



Food to Share as a Healthy Community and Environmental Justice Case Study

A community food partnership that provides unique opportunities to address both food insecurity and environmental solutions

Key Themes | Food Access & Healthy Food Systems, Health & Climate Change

SUMMARY

Food to Share is a program of Fresno Metro Ministry (Metro) that recognizes and elevates the role of nutritious food for healthy bodies, minds, communities, economy, and environment. Food to Share addresses high food insecurity related physical and mental health issues in underserved communities, as well as environmental health, by combining food rescue and education to increase food access and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables with food waste prevention and diversion to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. According to CalRecycle, every pound of food diverted from landfills and consumed in disadvantaged communities, reduces 2.2 pounds of GHG emissions.

Over the last four years, Metro has built Food to Share's operational systems and relationships necessary for the program's food recoveries, distributions, and cooking skills and nutrition education classes. The Food to Share program is now operating through a growing network of over 40 food donor organizations, including schools, retail outlets, farmers, packers, etc. and 49

receiver organizations that Metro continuously encourages, connects, and helps build capacity to enhance their Farmer's Market Style food distributions with healthy cooking demonstrations in food desert neighborhoods in Fresno. In addition to directly rescuing food from a variety of sources and redistributing to network members, Metro organizes and facilitates Cooking Matters, a FREE 6-week cooking skills and nutrition education course in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Food to Share infrastructure now includes this network of food donors and recipient organizations involved in food redistribution; a food exchange web site (www.foodtoshare.org); three cargo vans and dedicated drivers for direct food recoveries; Cooking Matters cooking and nutrition classes – plus expanding advocacy, gleaning, community gardens, and collective impact relationships with health improvement and food security networks – all combined in unique and unduplicated ways in the Fresno region that have resulted in over 1.8 million pounds of healthy food recovered and



successfully distributed in food desert neighborhoods through a growing network of CBOs, churches, and other organizations. We are committed to grow to 3 million pounds annually over the next 5 years.

LEAD AGENCY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Fresno Metro Ministry has advocated for health access and health equity, engaging residents and institutions in civic participation networks in Fresno since 1970. Metro developed Food to Share as a community development program to increase health associated with higher food access and nutrition education in our many under-served communities experiencing the negative results of food insecurity, and to improve environmental quality and GHG emission reduction by significantly increasing recovery of healthy food and diversion of food waste from landfills.

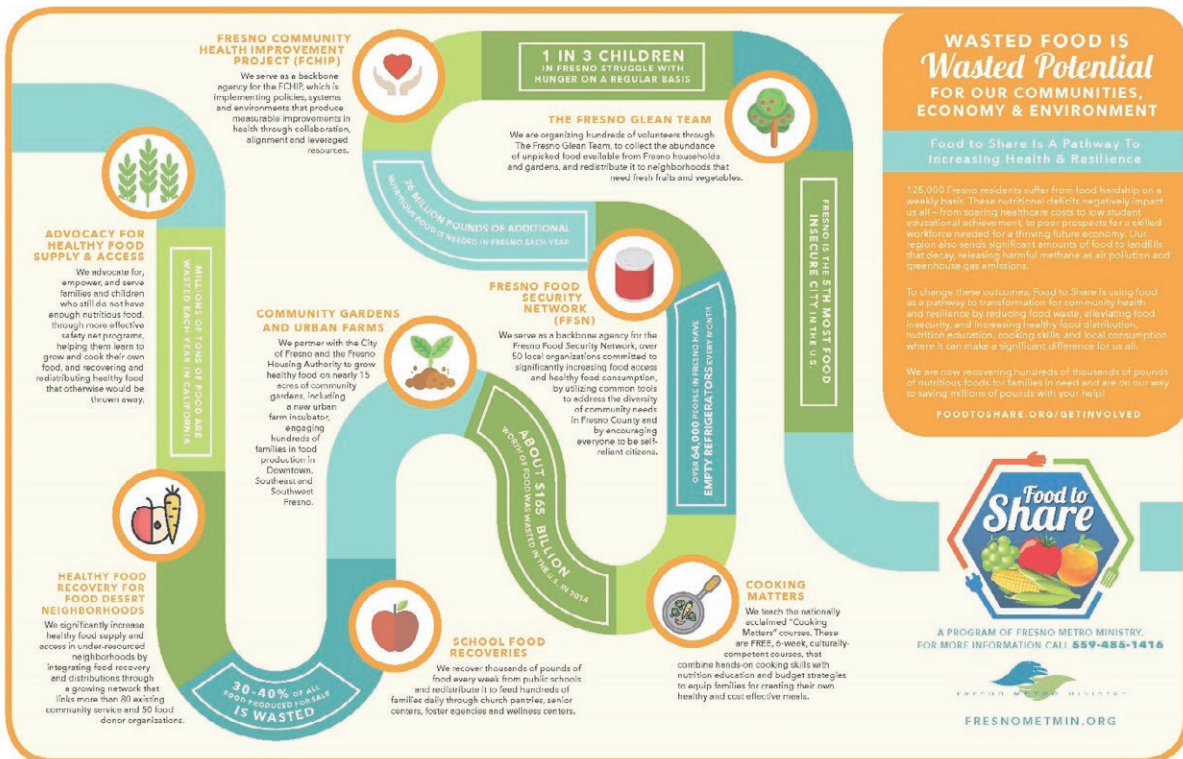
Food to Share is networking 49 food receiver members such as pantries, kitchens, churches, and nonprofits, already serving under-resourced communities, with over 40 food donor organizations including farmers, packers, processors, transporters, grocery stores, and 28 Fresno Unified schools. These organizations were not previously connected, and through the Food to Share program they

