

Food Donation & Recovery Outreach Program (Food DROP) in Response to COVID-19

On March 19, 2020, California Governor Newsome issued a “stay-at-home” order in an attempt to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). As Public Health officials set guidelines for social distancing. This meant restaurants and other food services businesses could only provide food to-go or delivery. Schools and childcare centers were closed; requiring children to stay home. Families that previously qualified for free or reduced school meals had to turn to their local food pantries to supply them with enough food.

Immediately, Los Angeles County’s Food DROP program staff began contacting the local food rescue and food distribution agencies and has maintained very close communication with them since. Through the weekly conversations with the non-profits, we learned that all of them experienced a surge in the number of clients who needed food; some of them saw the demand for their services more than double. Many organizations had to extend their hours to meet the increased needs from the community, while some have not been receiving enough donated food from their local businesses during the months of March and April, the time when many people were bulk buying.

Food pantries also had to make adjustment for the safety of their staff, volunteers, and clients. Many have experienced a shortage in manpower for distribution, as some staff and volunteers from the high-risk groups could no longer serve. Other stipulations included not having more than ten volunteers at the same time and must wear personal protective gear like masks and gloves. Food distribution has also shifted to a “drive-thru” method, and food pantries were in need of extra supplies such as bags and boxes to pre-bag food for clients to pick up at the curbside.

Besides constantly updating County's Food DROP website (FoodDROPLA.com) about our partners’ emergency operation hours and other information, we offered help in other ways. For example, we connect local supermarkets with food pantries to donate their excess food and provided more than 4,000 reusable shopping bags for food distribution. Additionally, Food DROP has sent out multiple useful resources to our partners, such as information on emergency funding opportunities, government programs, and other information in response to COVID-19.

Food DROP will continue to provide support to our local food recovery partners. We also urge food generating businesses to donate their excess edible food to help combat food insecurity in the County.

For more information, visit _____