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Excerpts and Summary of the 41st Hunger and Nutrition Forum
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The following is a summary of the reports made at the forum compiled by Edie Jessup and Carey Berend.

FOCUS: FARM TO PLATE

How Can We Better Utilize Local Produce? Issues Faced by Farmers

Edie Jessup: Good afternoon. My name is Edie Jessup and I'm privileged to work for Fresno Metro Ministry on its Hunger and Nutrition Project.

We're glad to have the **Farm Bureau and Western Growers** here to talk to us today because, indeed, good food comes from farms, and it's very important that we realize that and realize their special needs that impact the security of our food system.

Participant Introductions.

Edie Jessup: Michaela Sanchez-Galvador caters our Forums from Pacha Mama Catering. I know it's going to be good. Pacha Mama does wonderful vegetarian cooking and uses fresh produce raised here, and we're really happy to have food on the plate.

I commend to you the packet at your place. There is a rich variety of information, and though I was going to work on legislative updates I think you'll find what I would have to say in your packet today. You will find the summary from last month's *State of the Plate* forum that was focused on state budget issues, and there is a page with a comment on the federal budget. I want to remind everyone that February 17th is the last day **to register to vote and please do vote in the March 2 elections. It's important what we do at the state, federal, and local level on issues of people having access to really good food.**

We human beings started living in cities on the earth about 6,000 years ago and we did it because our farming got so good that not everyone had to spend all their time growing food. Farmers could raise enough food to feed themselves and lots of other people too, so some people began to specialize in making cloth and others specialized in making pottery and others specialized in building buildings. **We created cities as a result of good farming.** Some of the oldest cities in the world were in Egypt. *From the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead here is a partial list of things a citizen was not supposed to do. One is not to cheat poor people. One is not to take land from a neighbor. One is not to take milk away from children. One is not to waste water. From 6,000 years ago some pretty good recommendations about farming and about what we need to live well in our cities.* I am also going to present a few axioms that were adapted from a list developed by **Deborah Nancoville** locally who works with **Fresno Citizens for Good Government:** 'Never write anyone off or show

disrespect to an elected official. An opponent on one issue may become an ally on another. Work with people who think differently than you. A like-minded group is a coffee klatch and not a coalition. Being right is the booby prize if you haven't figured out how to get other people to understand you. If you think you know it all you haven't included very many other voices in your deliberations. Building trust between people is much more important than short-term victories for your own point of view. Lobbying for progress in problem areas is 98 percent listening and 2 percent talking. The most sustainable responses to problems are the responses that have included the most participation from the most people. Always stick with principles and issues over personalities. **Remember creating a great city and good government is a long-term gain.'**

I am very, very happy today to have the **Farm Bureau and Western Growers** here to talk to us. Those of us who are advocates for the poor and for folks who do not have access to very basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare frequently forget recognizing where our food comes from originally. I think our society has forgotten and has become disconnected from the farmers, what their lives are like, and how it is they put food on our plate. So I'm very happy to have these folks here. I want to introduce Karri Hammerstrom from the Fresno Farm Bureau to give us an update. She also has a handout which you'll find on your tables. Thank you, Karri.

Karri Hammerstrom, Fresno County Farm Bureau: Good afternoon. I'm Karri Hammerstrom. I'm the Issues Coordinator at the Fresno County Farm Bureau, and I'm also the government relations coordinator. **I take the lead on land use legislation, government relations, labor, anything that has to do with economic viability of the farming community, and I also farm.** My husband and I both have full-time jobs and we also farm about 20 acres in Kingsburg. We have tree fruit and alfalfa.

