of Meals
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley	143,841,967
School Sites	18,862,184
Senior Nutrition	11,283,758
Off the Grid	1,679,968
Great Plates Delivered	720,000

Senior Meals on Wheels	475,815
Homeless, Isolation, Quarantine	2,478,427
Total	179,342,119

The summarized data indicates that of the 180 million meals served from March 2020 to present, 99% are served through these partnerships and programs. Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, School Sites, and Off the Grid focus on serving low income families/children and COVID-19 impacted residents. Senior Nutrition, Great Plates Delivered, and Senior Meals on Wheels programs all focus on serving seniors throughout our community. The Homeless, Isolation, and Quarantine program focused on serving medically at-risk, COVID-19-19 positive, and homeless residents.

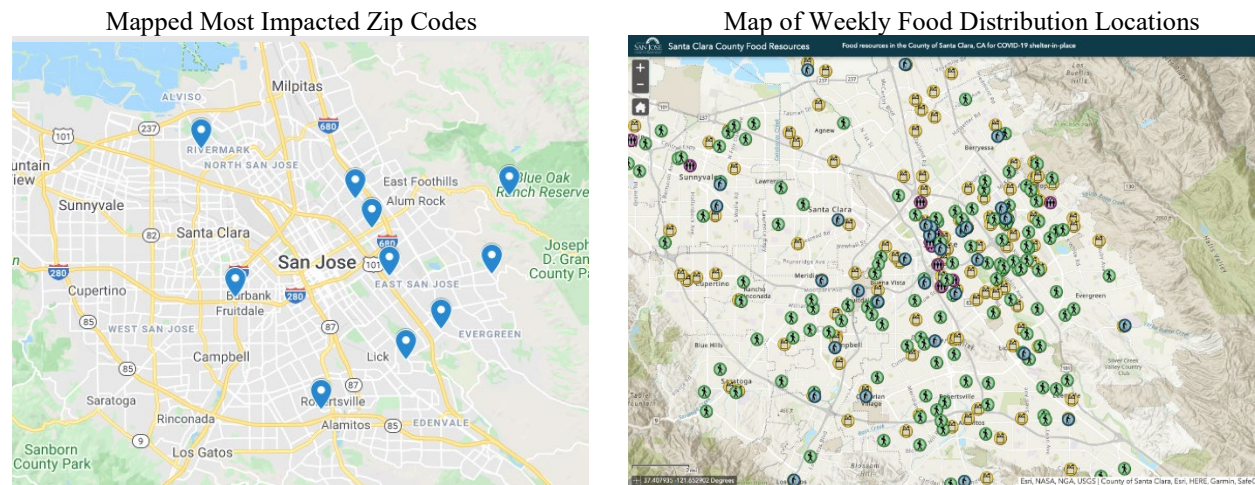
Response in COVID-19 Impacted and Vulnerable Zip Codes

For each program and partnership, the Food and Necessities Team collected and tracked data in order to ensure that the response was focused on areas that had the most need. By tracking meal data via zip codes, the team was able to monitor this situation and reallocate or deploy additional resources based off the needs of the community. Population data was incorporated to understand the intensity of food need to help identify the most COVID-19 impacted and vulnerable zip codes in San José over time. After a year and a half of meal distribution and data collection, the team has been able to identify the following 10 zip codes as most impacted. These zip codes are listed in the table below along with a description of their general location and the population of that zip code.

Zip Code	Description	Population
95116	Mayfair/Alum Rock	55,825
95111	South/Coyote Creek	61,830
95122	East	56,121
95127	Alum Rock	66,256
95148	East/Evergreen	48,273
95121	East/Evergreen	37,531
95133	Alum Rock	28,565
95118	South	32,421
95128	Fruitdale	36,975
95054	Alviso	24,524

These 10 zip codes account for approximately 448,000 residents out of a total San José population of 1,021,000 residents (43.8%). Of note, these 10 zip codes have historically been composed of populations that are low income and communities of color, which as stated previously, are indicators that have been traditionally associated with increased food insecurity. The City's Economic Recovery branch has echoed similar findings and demonstrated that these 10 zip codes also headed the top of their lists in terms of their indicators for economically impacted, which is another indicator for increased food insecurity. Given these findings, the team continues to prioritize food distribution options to be densely located within these most

impacted zip codes. Below is a map of the location of the most impacted zip codes alongside a map of the weekly food distribution locations to demonstrate this effort.



Additionally, the Food and Necessities team was able to map the number of meals provided through four efforts to these zip codes. The four programs that were mapped to zip codes are School Sites, Senior Nutrition, Off the Grid and Great Plates Delivered. Table 1 below demonstrates the number of meals provided to each zip code from each program, as well as the total number of meals provided across these 4 programs.

Table 1: Delivered Meals by Program and Zip Code

Zip Code	School Site	Senior Nutrition	Off the Grid	Great Plates Delivered	Total Meals
95116	1,043,300	178,749	128,581	22,610	1,373,240
95111	1,172,919	-	115,070	31,932	1,319,921
95122	1,115,637	-	112,339	26,288	1,254,264
95127	803,494	-	153,126	-	956,620
95148	786,432	-	75,086	21,044	882,562
95121	731,331	-	63,611	28,414	823,356
95133	678,789	-	41,601	19,090	739,480
95118	537,429	-	30,401	9,410	577,240
95128	359,233	40,828	43,138	10,708	453,907
95054	317,759	-	-	6,104	323,863

“Recovery and a Better Normal” Strategy

As part of the transition from pandemic response to recovery, the Food and Necessities team needed to plan and execute a compassionate, paced, and consistent ramp down of the food insecurity program. This “Recovery and a Better Normal” strategy seeks to connect our emergency response community partners and program participants with long term, sustainable programs over time while reserving the ability to deploy additional resources in the face of changing conditions. The first iteration of this strategy aimed to reduce the number of supported programs and partners from 24 to 6; which allows the City to focus continued support around reimbursable programs and programs of last resort (safety net for vulnerable residents). By working together with the other 18 partners, we were able to perform one-on-one assessments with program participants and enroll them in more sustainable programs like CalFresh for their continued food needs. According to feedback from some of these partners, participants with continued need varied between 25-33% of program participants. For these 18 programs and partners, the last round of funding concluded in July 2021 and staff are continuing to track the food network to ensure that the ecosystem can adjust accordingly without levels of food insecurity increasing among at-risk populations.

