If you frequent the Central Coast, you’ve likely stopped for fuel or snacks in Kettleman City. It’s the perfect halfway point with fast food restaurants galore and entertainment for kids as you inch closer to that ocean breeze. On the other side of the highway, however, residents of the city are faced with the effects of extreme drought, contaminated water, and a poverty rate of nearly 30%. This dichotomy of populations often masks the desperate need for help with access to fresh produce, clean water, and housing assistance.

Recently, as we analyzed data from our Groceries2Go Program, we realized that over 2,500 people in Kings County are making grocery pick-up appointments and driving to either Fresno or Tulare counties to receive a box of non-perishables and produce every two weeks. We knew it was time to expand this beloved program into Kings County and that Kettleman City was the perfect place to do it.

We are excited to announce that with the financial support of CalViva Health, we will be launching a new Groceries2Go site this fall in Kettleman City, in partnership with Kings Community Action Organization. Residents from Avenal, Hanford, Lemoore, Corcoran, Armona, Stratford and more can make appointments at a more centralized location through KCAO’s Family Resource Center.

“CalViva Health is proud to partner on this vital resource in the Kettleman community,” said Jeffrey Nkansah, CEO. “Food distribution is a link between healthy choices and a healthy life for our members.”

We are excited about this opportunity and thankful to CalViva Health and KCAO for helping us launch this satellite site in a community that will greatly benefit from Groceries2Go.
As we round out 2022, I am reflecting on the whirlwind of a year we’ve had. While the pandemic and its ripple effects lessened, we faced new challenges like inventory shortages, inflation, skyrocketing gas prices, and a formula shortage. These events meant continued disruptions in the lives of the neighbors we serve, who were already making tough choices.

Rising costs at the grocery store left people needing help to supplement their weekly grocery budget, gas prices guzzled up any extra income, and the formula shortage left families of young children feeling anxious and desperate. And while this new economic reality impacted our operations, I am proud to say that the strides we’ve made as an organization over the past several years, thanks to you, meant that we were (and are) better prepared to combat them with strategic partnerships and holistic programming.

Over the past several years, Central California Food Bank has focused on creating programs in conjunction with partners who serve the diversity of neighbors in need. We aren’t just serving men, women, and children — we are serving vulnerable seniors, pregnant women, college students, parents of young children, farmworkers, and neighbors with specific health challenges. We’ve also expanded accessibility to food programs through weekend, evening, and appointment-based distributions. These partnerships allow us to connect with a wide range of food-insecure populations quickly, should new challenges arise.

Your support has allowed us to deepen and strengthen our scope of work and reach populations who need specific help. Because of your generosity, we have been able to provide comprehensive meals through these tailored programs to serve our neighbors well-rounded nutritional options that may otherwise not be available to them. We sincerely appreciate the time and resources you’ve invested to allow us to serve our neighbors holistically and thoughtfully. We look forward to continuing these programs in 2023 and beyond and I know we can with you by our side.

Natalie Caples
co-CEO

This past summer, we announced our BIPOC Small Farmer Engagement Initiative, which connects local farmers to their neighbors through culturally relevant foods. One of our partners in this new program is the Ruiz family, who are Nopal farmers in Modesto. This cactus, native to Mexico, has a slightly tart flavor similar to green beans and is high in fiber, riboflavin, and vitamins A, C, K, & B6. If you are not familiar with nopales, they serve as a great addition to salads, scrambled eggs, and smoothies. Many people utilize nopales in their diets to help regulate blood sugar levels. Salvador Ruiz struggles with diabetes himself, so he knows and appreciates the health benefits of nopales firsthand.

Since adding nopales to our menu, our member partners have been excited to distribute them at Neighborhood Markets — especially those that serve the Latino community. If you want to try nopales for the first time, simply sauté chopped nopales (stripped of spines and cleaned) with olive oil, garlic, red onion, jalapenos, and tomatoes. Top with salt and pepper and serve as a side dish to your protein of choice.