Fresno County Farm Bureau's main issues are dealing with air quality, water quality, and economic viability. Fresno County Farm Bureau as a whole doesn't participate in getting food out to the urban community so much as we're trying to keep our farmers in business. We have, however, had some renewed efforts with our young farmers and ranchers, which is our group of **18 to 35-year-olds that are young professionals** in the farming industry that are our next generation working to hopefully be our next set of leaders in our community, and they **are now working with the Community Food Bank.** **There are a lot of passionate programs out there that I would love to see come together to work as a whole. When there are such limited resources the ability to maximize those resources by coming together is something that would greatly benefit this county.**

I want to mention a couple statistics. I think there are some misnomers because the Farm Bureau get lots of calls asking the farmers to donate. As a farmer myself I pay a packing company to come pick my produce. I still have to pay for it to get picked regardless if it's first-grade quality or not. **There are opportunities out there if you're looking for excess produce to work with packing houses to purchase. If you let them know ahead they can package the second-grade produce and the culls to take to facilities. Unfortunately, in Fresno County we don't have good cold storage and so you're looking at having to get fresh produce distributed very quickly or it starts to perish.**

I want to give an example of some farm prices. I think there's sometimes a misnomer that the farmer is making a lot of money because you're paying more for it at the supermarket. First let me talk about nectarines. If you're paying \$.60 at a retail market what's coming back to me before I pay for my picking, pruning, hauling, pesticide, fertilization, administration, water costs, electricity, all those other things I'm getting approximately \$.11 a pound and you're paying \$.60 a pound. By the time I've actually paid for all those other things I may make a half a penny a pound, maybe, and if it's a variety that's heavily inundated I may not be making anything at all. Another example is a 40-pound box of oranges which retails for \$67.60. The farmer gets \$9 of that. His picking, packing, hauling, and production costs are \$8.75, so the net farm income from one 40-pound box of oranges is \$.25. A retail price of one pair of cotton jeans is \$25. Assuming \$.60 a pound for lint and there is 1.5 pounds of cotton in a pair of jeans the farmer is getting about \$.90.

As you know, **in California about one in ten jobs are ag-related. In the Central Valley that's one in three. Net farm income is down about 41 percent and it's getting tougher with regulatory burdens. Workers' Comp is one of the toughest burdens for small businesses or businesses in general in California as well as environmental regulations. The agricultural industry is changing the way they're doing things. They're mechanizing things to minimize their Workers' Comp costs, which sometimes means fewer jobs, but they're doing things leaner and meaner.** We get very creative in how we farm our farm. We spend many a weekend and long hours out there and my little almost five-year-old daughter is learning that she's either going to be sitting in the truck or she's going to be learning to do something, and we get her to pick up the prunings and put them in the middle of the row when we're pruning.

In California agriculture is the number one industry. Well, it's the number two industry. Government is actually the number one industry and agriculture is number two, but we kind of have this schizophrenic attitude where we sometimes embrace agriculture and sometimes we don't. Edie asked if there is something you can do to help the agricultural community. Do what Edie mentioned earlier. Go out and vote, and when you're voting for people keep in mind what their views on everything are. Do they support agriculture? Do they enjoy eating food and wearing clothes but do they really realize that agriculture is the number one industry in California? Voting smarter and actually going out and exercising that right to vote is very important. Our existence in agriculture is sort of taken for granted like electricity. It's assumed because your food is there at the store that it will continue to be there **at the store, and for the most part that will continue to happen. You will see food always there. It may not be from California or the United States, but it will be there.** *It probably won't be the safest and best quality, either.* We have an attitude that the food's there, it just gets there and it's always there and it's replenished. As a consumer, when you're going places and you're buying produce **search out California-grown produce or United States products and if your store is not carrying it ask them about it. Tell them it's important to you and that you'd like to see more California produce.**

