



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: June 24, 2025

11

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**ADVANCING FOOD JUSTICE BY SUPPORTING THE SAN DIEGO FOOD BANK AND
SUNCOAST MARKET CO-OP (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

Access to healthy foods affects a person's health, dental, physical and mental well-being, longevity, and quality of life. Unfortunately, many communities—particularly those in low-income areas or rural regions—lack access to affordable and nutritious food options, which can lead to disparities in health outcomes. Healthy food options are vital in ensuring individuals can lead a healthy life and reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers.

On June 4, 2024 (12), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the development of a Food Justice Community Action Plan (FJCAP). The FJCAP sought to identify actions the County of San Diego (County) could take to reduce food insecurity, eliminate food deserts, improve access to locally grown produce, and increase collaboration between the County and organizations involved in the local food system.

The Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank (San Diego Food Bank) was founded in 1977 and is the largest hunger-relief organization in San Diego County and the fourth largest independent food bank in the United States. Across San Diego County, one in four individuals are food insecure and the percentage of children and youth that are food insecure is even higher at 32 percent. The San Diego Food Bank plays a vital role in our local safety net, serving 400,000 people each month through partnerships with 450 nonprofits, and is a critical link to basic needs for low-income seniors, working poor families with children, malnourished students, and homeless families and individuals. Additionally, the San Diego Food Bank serves 39,000 active-duty military, veterans, and their families. The San Diego Food Bank is on pace to distribute 50 million pounds of food and basic needs supplies through June 30, 2025.

In March 2025, the San Diego Food Bank was informed that nearly \$2 million worth of the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) food items was unexpectedly cancelled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These cancellations total approximately 1.8 million pounds

**SUBJECT: ADVANCING FOOD JUSTICE BY SUPPORTING THE SAN DIEGO
FOOD BANK AND SUNCOAST MARKET CO-OP (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

of food and include nutrient-dense, high-value items such as frozen proteins, milk, and eggs. This unanticipated loss in federal funding represents a 40% decrease in TEFAP funding to the San Diego Food Bank, the state designated and sole provider of TEFAP for San Diego County. As a result, clients have seen a decrease in the number of items in their TEFAP bag from 16 to 9 items.

With reductions in federal funding for food assistance, San Diego children and families will be more vulnerable to food insecurity. Hunger and poor nutrition can increase the likelihood of an individual developing chronic health conditions, behavioral health challenges, children experiencing developmental delays, and weakening of the immune system. Hunger also worsens educational outcomes as children struggle to focus in school. Food assistance programs help bolster economic stability for low-income families. When residents don't have to choose between food and other essentials like housing or medication, they are better able to participate in the local economy. Supporting the San Diego Food Bank as they continue to serve our region's most vulnerable individuals and families in this time of funding uncertainty will reap short- and long-term social and economic benefits for San Diego County.

SunCoast Market Co-Op (SunCoast), seeks to open a self-sustaining and community-owned cooperative grocery store in Imperial Beach, which would become South County's first food cooperative. SunCoast was formed by residents in 2016 to increase access to healthy food in the community. As of May 2025, SunCoast has over 1,200 member-owners and began construction on its food co-op in January 2025. SunCoast will be a key partner in tackling food insecurity and enhancing healthy food access in San Diego County as Imperial Beach and the surrounding communities are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity and chronic, non-communicable disease such as diabetes and heart disease that are strongly influenced by dietary patterns.

According to regional data from the San Diego Hunger Coalition, 30–40% of people residing within the 91932 zip code representing Imperial Beach are food insecure. Additionally, 40–60% of people in the 92173 zip code (San Ysidro), 20–30% of people in the 92154 zip code (Nestor, Palm City, Otay Mesa) and 30–40% of people in the 91911 (Southwest Chula Vista) are food insecure. Census tracts within Imperial Beach and surrounding communities are also deemed Low Income and Low Access (LILA) by the USDA Food Access Research Atlas. LILA designation identifies census tracts that are both low-income and low-access to food, utilizing a variety of factors including poverty rates and median family income to assess the challenges faced by residents in accessing nutritious food options. SunCoast operations are projected to increase access to nutritious food for people living in LILA neighborhoods, generate \$6.5 million annually for the regional economy, provide a supportive retail outlet to 150 farms and vendors across all five County Supervisorial Districts, and promote decarbonization through a variety of initiatives including the reduction of vehicle miles traveled for the delivery of produce and travel distance for residents to purchase groceries.

