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# A Growing Crisis with Food Banks

By Annamarie Farmer

In 1967, the first food bank was established in the United States of America in Phoenix, Arizona called St. Mary's Food Bank. Since then, there has been an increasing expansion of over 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries. However, the recent outbreak of COVID-19 has led food banks and pantries to struggle and even temporarily shut down. The growing crisis continues to affect our everyday lives, but even more so for people who have lost their jobs or were already in a state of poverty (Dzhanova). In this essay, we will be exploring COVID-19 and how it has affected unemployed people, how food banks are adapting, and how people and food banks Humboldt County are supporting their community.

COVID-19 is an extreme pandemic and has been closely monitored by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They have been consistently updating the COVID-19 page with facts that can help people understand what is happening in their area. According to the CDC, California is one of the states with the highest count of reported cases of COVID-19. It closely ranks with Illinois, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Michigan. The CDC also stated that the first-reported case was in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China during November of 2019, and it was announced as a pandemic on March 11 of 2020.

Only a couple days later, on March 19 of 2020, California Governor, Gavin Newsom, ordered, “all individuals living in the State of California to stay at home or at their place of residence,” helping to prevent the spread of the deadly virus. COVID-19 has prevented many people from seeing each other, or even coming into close contact with other people, this has caused many people to be let off of their jobs all around the world. Due to rising unemployment rates, there have been more families seeking the support of local food distribution centers (Dzhanova). Economists at Fed’s St. Louis district predict a staggering total of employment reductions at 47 million, this includes people who work at food banks and other agencies that help provide for those in need. Food banks are currently struggling with the loss of employees and volunteer help while also trying to continue feeding millions of people.

Many food banks have applied new protocols in order to maintain a safe and steady supply of food, but most suspect a rise in people seeking a safe food supply. Many also worry that they do not know how long they will be able to respond due to the lack of money and resources. Even Jean Shafiroff, philanthropist and a board member of the New York City Mission Society, states, “There’s never enough money.” Almost one out of every three food pantries have closed all throughout the United States due to the unexpected loss of resources (Dzhanova). Natalie Caples, chief operations officer at the Central California Food Bank, said, “Our agencies have reported increases that range anywhere between 40% and 100% increase in individuals accessing emergency food service,” and, “We are

really pushing our operations to the max right now. Every truck is going out full, essentially overweight.” It doesn’t help that the elderly community tends to volunteer more, but are now stuck at home because they are more susceptible to COVID-19 (“Volunteering and Health for Aging Populations”).

In Humboldt County, schools are doing excellent jobs in making sure that their students stay fed. Bus drivers go out every day to their stops and drop off meals for the students and the students can also get or give schoolwork to the drivers to turn in. Unfortunately, not everyone has the privilege of getting meals dropped off. In fact, families with very young children, seniors, and others who are vulnerable to COVID-19 are requiring more support than ever. Thankfully, Food for People in Eureka, California, has been trying their best to make food accessible to everyone possible. They have been making those extra steps to keep their workers, volunteers, and clients safe by pre-packing food bags, creating new drive through areas wherever possible, and expanding the space they use so that everyone can practice “social distancing” (“Humboldt County Food Bank Struggles to Meet Needs”). Food for People first opened their doors in 1979 and were extremely small, doing their best to help emergency food situations, since then they have grown. They envision a safe and supporting community where everyone has access to healthy and nutritious food and are dedicated to help create a stronger and more beautiful Humboldt County. They have multiple programs throughout Humboldt County and are still expanding, most of the programs are in bigger cities with surrounding smaller towns

that have tinier resources. The cities like Fortuna, Orrick, Eureka, Arcata, Loleta, and more include 3 or more of the following resources; Child Nutrition Programs, Senior and Homebound Programs, Free Produce Market Distributions, or Mobile Produce Pantry Distributions (“Food for People”).

In conclusion, the recent outbreak of a deadly virus is strongly affecting many people who were food insecure before, while also shoving more people into that state. (“World Hunger Day 2019”) Food banks in California help support more than two million individuals in need, but now there are more seeking for help (“California Association of Food Banks”). COVID-19 is shutting down businesses all over the world and families need to find new ways to stay afloat. Everyone is feeling the wrath of the new virus, everyone is struggling in different ways, and everyone needs to stick together as a community in this time of crisis.

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