

THE FOOD BANK COALITION OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

INTRODUCTION

The Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County (“Food Bank”) annually submits a formal request to the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors for grant funding. When approved by the Board, this request becomes a formal agreement between the County and the Food Bank for the fiscal year beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30. The grant for fiscal year 2007-2008 was \$95,000.



Food Bank Workers Unloading Truck

The Food Bank receives donations and obtains food from thousands of individuals and from major food markets. Some of the food that must be purchased is acquired wherever it can be purchased at the least cost. Produce comes to the Food Bank from across the state of California as well as from county farmers and is distributed free to numerous supporting nonprofit agencies.

The Food Bank must purchase food on the open market to fill gaps when donated food is not sufficient. When this occurs the nonprofit agencies receiving the food are asked to help cover the cost by paying a small value added fee of 20%. The savings to the agencies are still considerable considering the retail cost of food.

The Food Bank operates out of two warehouses, one in Paso Robles (12,000 sq. ft) and one in Oceano (5,000 sq. ft). The Paso Robles warehouse is owned by the Food Bank, its purchase made possible through grants. The warehouse in Oceano is rented, in a state of disrepair and is too small for the amount of food required to be stored to adequately accommodate the nonprofit agencies in the southern area of San Luis Obispo County.

The Food Bank owns and operates 17 vehicles, maintains a staff of 15 full and part-time personnel, and has 350 volunteer workers.

ORIGIN/PURPOSE

This Grand Jury investigation was in response to a complaint from a concerned citizen that the Food Bank's funds were not being used in accordance with their stated mission and purposes. While the Grand Jury determined that the allegations in the complaint were unfounded, the Jury thought that it would be beneficial to share the information that was gathered regarding the role of the Food Bank in San Luis Obispo County.

Even though The Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County is not a governmental agency, the Grand Jury has the authority to investigate because it receives funding from the County Board of Supervisors.

METHOD

TOURS:

- Food Bank facility in Oceano
- Food Bank facility in Paso Robles
- Food Bank weekly distribution to needy in Arroyo Grande

INTERVIEWS:

- Manager of Oceano Facility
- Executive Director of the SLO Food Bank Coalition
- Chairman of the Board of the SLO Food Bank Coalition

DOCUMENTATION REVIEWS:

- Organization Chart
- 2006 and 2007 Income/Expense Statement, & Balance Sheet
- 2006 and 2007 Operations Food Totals (Comparison of food received and distributed)
- 2006 and 2007 Program Comparisons (Program food distributed)
- 2007/2008 SLO County Board of Supervisors Agreement with Food Bank (Grant)
- 2008 Budget, YTD Income/Expense Statement & Balance Sheet
- Executive Director's Goals 2008

NARRATIVE

Food Distribution:

Funds received from the County and individual donations are used to increase the direct distribution of food to low-income individuals. In 2007, the food bank provided 2,887,127 pounds of food to county residents. This represents a total value of \$4,272,948 (at the America's Second Harvest Rate of \$1.48 per pound). These totals do not include other Food Bank Programs such as the Back Pack Program in public schools, the USDA distribution sites around the county and the summer Free Produce Distributions.

The Food Bank is always looking for ways to help low-income people throughout the county. The Food Bank can best distribute food by working with agencies that are formed specifically to help people in need. The Food Bank works with over 150 nonprofit agencies including shelters, kitchens, a variety of pantries, recovery homes, rehabilitation facilities, and homes that help children at risk. The mission of the Food Bank is to provide low-cost food so that these agencies can serve more people without having to initiate their own public food drives. The Food Bank is now obtaining perishable food (produce & processed) from the major food chain stores and local farmers. This perishable food creates unique challenges in trying to keep it fresh and edible before delivery to the nonprofit agencies. The Food Bank, because it had the resources, acquired refrigeration equipment which was donated to the agencies so that they can maintain the food's freshness, allowing them time to distribute it to those in need.



Volunteers Bagging Food for Distribution

The Food Bank also serves those in need through direct distribution in a variety of programs:

- Senior Brown Bag Program
- USDA Commodities Program (for families)
- Back Pack Program (for elementary school children)
- Harvest Bag Program (for people of all ages)

The Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo is dedicated to providing nutritious food to agencies that serve low-income households. Each of the programs sponsored by the Food Bank offers a unique source of nutritious food to those citizens in need.

THE FOOD STAMP OUTREACH PROGRAM:

The County grant funds are also used by the Food Bank to increase enrollment in the Food Stamp Program. These programs are for eligible persons in the County who need the Food Stamps to help provide good nutrition for them and their family. SLO County low-income food stamp eligible population is estimated to be 40,000; approximately 6,200 are children.

The Food Stamp Outreach Program is designed to streamline and facilitate the Food Stamp Application process for eligible households. A full time employee of the Food Bank is dedicated to visiting food distribution sites throughout the county and assisting clients with their application for food stamps. Each client who chooses to apply for food stamps will be given a list of the documents they need prior to their interview. The Food Bank's staff is available to prospective clients evenings and weekends, to prescreen them by phone for food stamp eligibility based on the latest eligibility standards in the county. The goal is to encourage participation among working families, elderly, and individuals who are not able to make it to the Department of Social Services (DSS) during regular business hours. Once the client completes the application the Food Bank helps submit the application to the appropriate DSS.

The Food Bank staff works with anti-hunger political action groups to cut the red tape in the legislation that restricts eligibility to needy families. The staff annually attends advocacy training events that help shape future policy related to the Food Stamp Program and other hunger programs.

CONCLUSIONS

The Grand Jury reviewed a substantial amount of information as noted above. This review leads us to the conclusion that the Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County is contributing to the health and welfare of needy citizens within the county of San Luis Obispo.

COMMENDATION

The Food Bank Coalition, its staff and the many dedicated volunteers are to be commended for the excellent job they are doing to help alleviate hunger that is prevalent within a significant portion of the low income population in San Luis Obispo County.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

No responses to this report are required.