

Food Recovery in Tehama County: One nonprofit has a long history of helping food-insecure residents and reducing food waste

by Whip Villarreal

Daniel Dempsey has been operating Tehama County Gleaners and Food Bank for the last 11 years in Red Bluff, Calif. The organization dates back to the 1980s and has been working to help combat hunger and food waste within the county ever since.

Tehama County Gleaners and Food Bank is partnered with Feeding America and its community food pantry provides food items to households experiencing food insecurity. This organization supplies critical nutrition to hungry individuals and families that are in need. It also serves as a resource for families in need of emergency food.

Giving access to its pantry for those who are food-insecure within the community can be a welcome lifeline for families that are operating on tighter budgets because of economic uncertainty and lingering inflation.

“The amount of families that visited our pantry decreased during the height of the COVID pandemic because many were getting extra benefits through federal food assistance programs,” says Dempsey. “When things started going back to normal and the government began decreasing amounts families were receiving, there was a noticeable increase of the number of families visiting our pantry.”

Dempsey says all in all, the number of people receiving food items from its pantry has consistently increased each month. He expects the number of families that Tehama County Gleaners and Food Bank serve will continue to increase in the near future as well.

It’s not a perfect science planning on how much it can provide to families. Amounts of food it receives changes week to week. Dempsey explains that one week the organization may receive 300 pounds of food items and get 2,500 pounds the next.



Daniel Dempsey, who runs the Tehama County Gleaners and Food Bank, says the number of people receiving food items from its pantry has consistently increased each month. Photo by Ray Laager

Part of Dempsey’s weekly routine is to collect food from places like Raley’s, Walmart and FoodMaxx. He loads it into his truck, brings it back to the warehouse and weighs what is collected by category, including beef, deli, dry food, frozen food and produce. He records the weight of each category and stores them accordingly. They are ultimately given out to the community and other organizations that feed the hungry and food-insecure.

Not only does Tehama County Gleaners and Food Bank help feed the hungry, it also helps reduce the amount of food waste that gets thrown away.

“At the end of the week, whatever is not taken from our pantry is given to pig farmers to feed to their livestock,” explained Dempsey. “We don’t throw anything away and there is no waste. Some

food items we get are still good quality and some are just destined for pig food. At least it is going somewhere to benefit the community and not being thrown away. It’s a big collaboration with other organizations within the community to make sure this food doesn’t go to waste and if I can do anything to store it until someone can use it, I am happy to do it.”



For more information on SB 1383 and how it will affect Tehama County residents, visit www.tehamacountylandfill.com. This article was funded by a grant from CalRecycle.