

SHORTCUTS

GIVING BACK



Photo: Kelli Uldall

Local Nonprofit Supplies Fresh Produce to Neighbors in Need

BY RENEE BRINCKS

Alicia Cask, acting executive director of Ag Against Hunger, says that 1-2 million pounds of food are sent monthly to feed the hungry.

Monterey County's largest industry is agriculture. Much of America's produce originates from the Salinas Valley, a region dubbed the "Salad Bowl of the World."

Despite that abundance, some households face food shortages.

"One in five Monterey County citizens uses a food bank or food provider," says Alicia Cask, acting executive director of Ag Against Hunger.

Since 1990, the Salinas-based nonprofit founded by local farmer Tim Driscoll, Willy Elliott-McCrea of Santa Cruz's Second Harvest Food Bank and Jess Brown of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau has distributed more than 275 million pounds of produce through food banks, youth programs, senior groups and other partners.

Each month, Ag Against Hunger sends one to two million pounds of food to organizations in Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. Occasionally, donations reach recipients across California and the western United States, as well.

Volunteers glean some of the food from local fields. Area growers and processors also donate produce that they can't sell due to market demand, cosmetic matters or shelf-life restrictions.

"We take produce that would normally be dumped or disked under and provide fresh fruit and vegetables that families would not otherwise get," says Cask. "This is the ag community giving back."

To volunteer with, donate to, or learn more about Ag Against Hunger, visit www.agagainsthunger.org.