

# Mobile food pantry a blessing for Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano

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Oranges, glorious oranges were abundant Tuesday, the juicy mounds tumbling off a conveyor belt in Fairfield and into the hands of visitors.

The onslaught of citrus was just a taste of the produce now available to needy local residents, compliments of a grant from Kraft Foods that paid for a refrigerated truck for the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano counties.

"The idea is easy on, easy off," said Larry Sly, the food bank's executive director, indicating the overflowing produce bins stacked aboard the truck at the organization's headquarters on Courage Drive. Bagged apples, oranges, potatoes and broccoli were stacked to the brim in their own compartments. "They come in, grab bags of food, and go."

Each participating family can grab well-filled bags of anything that touches their fancy. The offerings are seasonal, and can include pears, kiwi, celery, melons, onions and more. Tomatoes have made an appearance, too.

"A lot of people we serve are working folks. They just happen to make \$10 an hour. That's \$21,000 a year," he continued. "They are walking away with 20-30 pounds of groceries. That can mean the difference of sending a kid on a field trip or not."

An estimated 132,000 clients in Contra Costa and Solano receive aid from the food bank each month, officials have said. To better serve them, the Community Produce Program was created last year.

Buying produce for pennies on the pound through the California Association of Food Banks, the local group packs them onto their refrigerated trucks -- now a team of two -- and heads out into the communities to distribute them.

"It really gives them the opportunity to have a farmer's market in a truck," added Charles C. Eckman, a vice president with Kraft Foods. The vehicle, he said, "can go to places where a lot of people don't have access" to fresh fruits and vegetables.

The new truck went for its inaugural run on Monday, stopping at the Salvation Army Center in Suisun City. It was the busiest kickoff ever, Sly said, with 159 households served, translating to about 647 people.

With this truck, more Solano clients will receive aid. There will be seven distribution sites in Vallejo, where they're headed to today, five in the Fairfield-Suisun areas, two in Vacaville and one each in Dixon and Rio Vista.

The program will be evaluated in 2014 and any necessary changes made.

"It's just amazing," Sly emphasized. "It makes a difference. It really does."

Continued community support is appreciated.

To learn more or to volunteer, go online to [foodbankccs.org](http://foodbankccs.org).