

New program gives more needy families access to fresh produce



The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano has unveiled the Harvest to Home program, which brings produce and bread to low-income apartment complexes whose residents are unable to access Food Bank distributions.

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Local low-income families will soon find another way to access healthy nourishment, thanks to another program recently unveiled by the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano.

For several years now the Food Bank has sent out a mobile truck, via the Community Produce Program, to numerous, well-attended locations in less affluent neighborhoods in both counties. At these sites,

needy families are sent home with boxes and bags of fresh seasonal produce ranging from tomatoes and celery to apples, oranges and pears.

Though successful, the mobile produce program doesn't reach all of those in need.

"We learned that residents in nearby neighborhoods qualified to receive food from the Community Produce Program, but simply could not participate because they didn't have transportation to the distributions, were at work during distribution times or were medically home-bound," advised Lisa Sherrill, Food Bank spokeswoman.

So, officials began thinking — was there another way to extend a helping hand to needy families living near the distribution sites?

That, officials said, is where the Harvest to Home program comes in.

"It delivers groceries to low-income apartment complexes," Sherrill said.

Through the program, twice a month, fresh produce and bread are brought to the complexes. The items are laid out in a community room and laid out farmers-market style so residents can come and choose what they want or need.

"We picked the current sites for Harvest to Home by reaching out to complexes with large numbers of units who were interested in partnering," advised Caitlin Sly, the Food Bank's programs director. "We also had some complexes that reached out to us because they wanted to become an agency or a Community Produce Program site. We still hope to add two more sites — one more in Solano and one in East Contra Costa County."

The program is expected to start at Vallejo and Dixon locations sometime this year and is currently operating in Richmond, Pinole, Hercules and Concord.

Thus far, the program has been successful. In December alone, more than 900 people were served, officials said.

"The truckloads of food that come into our warehouses can only make a difference if we can successfully get it out to our community members in need," added Larry Sly, the Food Bank's executive director. "Our job is to not only procure food, but also to make it accessible."