are now enabled to conduct their work on a more consistent basis, have direct access to a wider variety of healthier food donations, and work collaboratively to develop scalable solutions to hunger, food insecurity, and food waste in Fresno County. Food to Share is literally connecting groups and organizations that were not working together and are now communicating and leveraging their collective results.

KEY FOOD TO SHARE PARTNERS INCLUDE:

Fresno Unified School Districts with 28 regular school recovery sites and on our way to all 94 schools with food service

- » Central California Food Bank
- » Fresno Rescue Mission
- » Saint Rest Baptist Church
- » County of Fresno Public Health Department
- » Every Neighborhood Partnership
- » Fresno State Student Cupboard and Dietetics Department
- » St. Agnes Medical Center and Kaiser Permanente
- » Masten Towers and Silvercrest Senior Living facilities
- » St. Martha's Pantry



With these and many more partners we are developing a range of new healthy food recovery and distribution strategies, including rapidly expanding food rescue operations at area schools and retail outlets.

DRIVERS AND FUNDING SOURCES

A key drivers for Food to Share have been the resource conservation, resilience, and healthy community policies and objectives contained in the recently adopted City of Fresno 2035 General Plan. Reducing GHGs is a strong theme of our General Plan. Food to Share represents a community-based effort to implement our local General Plan by generating interrelated triple bottom line co-benefits that link healthy food access and nutrition outcomes for disease prevention and wellness with environmental quality and economic development results. We hope to replicate and scale many of the Food to Share components throughout the south San Joaquin Valley through existing and new partnerships in adjoining counties. Metro has been in early conversations with CalRecycle to develop local operational understandings regarding **SB 1383** implementation. We plan to work with local jurisdictions to be an integral part in ensuring the bill's success at the local level here in our region.

Metro has built Food to Share through funding competitively applied for and received from federal, state, and multiple foundation and philanthropic sources. All grants received have had strict documentation and reporting requirements. Food to Share weighs and classifies each pound of food rescued and the disposition of that food in underserved and food desert communities. CalRecycle was one of our first funders. Food to Share operations require ongoing funding to sustain and grow results, so we are now building a broad and diverse local base of donors who appreciate and support the goals and results that Food to Share has achieved so far and wish us to have a greater impact in the future. Current and past funders include CalRecycle, Kaiser Permanente, Trinity

Health, Heron Foundation, The California Endowment, Wells Fargo, Anthem Foundation, The California Wellness Foundation, the Smittcamp Foundation, CalViva Health, Educational Employees Credit Union, Regenerate California Innovation (RCI), Share Our Strength, Bennett Family Trust at the Central Valley Community Foundation, the Centers for Disease Control, and The Whitney Foundation.

