

# County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency



353 West Julian Street  
San Jose, California 95110-2335

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**DATE:** June 24, 2020

**TO:** Honorable Board of Supervisors  
Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

**FROM:** Robert Menicocci, Agency Director *RM*

**SUBJECT:** **Off-Agenda Report - Second Harvest Food Bank Staffing and Possible Strategic Investments**

## **Background**

At the June 2, 2020 Board Meeting, Supervisor Chavez requested additional information on how the County can support Second Harvest of Silicon Valley through personnel and/or strategic investments. The Social Services Agency consulted the Santa Clara County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Second Harvest Food Bank in preparing this report.

## **Service Delivery Changes During Initial Period of Shelter-in-Place**

Since the beginning of the Shelter-in-Place in mid-March, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) established regular communication with Second Harvest to ensure operational communication and situational awareness. The communication was built on already-established partnerships. Second Harvest also worked with the EOC of the City of San Jose.

Second Harvest found that some pre-existing food distribution sites were closed, so they started ten large emergency drive-through food distribution sites in Santa Clara County serving 500 to 1,200 people every week or every other week. These drive-through sites were centered on areas of need in Santa Clara County. Second Harvest also trained their partners on how to convert their sites to socially distanced drive-throughs so there are now over 100 drive-throughs operating across both Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties.

Calls to the Second Harvest Food Connection hotline increased to 1,200 per day at the peak. Second Harvest expanded from four phone lines to 15 and move their phone system into the 'cloud'. They have maintained 11 of those phone lines through today though call volume has returned to closer to normal at around 200 calls per day.

Second Harvest realized immediately they would need more warehouse space and through a partnership with Cisco and Prologis, were able to get an additional warehouse to use until September at no charge. They also procured additional refrigerated space in Watsonville.

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County Executive: Jeffrey V. Smith

Home delivery became a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second Harvest started a home delivery program in partnership with Catholic Charities, Cathedral of Faith, other organizations, and volunteers. This partnership now provides home delivered groceries to over 5,000 households in Santa Clara County.

### **Update – Community Need, Staffing Needs, and Warehouse Space**

**Community Need:** Second Harvest is now serving over 500,000 people each month (up from 270,000 in February 2020) and the amount of food distributed in May is nearly double what was provided in February – over 12 million pounds of food. Second Harvest is trying to determine how best to sustain this level of response as they are seeing no decline in need.

**Staffing:** As the pandemic unfolded, Second Harvest experienced difficulty filling many of its volunteer positions at a time when the need was skyrocketing. In response to this statewide trend, Governor Newsom announced he was deploying the National Guard to support certain food banks, including Second Harvest of Silicon Valley. The National Guard arrived at Second Harvest on March 24, 2020 and at the peak, 150 National Guard were deployed at the food bank locations – boxing food and assisting on the Food Connection Hotline, with capabilities in multiple languages.

The National Guard was pulled out briefly during civil unrest in early June and were replaced for a few days with State Guard. The National Guard is back at Second Harvest, at about 50% of their original strength. The State expects additional drawdowns with all National Guard deployments ending by mid-August. The State wants to ensure an orderly transition but provides primarily volunteer resources – Second Harvest volunteers are now strong enough to staff the Cypress Center in North San José, but Second Harvest’s other warehouses are not suitable for volunteers so they will need to be staffed with other resources.

As the lead agency for emergency services in San José, the City of San José EOC fulfilled several requests for staffing at Second Harvest and continues to provide support until a longer-term transition plan is established. The City of San José has provided about 20 disaster service workers to box food and conduct data entry. Some of these employees will have to return to their regular jobs soon. The City is preparing to execute a contract to give Second Harvest access to the San Jose Conservation Corps for the next two months. It is expected that Second Harvest will need this additional staffing as long as the need remains at this level and COVID-19 requires most of the food to be boxed to ensure safe social distancing.

**Warehouse Space:** Second Harvest’s current warehouses do not have the space to accommodate all the food they are now providing. They have a temporary warehouse until September but are interested in partnering with the County to understand if there may be opportunities for the County to assist in providing a larger facility for Second Harvest. Second Harvest is now dealing with three warehouses in Santa Clara County and one in San Mateo County, and the logistics are daunting. They would like to explore alternatives that may allow a more consolidated approach to their work. They have both short-term and longer-term needs:

- Short-term: Conditioned warehouse space (preferably near the Cypress facility on 1<sup>st</sup> Street in San Jose) and additional refrigeration capabilities (preferably at same warehouse).
- Longer-term: County support in acquiring a permanent, preferably consolidated facility to ensure the ability to feed the community.

The County is in continuing discussion with partners regarding investments needed to support the long-term infrastructure for food access, and staff are currently working to address the Board's June 2, 2020 referral related to creating a comprehensive system-wide Food, Agriculture, and Health Access Initiative. Administration will report back at the August 25, 2020 Board of Supervisors meeting with a workplan and timeline for the creation of such a comprehensive and system-wide initiative.

cc: Miguel Márquez, Chief Operating Officer  
James R. Williams, County Counsel  
Megan Doyle, Clerk of the Board  
Chief Board Aides