

Ag Against Hunger Delivers From Field to Table



Photo: Kelli Ulgall

When local fields have an abundance, the founders of Ag Against Hunger (Abby Taylor-Silva, Alicia Cask, Sarah Hainstock and Kori Tuggle) arrange delivery to local food banks.

The Salinas and Pajaro Valleys yield more produce than any other region in the world. So it comes as quite a shock that one in five people living in the Central Coast's tri-county area are hungry. For these individuals and families in need, there is a benevolent organization here to help: Ag Against Hunger.

Founded 18 years ago, the nonprofit clearinghouse takes surplus produce from growers and distributes it to roughly 60 food banks

throughout the West Coast. Since its start, Ag Against Hunger has provided more than 145 million pounds of fresh, local crops to people throughout the state. Annually, it feeds 3 million individuals with an astounding 10 million pounds of produce.

"We're lucky to be in this region, which has such abundance," says Executive Director Abby Taylor-Silva. "It helps the industry in a lot of ways because they can relieve themselves of products,

and it goes to a really good cause. It's a win-win."

The dedicated team of volunteers adheres to the organization's mission: diminish hunger by acting as the link between the agricultural community and food assistance associations. Specifically, Ag Against Hunger donates to the Food Bank for Monterey County, Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties, Great Bears of California, and Community Pantry of San Benito County.

"In general, our local food banks don't have the cooler space. It's a neat way for them to get really fresh products and exactly what they want," explains Taylor-Silva. "Everything that we bring in has one to two weeks of shelf life. We make sure that the produce will be fresh enough to give," she adds.

The actual harvesting is accomplished by the more than 400 volunteers who participate in the gleaning program, taking to the fertile fields to gather the leftover produce.

"We provide them with hair nets and gloves, and they're given tools. They get to enjoy the sunshine and see the beautiful fields," says Taylor-Silva of the outings, which occur several times a month. "It gives people an immense appreciation for those that harvest food every day."

As for the low-income population that receives the fresh fruits and vegetables, Ag Against Hunger is a blessing. "In these tough economic times, it's especially important that we're here to collect for these programs," says Taylor-Silva. "I feel very proud to work here."

For more information or to become involved, contact Ag Against Hunger at 831/755-1480 or www.agagainsthunger.org.

—Katie Perry



Waiting for a Family

Fourteen-year-old Bobby has aspirations to perform on stage and become a professional actor. He also loves reading, writing poetry, and relaxing by cooking (Southern food in particular), especially while listening to jazz music.

Children of all ages and backgrounds are waiting for a home. They need the same love, care and safety your child counts on every day. For more information, please call Kinship Center at 831/455-9965.