

# Farm to Family

Connecting Growers  
and Packers with  
California Food Banks



## Solving a Food Distribution Problem

**H**unger is often referred to as a distribution problem rather than a supply problem. Farmers in the United States grow enough food to feed our population. However, the rising costs to transport surplus food to needy areas, coupled with adequate storage and distribution networks, leave many areas in our country with a **food deficit**.

In California, millions of residents have difficulty providing food for their families and themselves. With housing, transportation, and other costs rising steadily, family food budgets are being severely pinched. Families are increasingly turning to their local food banks, charities, and congregations to help make up the shortfall. Ironically, the amount of salvaged goods donated by manufacturers and retailers (including dented cans, mislabeled jars, and soon-to-expire dry goods) to our state's food banks is dramatically decreased over the last several years. This is due to two main factors — improved manufacturing technology and increased opportunities to sell food at secondary markets. Food banks are struggling to find new sources of food to replace these lost donations.

The answer to this supply shortfall is right in our own backyard. **California produces more than half of the nation's total of fruits, nuts and vegetables.** For



some commodities and during certain times of this year, there is a deluge of unusable products. Growers and packers are forced to dispose of surplus, and cosmetically blemished produce. Discarded produce can be costly, time consuming, and sometimes result in negative publicity, especially in a state where millions go hungry every year.

The solution is *Farm to Family*, a program designed to connect our growers and packers with our state's established food bank network. The Program, administered by the California Association of Food Banks and modeled after a successful two-year pilot program, encompass the state's **over 40 food banks** and reaches both urban and rural parts of the state.



## Pilot Program Demonstrates that Distribution is Possible

In 1999, innovative members of California's stone fruit industry joined with the Coalition of Northern California Second Harvest Food Banks to establish the **Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Initiative**. Packers agreed to make the best culls of non-marketable fruit available to the program. The Coalition purchased 300 plastic bins and established a transportation system to pick up the fruit at the packing facility and delivery it to each food bank, every week, in perfect condition. Within two years, the program provided more than **750,000 pounds of fresh fruit** to Northern California families during the packing season. The program demonstrated value to growers, packers, food banks, hunger relief agencies, and families. This Initiative paved the way for CAFB's *Farm to Family* statewide produce distribution network.

## Moving Fresh Produce Statewide

Produce presents more challenges than traditional canned and dried goods because of its short shelf life and because it is labor-intensive to move and distribute. But its availability in California and the West, and its nutritional value, are driving a new push to tap in to this abundant resource.

*Farm to Family* works with growers and packers to minimize wasted product by connecting them with California's over 40 food banks. The agricultural community has a long **history of donating surplus commodities** to local food banks. But in some areas, excess supply — especially during peak season — often overwhelms the ability

of local food banks to take full advantage of the surplus. Ironically, when growers and packers have the greatest opportunity to help, only a small percentage of surplus products make their way in to the hands of California's needy residents.

The CAFB has established a logistics network to capture surplus produce from one growing region and distribute it to other regions that can use the donations. When multiple food banks around the state are aggregated, the entire surplus is put to good use. Of course, **local needs are given priority** to benefit surrounding communities and reduce unnecessary transportation costs. Donors are protected from liability by the nation's Good Samaritan laws and their efforts are rewarded with **tax breaks and positive public relations**.

Currently stone fruit, oranges, watermelons, honeydew melons, apples, onions, and potatoes are supplied by packers in the Central Valley and distributed to food banks throughout the state. For larger food banks with well-established community networks, produce is delivered to food banks for distribution to community agencies. These agencies distribute produce and other food to low-income families. In rural and remote locations, produce is distributed through tailgate distributions. Low-income residents are able to receive healthy food and are introduced to new California-grown products. In total, 9 million pounds of fruits and vegetables were delivered to people in need in the program's first year.

The program goal is to distribute an additional 3 million pounds of food in 2006. With your help, we have the ability and the vision to provide fruits and vegetables to the over 40 food banks, 5000 charities and congregations, and 2 million Californians we serve each month.



## Step-by-Step Guide to Donating Fresh Produce

- 1 Interested grower or packer contacts the *Farm to Family* manager at (866) 321-4435.
- 2 The *Farm to Family* manager and the donor company discuss site-specific details including available quantities, produce bin needs, and schedules.
- 3 The donor company receives a single point of contact with *Farm to Family* to ensure clear and effective communications.
- 4 Program administrators deliver Macro Plastic 24-A-S produce bins to donor company sites. Outside dimensions are 47.125" long by 47.125" side by 28.125" deep.
- 5 Truckers under contract with the program pick up full bins with culled product on an agreed-upon schedule and drop off new, empty bins.
- 6 Local food banks receive full bins based on need and availability of local distribution infrastructure. We will also gladly accept already packaged product and product in totes.
- 7 California families receive fresh, highly nutritious food to supplement their diets.
- 8 Donor companies reduce their un-marketable produce, help California's hungry families, and can receive a tax deduction for their donation.
- 9 Everyone wins!



## The Importance of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

**S**cientific research shows that fruits and vegetables are powerful defenders of our health, and scientists now agree that fruits and vegetables should be the foundation of a healthy diet. Eating fruits and vegetables promotes good health and reduces the risk of many cancers, high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and other chronic diseases.

In 2005, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture jointly released the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The Dietary Guidelines provide science-based advice to promote health and to reduce risk for major chronic disease through diet and physical activity. One of the key recommendations of the new guidelines is for Americans to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed each day. Two cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables per day are recommended for a typical 2,000-calorie diet. Another key recommendation is for Americans to choose a variety of fruits and vegetables each day. In particular, select from all five vegetable subgroups (dark green, orange, legumes, starchy vegetables, and other vegetables) several times a week.

Source: National Cancer Institute, Produce for Better Health Foundation, and the 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

### CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS

CAFB was founded in 1995 to promote collaboration in response to emerging social, economic and legislative challenges impacting hungry people throughout California. Our mission is to provide a unified voice among food banks to maximize their ability to build a well-nourished California. To accomplish that mission, our membership focuses on supporting food banks, increasing the visibility of food banking, sharing food resources and influencing public policy.

California's efficient food bank network distributes over 200 million pounds of food each year to people in need. Statewide, over 40 food banks provide 5,000 non-profit agencies with food. These agencies in turn distribute food directly to over 2 million hungry families and individuals. More than 25,000 volunteers support the food bank network.