Table 2 below illustrates the remaining 6 programs/partners along with the target population served. As noted previously, these partners make up 98% of the total effort and staff will continue to work with these partners over the duration of fiscal year 2021-2022 to “right size” the response with the needs of the community.

Table 2: Program Partners and Target Population

Program/Partner	Target Population Served
Second Harvest Food Boxing	Low income families
Meals on Wheels	Seniors
Senior Nutrition Program	Seniors
Homeless, Isolation, Quarantine Meals	Low Income/Medically at Risk
Off The Grid	Low Income/Medically at Risk
Catholic Charities/Loaves and Fishes	Low income families

Food Program Initiatives Across Federal, State and Regional Entities

A positive outcome as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the recognition on all levels of government that food insecurity needs to be addressed more aggressively. By providing funding and opportunities for food networks, governments have avoided a widespread food crisis within the City of San José. Although this work is continuing to develop, the move to provide vulnerable residents with a food safety net and to develop long-term, sustainable programs for those with continued need has been a leap in the right direction.

Federal Programs

The federal government funds several food related programs through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) under Food and Nutrition Services (FNS). FNS works to end hunger and obesity through the administration of 15 federal assistance programs including Women Infants and Children (WIC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and school meals. In March 2021, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act authorized emergency allotments to SNAP households to help address temporary food needs during the pandemic. In parallel, the American Rescue Plan added an additional fruit and vegetable allotment for WIC participants. Both of these additional allotments are expected to expire on September 30, 2021 and the team will be monitoring the need across the food network to see if there is a rapid increase from food distribution partners as a result. Participants will continue to receive their SNAP and WIC benefits; however, the additional allotments will cease at that time.

State Programs

In California, two programs provide significant benefits for low income families and children: CalFresh and Universal School Meals. The state of California has continued to provide additional, targeted funding for CalFresh and to make benefits easy to obtain for residents in need. In July 2021, California made history as the first state to permanently adopt Universal School Meals. This legislation, known as the Free School Meals Act for All 2021, means that all students K-12 will receive free meals, regardless of income.

Additionally, the Food and Necessities team is tracking SB 464, “Food For All Act”, which seeks to provide a safety net for undocumented and migrant residents that are not eligible for federally funded programs due to their immigration status. Passage on this bill would have tremendous impacts for communities of color in addressing unmet food needs.

Regional Efforts

Second Harvest Food Bank has traditionally provided most of the food efforts throughout Santa Clara County. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need to have a regional food policy that includes stakeholders across jurisdictions and programs to monitor and recommend action in the event of increased food insecurity. Santa Clara County has taken an active role in initiating and leading the Regional Food Advisory Group, of which the City of San José is an active member.

Next Steps in Supporting At-Risk Populations

The City of San José continues to provide a valuable safety net for vulnerable residents and will likely need to continue the current level of effort through the winter holidays. Historical data demonstrates that food insecurity levels-off in the summer and peaks in the winter when households incur additional living expenses. Additionally, the recent surge in variant cases of coronavirus are causing many businesses to reverse course as the situation continues to evolve.

To get through the winter holiday season, there may be a need to exercise the ability to bring additional partners in to cover for the increased need for meals and groceries should coronavirus surge cause additional economic and food related impacts to our residents.

Heading into the beginning of 2022, staff anticipates food insecurity levels to follow a similar pattern as experienced in Q3 and Q4 2021, where food needs decrease steadily approaching the summer at which time staff hopes that the compassionate, paced, and consistent ramp down approach can achieve an ultimate conclusion. The team will continue to advocate for sound food policies and programmatic funding that works to address food insecurity at its core, rather than focusing only on treating the symptoms.

CONCLUSION

Although food insecurity appears to have leveled-off from pandemic peaks, our community and at-risk populations still have a long way to go before they can be considered to have recovered from the dramatic and unprecedented impacts of COVID-19. The City continues to track and monitor on the ground needs and efforts while continuing to demonstrate leadership in food policy and response. As the City continues to advance its "Recovery and a Better Normal" strategy, staff will work to extend opportunities to greater food security for our community partners and at-risk populations. The City's transition also reflects our priority to provide a safety net for those in need. Over the remainder of the year, staff will advocate for sustainable food policy while working with partners to pivot from emergency response to recovery and ultimately to make real progress on food insecurity and its impacts to families, children, and seniors.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

No additional follow-up actions with Council are expected at this time. Staff will monitor the impact of these actions and report any issues to the Council as needed.

CLIMATE SMART SAN JOSE

The recommendation in this memo has no effect on Climate Smart San José energy, water, or mobility goals.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This memorandum will be posted on the City's website for the September NSE Committee agenda.

COORDINATION

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION/INPUT

No commission recommendation or input is associated with this action.

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP17-008, General Procedure and Policy Making resulting in no changes to the physical environment.

/s/
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Director of Parks, Recreation, and
Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact CJ Ryan, Administrative Officer, at cj.ryan@sanjoseca.gov.