

LATEST HEADLINES

Grant program aims to keep food on tables and out of landfills



Pantry Manager Amos Johnson stocks the fridge at the Veterans Transition Center. After receiving a grant in 2023, the Center purchased a 72-cubic-foot fridge and freezer that allowed the center to store more food and more than double its service capacity. (Kari Goodbar — Herald Correspondent)



By **KARI GOODBAR** | newsroom@montereyherald.com

PUBLISHED: October 26, 2025 at 11:51 AM PDT | UPDATED: October 26, 2025 at 11:57 AM PDT

Every year, Californians throw 2.5 billion meals worth of edible food into landfills, despite the fact that one in five state residents experience food insecurity, according to CalRecycle.

But a new grant program managed by ReGen Monterey and Salinas Valley Recycles is providing money for food recovery organizations to hire additional staff members or purchase equipment and supplies that can help expand and improve their existing operations and reduce food waste in Monterey County.

"There's a huge need out there to feed people who can't feed themselves, and this program really helps us do that," says Julieta Borges, kitchen manager of Dorothy's Place, an organization that provides services to people experiencing homelessness.

"We're also doing the right thing for the environment," says Jill Allen, executive director for Dorothy's Place.

"It's a win-win for everybody."

Grant in action

At the Veterans Transition Center of California, a van loaded with crates of bread, pastries and produce pulls up to the food pantry building. Food Pantry Manager Amos Johnson and Grant Writer Thomas Lamphere assist their staff and volunteers with invoicing the latest haul donated by Grocery Outlet and unloading the items into the pantry.

"By the end of the day, all of these shelves will be empty," Johnson says as he stocks the last few items and glances at the clock to prepare for opening time.

After receiving grant funds in 2023, the Veterans Transition Center purchased a 72-cubic-foot fridge and freezer that allowed the center to store more food and more than double its service capacity. "We used to serve around 500 people a month and lately we've been exceeding 1,100," says Lamphere. He emphasizes the importance of the food pantry program, sharing that the leading cause of veteran suicide after homelessness is food insecurity. "The foundation of everything is having something to eat," he says, noting that the experience of hunger can overshadow the benefits of other services offered at the center, such as mental health counseling or vocational training.



Kenneth Critchfield, a pantry assistant at the Veterans Transition Center, checks the shelves. Lately, the center has been serving more than twice the number of people it used to get. (Kari Goodbar -- Herald Correspondent)

Dorothy's Place is another previous grant recipient and has used the funding for the construction of a dry goods storage building and the purchase of a large walk-in freezer. Borges, the kitchen manager, proudly shares that all of the meals from their kitchen are cooked from scratch and that properly storing fresh ingredients is crucial for providing nutritious meals.

Roots of the grant

California Senate Bill 1383 (SB1383) helped spur the creation of this grant program. This state-wide legislation went into effect in 2022 with the goal of diverting 75% of organic waste away from landfills by 2025. In addition to composting, food recovery is a critical part of this waste diversion strategy. Across the state, 217,042 tons of food was recovered and distributed in 2023, and the target amount for 2025 is over 231,000 tons. SB1383 also requires food retailers donate the maximum amount of food in their inventory that is safe for consumption but exceeds the sell-by date.



Some food recovery organizations are taking advantage of a new grant to add staff members or purchase equipment and supplies that can help expand and improve their existing operations and reduce food waste. (Kari Goodbar -- Herald Correspondent)

Connecting time-sensitive food donations with organizations that can distribute the food remains a challenge, but strong community partnerships and a new app are helping overcome this issue. Careit is a digital platform designed to help food recovery organizations get alerts for available food. Those alerts can come from food retailers such as grocery stores, catering companies or restaurants, but the alerts can also come from fellow food recovery organizations with excesses of certain food items that might spoil before distribution. The app also allows food donors and distributors to record weights and other metrics of each shipment, which helps all the organizations measure the impact of donations and better understand the flow of supply chains.

Apps like these can help streamline the food donation economy, but the Veterans Transition Center, Dorothy's Place, and other organizations were hard at work feeding people long before the app was developed and the grant was created. Katy James of Blue Strike Environmental, a consulting firm that advises the grant recipients on environmental compliance strategies, explains that the grant program provides certain tools and resources, but those tools do not replace the community connections that developed with time and experience. "The food recovery organizations are the ones who have the knowledge in this space. They're out there on the ground doing the work. It's an honor for us to be a small part of what they do," James says.

Applications for this year's Edible Food Recovery Grant cycle closed on Oct.15. ReGen Monterey and Salinas Valley Recycles expect to announce winners in early December and plan to distribute a total of \$100,000 in funding.

2025 > October > 26