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# BAY AREA FOOD BANKS



**Alameda County Community Food Bank • Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano  
Redwood Empire (Sonoma County) Food Bank • San Francisco Food Bank  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties**

## **Bay Area food banks immersed in ‘hunger epidemic’ *Seven counties rally around May 9 Letter Carriers Drive***

At Bay Area food banks, foreboding statistics are being amassed by the pallet.

Calls to the food hotline at Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties have skyrocketed by 54 percent since the outset of 2009. A similar line at the Alameda County Food Bank has doubled its business in just two years. In January, USDA distribution sites in eastern Contra Costa County doled out 81 percent more food than the same month a year earlier. Sonoma County’s Redwood Empire Food Bank has seen a 22% surge in demand in 2009. Meanwhile, the San Francisco Food Bank is scrambling to fill the void left by a 75 percent drop in manufacturer’s donations of one of its staple items: cereal.

“The evidence is overwhelming,” said Alameda County Community Food Bank executive director Suzan Bateson. “We’ve crossed the threshold that separates hard times from a hunger epidemic.”

Bateson and her colleagues throughout the Bay Area are pinning their hopes of relief on the biggest one-day food drive in the nation – the **17<sup>th</sup> Annual National Association of Letter Carriers’ (NALC) Drive on the morning of Saturday, May 9.**

“This drive comes at a critical time,” said Keith Flagler, interim CEO for Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, the Bay Area’s largest-volume food bank. “Donations tend to drop off after the holidays, while the food banks see an increase in requests from parents of school-aged children. Couple this with an inundation of economic victims – people who never before needed help from a food bank – and it makes for a very precarious situation.”

In 2008, the NALC drive raised 650,000 pounds of food for the seven Bay Area county food banks that operate under the banner of Feeding America (formerly America’s Second Harvest), the national association of food banks headquartered in Chicago. Despite an abysmal economy - and a three-year trend of shrinking donations to the drive - the 7,500 letter carriers participating in the Bay Area have set their sights on collecting 775,000 pounds on May 9. That would provide approximately 600,000 meals.

“We’re in urgent need of the incredible support we receive from the NALC drive this year more than ever,” said Larry Sly, executive editor of the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. “We’ve never seen demand on this level.”

The format, which Redwood Empire Food Bank executive director David Goodman describes as “the easiest method ever devised to donate food,” hasn’t changed since the inaugural drive in 1993. Postal patrons simply leave a box or bag of non-perishable food by their home or business mailbox on the morning of May 9. The letter carriers do the rest, transporting the donated food to collection bins at one of 140 Bay Area post offices. From there, the food is trucked to the local county’s food bank, where it is weighed, sorted and distributed to a vast network of food pantries, soup kitchens and community agencies.

“This drive is my favorite workday of the year,” said Linda James, who coordinates the Sonoma County collection effort. “It gives carriers a chance to help our community, our customers – those people in need that we see every day.”

“We’re part of the fiber of the neighborhoods,” said Danny Laffan, president of NALC Branch 193 in San Jose. “On a daily basis, we see and feel the impact these tough economic times have on our customers. More families than ever are being affected. All of our drives are important; this year’s is critical.”

In late January, Postmaster General John E. Potter warned Congress that service cuts may be necessary, telling a Senate subcommittee that the postal service may be forced to cut mail delivery from six to five days a week.

“We’re not just observers to all the economic turmoil; these are hard times for the postal services, as well,” said San Lorenzo letter carrier Dennis Stecz, who organizes the Alameda County collection effort and has participated in every NALC Drive. “All things considered, this is undoubtedly the most important drive we’ve ever conducted.”

“Everybody wins in the Letter Carriers Drive,” added San Francisco drive organizer Kim Troung. “Our customers get a warm feeling from donating food, we letter carriers are proud to make such an impact on our communities and the people that receive this food - many of whom we see every day - are in dire need of it.”

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