

THE REPORTER

Food Bank offers healthy food choices

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It's no great secret that the way we Americans eat is killing us. According to the Center for Disease Control, 35 percent of adults 21 years of age and older were obese in 2012. The percentage of adults who are overweight (which includes those who are obese) was 69 percent. The frightening fact is that even our children are obese, with 12 percent to 18 percent classified as obese. Diabetes is also a significant problem nationwide with over \$28 billion being spent on diabetes treatment in California in 2012.

Fast food, huge portions and enormous amounts of sugar lead to obesity and diabetes. If we want to address these health issues, people will need to change the way they eat. How to do this is a complicated question. There are those who would like to mandate what people eat. Some want to begin with individuals who receive CalFresh (food stamp) benefits. New York City tried to ban the use of these funds to buy high-sugar drinks, but ran into resistance from soda manufacturers and some civil libertarians. The New York City plan to control what food recipients purchase was overruled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Instead of mandating, public health advocates want to generate change by making healthy food more economical and attractive. Along with programs that distribute fresh produce, the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano provides access to recipes and a nutrition educator. We are also able to distribute coupons to the low-income individuals we serve so they can purchase fresh produce at farmers markets.

The California Market Match Consortium was created to distribute funds obtained from the California Department of Food and Agriculture and private donors. We let the people we are helping enroll in the CalFresh program know that they can obtain Market Match coupons to use at the farmers markets. As a bonus, people receive \$5 worth of bonus scrip for every \$10 they spend at the farmers market. This program can grow through a \$100 million allocation in the 2014 federal Farm Bill and a \$2.75 million per year (for five years) Market Match Nutrition Incentive fund included in a California Assembly bill.

The Food Bank also distributes farmers market coupons to low-income senior citizens through our Senior Food Program. Funds from the California Department of Food and Agriculture provide us with \$20 booklets of coupons that seniors can use at their local farmers market. More than 1,600 of these coupon books go to the Senior Food program participants, helping them obtain healthy produce on a continuing basis. The Food Bank sees its responsibility as helping those who want to change what they eat. We will distribute more than ten million pounds of fresh produce this year.

People want to eat well and they want to be healthy. The Food Bank wants to make that possible for the people we serve.

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