The Board has taken previous action recognizing the importance of advancing food justice. As the County of San Diego continues this work to enhance the local food system, the County has a unique opportunity to support vital community partners through today's actions, which will benefit residents across the County. The San Diego Food Bank will continue to serve hundreds of thousands of people in San Diego County monthly, serving nutritious meals to students, veterans, seniors, working poor families, and homeless families and individuals. In alignment with Board Policy B-58, today's action will grant \$250,000 to the California Center for Cooperative

**SUBJECT: ADVANCING FOOD JUSTICE BY SUPPORTING THE SAN DIEGO
FOOD BANK AND SUNCOAST MARKET CO-OP (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

Development, the non-profit fiscal sponsor for SunCoast, to support inventory, staff salaries, and marketing efforts for the SunCoast Market Co-Op, and \$500,000 to the San Diego Food Bank to supplement inventory for food distributions and mobile partners. These investments will strengthen the region's local food system, support communities disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, and help ensure more residents have access to affordable, nutritious food.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

**SUPERVISOR MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE AND SUPERVISOR JOEL
ANDERSON**

1. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer, or designee, to execute a grant agreement in the amount of \$250,000 in accordance with Board Policy B-58 with the California Center for Cooperative Development to support inventory, salaries, and marketing efforts focused on increasing access to healthy food in the community.
2. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer, or designee, to execute a grant agreement in the amount of \$500,000 in accordance with Board Policy B-58 with the San Diego Food Bank to support inventory for food distributions and mobile pantries.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Low-income and rural people in the United States may have limited access to healthy foods because of their distance to affordable food options. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) experience the highest rates of poverty, food insecurity, and diet-related illness. BIPOC communities also experience significant disparities in farming, business, and land ownership, limiting opportunities for community wealth-building, power, and leadership. Prior research shows that food insecurity varies based on demographic characters. Black and Hispanic people, immigrants, and people with disabilities are more likely to be impacted by food insecurity. By supporting community efforts to provide healthy foods, we are ensuring that we are building healthier and stronger communities.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's action contributes to the County of San Diego's Sustainability Goals of engaging the community in meaningful ways and protecting the health and well-being of everyone in the region by expanding the market for healthy, sustainable, and local food for communities who have long been underserved and may be affected by the impacts of living in a food desert or having other barriers like income or transportation access.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are not included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan for the Land Use and Environment Group Office / Office of Sustainability and Environmental Justice (Department). If approved, this request will result in one-time costs of \$750,000. The Department will use existing appropriations that are available due to operational savings; the funding source is General Purpose Revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

**SUBJECT: ADVANCING FOOD JUSTICE BY SUPPORTING THE SAN DIEGO
FOOD BANK AND SUNCOAST MARKET CO-OP (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Access to healthy foods affects a person’s nutrition, health, dental, physical and mental well-being, longevity, and quality of life. Unfortunately, many communities—particularly those in low-income areas or rural regions—lack access to affordable and nutritious food options, which can lead to disparities in health outcomes. Healthy food options are vital in ensuring individuals can lead a healthy life and reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers.

Studies have shown that without healthy food options available, individuals may settle for foods that are higher in calories and lower in nutritional value. Healthy food choices in food retailers give people autonomy over their diets, rather than having the choice made because of access. However, food security goes beyond access to food options but involves other aspects of healthy living, such as transportation and proximity. Unfortunately, differences in food access vary across race, ethnicity, geography, and socioeconomic status, further reinforcing health disparities between communities. Grocery chains often determine that they will not be profitable in low-income or low-density areas, leaving low-income and rural residents to travel longer distances to shop for groceries or buy from expensive outlets, like convenience stores or fast-food restaurants.

The County of San Diego (County) has been working toward achieving a food-secure region through its various departments and agencies and has adopted the sustainability goal of expanding the market for healthy, sustainable, and local food. In 2016, the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors (Board) initiated the Live Well San Diego Food System Initiative to work toward a robust and resilient local food system. On June 4, 2024 (12), the Board directed the development of a Food Justice Community Action Plan (FJCAP). The FJCAP sought to identify actions the County could take to reduce food insecurity, eliminate food deserts, improve access to locally grown produce, and increase collaboration between the County and organizations involved in the local food system.

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FOOD BANK AND SUNCOAST MARKET CO-OP (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

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With reductions in federal funding for food assistance, San Diego children and families and isolated seniors will be more vulnerable to food insecurity. Hunger and poor nutrition can increase the likelihood of an individual developing chronic health conditions, behavioral health challenges, children experiencing developmental delays, and weakening of the immune system. Hunger also worsens educational outcomes as children struggle to focus in school. Food assistance programs help bolster economic stability for low-income families and seniors. When residents don't have to choose between food and other essentials like housing or medication, they are better able to participate in the local economy. Supporting the San Diego Food Bank as they continue to serve our region's most vulnerable individuals and families in this time of funding uncertainty will reap short- and long-term social and economic benefits for San Diego County.

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The Board has taken previous action recognizing the importance of advancing food justice. As the County of San Diego continues this work to enhance the local food system, the County has a unique opportunity to support vital community partners through today's actions, which will benefit residents across the County. The San Diego Food Bank will continue to serve hundreds of thousands of people in San Diego County monthly, serving nutritious meals to students, veterans, seniors, working poor families, and homeless families and individuals. Supporting SunCoast will help optimize healthy food access, improving the health of our residents, supporting local farmers and the broader food system, and bolstering regional decarbonization efforts.

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FOOD BANK AND SUNCOAST MARKET CO-OP (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action supports the County of San Diego's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan Initiatives of Equity (Health), Community (Quality of Life), and Justice (Environmental) by ensuring we are investing in programs that will ensure that the communities of the County of San Diego have access to the basic need of healthy food.

Respectfully submitted,



MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE
Supervisor, Fourth District



JOEL ANDERSON
Supervisor, Second District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A