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# Food bank lowers rates for local food pantries

- Increased grant money helps Merced County Food Bank charge less
  - Food bank supplies dozens of pantries, programs in Merced and Mariposa counties
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- Nearly 30 percent of Merced County children live in food-insecure households



The Merced County Food Bank is at 2000 West Olive Ave. in Merced. **Andrew Kuhn** [akuhn@mercedsunstar.com](mailto:akuhn@mercedsunstar.com)

BY MONICA VELEZ

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Food pantries in Merced and Mariposa counties may be able to buy more food for their communities thanks to grants that are helping the Merced County Food bank reduce its rates, officials said.

The food bank board of directors voted last week to reduce its per-pound fee by nearly 8 percent, from 19 cents to 17.5 cents, the lowest price it has offered in the last five years, board President Mark Seivert said.

“It’s not too significant but it allows us to give a little bit more,” said Robert McCune, founder of the food pantry at the Apostolic Tabernacle church. “Any decrease helps.”

The Merced County Food Bank partners with more than 80 pantries and programs in Merced and Mariposa counties to provide food to the needy.

The rate charged to the pantries helps the nonprofit food bank cover operating costs such as electricity, maintenance, transportation and distribution, said food bank leaders.

The reduction by the food bank was possible due to an increase in funding, according to Bill Gibbs, who joined the organization as executive director in February.

Since Gibbs’ arrival, the food bank has raised \$600,000, including donations from companies such as Wells Fargo, PG&E and Walmart, according to Gibbs and Seivert.

“We did good on fundraising, and it only seemed appropriate that we share that good fortune with everybody in the community,” Gibbs said.

Nearly 29 percent of children in Merced County live in food-insecure households, according to a study by the Chicago-based group, Feeding America. Food-insecure households are those that, at times, lack enough food for an active healthy life or have uncertain access to nutritionally adequate food as measured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The county’s food-insecurity rate for children ranked it in the bottom fifth of all California counties. The rate for California overall was just under 23 percent and, nationally, it is under 21 percent.

More than 3 million pounds of food was distributed by the Merced County Food Bank last year, Gibbs said.

“The need in our community, over the last few months, is three times what capacity is,” Gibbs said. “Most people don’t realize what the needs are of food banks.”

McCune said hunger is a bigger problem in Merced than people think and people in the community depend on Apostolic Tabernacle to feed their families.

“Parents are doing the best they can and sometimes they still can’t feed their children,” McCune said. “We need to get people up and sometimes people can’t get up without help.”

The majority of the food given out by Apostolic Tabernacle’s food pantry comes from the Merced County Food Bank, volunteer Jackie Enriquez said.

McCune said he goes shopping for food at the food bank once or twice a week.

“I’m very well-known up there,” McCune said.

Seivert said some of the top food banks in the country charge no money for food, a goal the Merced food bank hopes to reach one day.

“That’s the goal of the board,” Seivert said. “We would love to be able to give out food for free.”

Food is available at Apostolic Tabernacle from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday and Wednesday and from 10 a.m. to noon on Fridays.

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