

# 31 TL pantries: 2.5 million pounds of food in '09

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double the number six years ago. A pantry is simply a group of people who get food from the Food Bank. Founded in 1987, the Food Bank delivers enough produce and staples to feed 22,000 households a week, about 7% of the city's total.

A quarter of the pantries are in the central city, 31 in the Tenderloin and 18 South of Market. Of these 49 pantries, 26 are held at supportive housing sites, either SROs or apartment buildings; 10, called Brown Bag Pantries, are in seniors-only housing; six are targeted to children and offered at schools, child care centers and family service agencies; five are at churches and community centers; and two are at immigrant-serving agencies.

Tenderloin pantries gave away almost 2.5 million pounds of food to 2,769 people in the 12 months beginning in October 2008 — that's about 17 pounds of food a week per person. The South of Market pantries have equivalent weekly totals, putting 1.6 million pounds of food on the tables of 1,750 residents.

Besides its pantry network, the Food Bank operates five other programs, including a popular shopping program: Staff of 200 nonprofits that serve meals to the poor plus about 100 pantry coordinators shop

weekly at the Food Bank's 55,000-square-foot warehouse in Dogpatch, at 23rd and Pennsylvania, a cavernous space that can hold 220 million pounds of food.

The shoppers buy staples by the pound — rice and beans for 18 cents, for example, oats for 22 cents, bread for 4 cents — and peanut butter at \$16.56 for a case of 12 jars, and much more. Pantry coordinators who shop are supplementing the basic groceries that the Food Bank delivers to every pantry, whether its staff come in to shop or not.

The basics include produce that comes into the warehouse in stunning quantities. Last summer, the Food Bank's Website announced "40,320 pounds of artichokes today!" And soon after: "First stone fruit of the season — 38,000 pounds of fresh peaches!" and "Today's fruit of the day — 1,980 cases of grapes!"

The Food Bank gets this produce from two sources. Twice a week, its truck stops at the nearby San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market and picks up more than 12,000 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables that are slightly misshapen, too small to be sold or otherwise not sellable. For 10 years, the market's been putting aside this bounty for the Food Bank.

The other source is through Farm to Family, a four-year-old California Association of Food Banks program started by Gary Maxworthy, a San Francisco Food Bank board member.

Today, California's 40 food banks buy imperfect, but perfectly fresh, produce from 80 growers and packers participating in Farm to Family. The food banks pay next to nothing: 40 pounds of apples for the retail cost of one jar of apple sauce, for example.

## ADOPT-A-PANTRY

The San Francisco Food Bank distributed 36.5 million pounds of food in 2009, half of it fresh produce, enough for 80,000 meals a day. That's up 30% from 18 months ago when The Extra reported on the Empress Hotel's food pantry.

The Empress is a "shopping pantry." Bessie Carmichael is not. Citywide, almost half the 200 pantries' coordinators rarely or never shop because they have no budget for the extra groceries.

Those who do shop come to the warehouse the day before they hold their pantry, buying as supplements what they know suits clients best or what the clients ask for — prepared foods that SRO residents can cook in microwaves, dry beans for apartment dwellers with stoves, low-sugar snacks for diabetics, foods that will appeal to picky kids. The Food Bank likes shoppers — it means added income to buy more groceries to distribute free.

For the shopping and nonshopping pantries alike, warehouse workers fill boxes and bags based on the number the pantry serves, what's on hand, and what Food Bank coordinators and their pantry colleagues believe is most appropriate to a pantry's clients. Trucks deliver the pallets of food the next day.

The Food Bank's mandate is to feed the hungry, but with shrinking monetary dona-

tions and erratic food prices, shopping trumps nonshopping. The Food Bank now pushes new pantries that can afford it to shop and is looking at how to get more established pantries to head for the warehouse.

One way is through Adopt-a-Pantry.

"We looked at the disparity of distribution — which pantries were shopping and why," said Aaron Rashba, the Food Bank's major gifts officer. "Pantries affiliated with — institutions or agencies that can fundraise more readily were shopping because they had some money to buy the supplemental food that we sell."

Adopt-a-Pantry asks individuals, groups or companies to pick one of the 95 non-shopping pantries and give them enough money so their coordinator can buy groceries to add to the weekly offerings. This has donor appeal because the adoption money is restricted to specific sites, the results immediate and tangible.

Seventeen of the adoptables are in the Tenderloin and SoMa (see sidebar).

There's no fixed amount, but the donation should be enough that the pantry participants can feel the difference, \$2,000 to \$20,000, Rashba says.

With \$7,000, for example, a weekly pantry can get a greater variety of food to 50 to 60 families for a year. The tax-deductible donation goes to the Food Bank, which then opens a warehouse account and the adopted pantry runs a tab.

The program is nearly a year old and two sites have been adopted: Noe Valley Ventures, a giving circle of eight families, adopted the pantry at Sanchez Elementary School in the Mission District; and a group of families recruited by a Food Bank board member adopted the pantry at Westside Court, a low-income housing development in the Western Addition.

Rashba says potential donors are looking seriously at five additional sites.

## MEAT, BREAD COVETED

A few blocks from Bessie Carmichael at The Rose Hotel on Sixth Street, another adoptable pantry, caseworker Michael Powell gets things organized for the 40 people in line for groceries. More than 30 are hotel residents or their guests, the rest neighborhood people. The Rose, a 75-unit SRO owned and operated by Mercy Services, won't turn away anyone who is hungry.

"We used to have about 24 people in the pantry line," Powell said. He, too, wasn't surprised that the number for the Wednesday giveaway has almost doubled. "If we get adopted, I know what I'll shop for. It's what our residents are always asking for but what we can rarely provide — meat, cheese, bread, healthy snack items."

This day's pantry items are similar to the school's, with the addition of fresh green tomatoes, canned cranberry sauce, microwavable rice bowls, fiber drinks and the coveted loaves of bread. Three members of Toolworks, an agency that serves disabled adults, help people fill their bags.

"This food really helps me," said

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**Weekly** pantry food helps round out meals for Rose Hotel resident Leroy Smith.



PHOTO BY MARJORIE BEGGS

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