In case you missed it, we partner with local Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables and distributing them right back to the geographical location in which they are grown.

THE SIDE DISH
by Natalie Caples, co-CEO

NOPALES FOR NEIGHBORS
Central California Food Bank is proud to announce we are a recipient of the Albertsons Foundation Nourishing Neighbors grant. Did you know that within the service area of our School Pantry Program (Fresno and Tulare Counties), the average child food insecurity rate is **23.55%**? This is significantly higher than California’s statewide food hardship rate of **13%**.

This startling statistic fuels our focus on child hunger programs, and funds from this grant will be used to provide breakfast foods to over 40,000 children through our School Pantry Program. In addition to other nonperishable goods, each box includes food to create more than eight breakfast meals for students and their families.

Our School Pantry Program aims to meet the food needs of low-income, at-risk children in Fresno and Tulare who face difficulty in accessing enough food regularly, and whose families’ food security may have been negatively impacted by the economic fallout of the pandemic.

We are grateful for this grant from the Albertsons Foundation and are excited to ensure children have access to breakfast foods so they can start their days with a full stomach — ready to learn, play, and succeed.

Grocery budgets are often tight, but even more so during the holidays. Kids are home from school eating more frequently, and the holidays present a time where expectations of full tables with tons of food are high. For many families, cooking up a big meal just isn’t in the budget. That is why, with your help, our volunteers build over **10,000 Holiday Meal Boxes** each year. These boxes will be distributed to **160 sites across the five counties** we serve and will include holiday staples such as whole chickens, mashed potatoes, green beans, stuffing, gravy, rice, beans, and more! **When you make a gift today, you share the delight of a holiday meal for families facing hunger.**

**NOURISHING NEIGHBORS WITH A HEALTHY BREAKFAST**

Happy School Pantry Recipients!
FILLING IN THE FOOD GAP WHEN SCHOOL IS OUT

During school breaks, when the National School Lunch Program is paused, many kids are hungry with little to no access to the meals they regularly receive at school.

The Teague Community Resource Center staff witnesses the need as they help bridge the food gap students in Northeast Fresno and Central Unified experience when school is out. They work with local schools’ food directors to identify breaks throughout the year where students will need additional access to food.

Central California Food Bank partners with the Teague Community Resource Center to align their food distributions with school breaks, providing fresh produce and emergency food relief boxes with shelf-stable items and protein like canned chicken, peanut butter, and beans, at times when families need it most. We are so grateful for this partnership, which helps provide children with the nourishment they need today to thrive tomorrow!

SCHOOL PANTRY HIGHLIGHT

Adolfo Reyes, principal of Sequoia High School, was asked by his wife to help distribute food through a neighboring school district during the height of the pandemic. After passing out food to the outskirts of Porterville, Adolfo witnessed the deep appreciation from families who were so desperate for help. That experience led Adolfo to realize how much a food distribution would help his students and their families at Sequoia High School in Visalia.

After connecting with Central California Food Bank, Mr. Reyes eagerly signed up to be a part of our School Pantry Program. They started small but rapidly grew to serve more families in need. Students actively participate in the logistics and organization of the school pantry as well as benefit from the food assistance. Local media, armed forces, and community members have stepped up to spread the word and volunteer to ensure that students have access to the food they need to flourish in the classroom and beyond.

These boxes of food provide students and their families with eggs, tortillas, and culturally relevant, healthy non-perishables to stock their pantries with enough food to get through the week. Additionally, Sequoia High School staff teaches students how to cook dishes using items provided in the food pantry boxes.

Mr. Reyes knows that many of his students don’t eat because of their life circumstances, and he knows that this additional food allows them to be better prepared and more mindful in the classroom.

“Part of being human is that we must eat. And to eat the right thing is the most important. Our students know that when there is food, there is love,” he says.

We are proud to partner with schools like Sequoia, who work tirelessly to provide wrap-around services for their students in need.

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To learn more or to make a donation, visit ccfoodbank.org.

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