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Food to Share's primary stakeholders are disadvantaged community members, food producers, food receiver organizations, who we have come to know and engage through many one-on-one conversations, focus groups, convenings, networking, and coalition building. As part of our initial process to strengthen the participating organizational constituencies for the Food to Share network, in early 2016 we conducted five focus groups with potential food receivers and food donors. A total of 38 participants representing 28 organizations and business were engaged in dialogue around their operations, challenges, needs, and the importance of their involvement in Food to Share. Participants also gave their perspective on their role in the community food system and were also engaged in discussion on food waste, high hunger, low-nutrition, food insecurity and hardship in Fresno County. The most common needs cited were; more healthy food to be made available to churches and community based organizations already feeding and re-distributing food to underserved communities, and more training and resources for more effective organizational and volunteer operations.

Our stakeholders have and continue to help shape the elements and operations of Food to Share, especially through our multi-sector gatherings of the Fresno Food Security Network, a collective impact effort aimed at eliminating food insecurity for which Metro serves as the backbone agency.

HEALTH, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND/OR CLIMATE IMPACT AREA

Fresno County has long been America's top-producing agricultural county with 2015 commodities totaling \$6.6 billion. Yet, in the midst of this abundance, more than 125,000 city of Fresno residents suffer from food hardship on a weekly basis, and Fresno County has 12 areas classified as food deserts. Many families do not have enough money to purchase nutritious food, instead turning to the cheapest food available, largely processed and nutrition deficient. According to County of Fresno Public Health Department's 2017 Profiles, 75% of adults are overweight or obese, as are 35% of middle and high school students. Over one-half of our nearly 1 million county residents are pre-diabetic. Compounding our health issues, millions of pounds of healthy food are wasted each year and buried in landfills, which then emit dangerous methane gas as food decays, exacerbating our already unhealthy air quality and respiratory disease, and increases release of GHGs.



RESEARCH AND DATA

Food to Share has access to current data through partner organizations such as the County of Fresno Public Health Department, Community Medical and St. Agnes Medical Centers, Community Food Bank (Feeding America), Fresno Hunger Count, and locally collected data through resident engagement and internet research conducted by Metro about local hunger, health, and nutrition deficits. Metro tracks food recovery and education efforts as follows:

- » **Healthy food poundage tracking** – forms maintained by Food to Share drivers who pick up, weigh and deliver food, we do not recover sodas, candy, and most sweets;
- » **Cooking Matters** – we conduct pre- and post-tests to measure increased confidence using fresh ingredients and increased likelihood of consuming more fruits and vegetables; and
- » **Mapping** – we strategically choose disadvantaged community neighborhoods for distributions, close to housing for residents who can't drive. To identify these neighborhoods we use a combination of different tools and data, including **CalEnviroscreen 3.0** (disadvantaged communities), USDA (designated food deserts) and our local Community Food Bank (under-served communities).

CHALLENGES

The ongoing need for funding to scale the program is the major challenge – unfortunately the need appears almost endless. The serious lack of nutrition education and cooking skills is becoming an epidemic. Building capacity and resources of food recipient organizations who feed and redistribute food in underserved neighborhoods is a significant challenge. Over the last year we have learned that unpredictability of recovered food donations is a major challenge, which we are offsetting by increasing recoveries from all 94 Fresno Unified schools with food service. We always have to work hard to maintain a consistent sufficient base of active volunteers.



OUTCOMES

In addition to significantly increasing the number of pounds of healthy food rescued and redistributed, we are committed to expanding Cooking Matters cooking skills and nutrition education classes throughout Fresno. We want to sustainably impact the community residents' diets and capacities, by not only increasing access to healthy foods in neighborhoods but more importantly helping residents develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to create healthy meals on very modest budgets while making healthier choices for themselves and their families.

Food to Share understands it is necessary to get nutritious food into our communities but it is not sufficient. By supplementing our food recoveries and distributions with our "Cooking Matters" cooking skills classes, Food

to Share is creating an opportunity for residents to learn about and taste an array of healthy foods while testing new hands-on ways to cook that have been proven to change dietary behavior in other cities.

As noted under the section on Drivers above, we are intentional about implementing our City's General Plan and work closely with the City of Fresno on many aspects of the Food to Share pathways for healthy food and resilient communities, as well as on a number of other community-economic development, multi-modal transportation, and urban design initiatives aimed at Central Fresno community revitalization and GHG reductions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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