I have on your tables a copy of a presentation that was made to Senator Alarcon's poverty hearings that he held here in the Valley last May. **Karla Fullerton**, our executive director, and I both made presentations to this senate hearing to give a different view of agriculture than what sometimes is believed. One of those things, and I think it's important to know, is that **67 percent of U.S. farms have off-farm income and 50 percent of those have spouses who hold a second job.** My husband and I are prime examples. We're both holding jobs and we're farming. **Seventy-one percent of California's 80,000 farms, which is almost 57,000 farms, receive a net cash farm income of less than \$10,000, which is substantially below the nation's poverty income levels. Even with second and third jobs 21 percent of these farming households are still below the poverty level.** Again, we're doing things leaner and meaner. We're not these big, rich farmers. We do have the costs of doing business. Again, we have a lot of pressures, especially in the Fresno County area. **We're having pressures with land use as our region continues to grow in dealing with sprawl issues. We've been trying to be very supportive of the City Council and the County Supervisors to stick to their current general plans that supports the landscape of choice that direct and encourages growth toward cities and established communities and in-fills and keeping development within their spheres of influence and not leapfrogging beyond to where the infrastructure can't sustain or support that new development,** which puts a strain on the surrounding entities.

I could go on and on. There are a lot of issues that we're faced with right now and dealing with, and I just wanted to share of few of those and answer any questions that anybody may have.

QUESTION: Rev. Walt Parry: You indicated if I heard correctly, that the net farm income was down 41 percent. Over what period of time?

Karri Hammerstrom: I think that's over the **last five or ten years.** The input costs are up and the output costs are down. You see a lot of cycles with farming. You have varieties that get planted and then everybody is planting them because it's a great variety and then they all peak at the same time

so the market gets over-saturated and then you'll see new plantings coming in. The **market is very cyclical**.

Edie Jessup: Karri, I really appreciate you being here. I have three things that I would like to mention. **You mentioned that cold storage is lacking here.** I have a group meeting around food resources that is really interested in assessing where we do have cold storage and how it could be better used so that we can really use it. I know that Tim Reese, as the new director of the Community Food Bank, is real interested in finding ways to develop cold storage so we can use local produce better. That's one piece that we might further discuss together.

The other thing is **we have talked about a co-op of some sort where there could be local folks contracting and purchasing for seconds to really create a market in fact for local produce.** The school district and EOC, which have big food services, said that if there were a local way to purchase local produce they would do that, but they have to order enough, so there **needs to be a brokerage of some sort. That would be a direct local link for produce that maybe isn't marketable. So we'd like to talk to the Farm Bureau about that.**

Lastly, Placer County has done very well with development of "Placer Grown" stickers and events and they've developed a booklet about what's available when and a circuit of farms or stands where people can get that local produce, and they have developed it into something that works very well. I believe that they've had county government support for that, and I would love to engage the Farm Bureau in talking about that, also.

Karri Hammerstrom: In regards to the last thing you talked about, **Fresno County** is taking a more aggressive role in looking at economic development. Part of that **is looking at value-added uses to change the value-added, which for those that don't know, takes a raw product and changes it into some form to add value to it such as taking tomatoes and making salsa out of it, and having zoning that allows for that flexibility.** There have been discussions and it was part of the consultant's report that was made last night on the **West Side Economic Development to maybe get a Fresno type label, but you're also dealing with 6,000 farms in Fresno with the majority of those being very small, less than 500 acres.** There has been talk and the county has also been interested in doing **Agri-tours**, which would have some elements of that as well. In regards to the **co-op or the brokering, there are actually plenty of brokerage firms in Fresno County that could supply school facilities with the amount of produce and the type of variety that they need.** There are several houses here that do that. In regards to the **cold storage, we have a Fresno County Farm Bureau board member that also sits on the Community Food Bank board, and we really are interested in trying to work with them to get a cold storage facility available to expand the amount of cold storage because we do have farmers that donate produce. Again, it's just the distribution to get that there.**

QUESTION: What affect has the importation of produce, particularly from Chile, had on the farm situation?

Karri Hammerstrom: It just depends. On some of them the cycles are different so you **might have an imported Chilean product that's not the same time of year as we have other product.** As we're importing from **Mexico their growing seasons are getting closer and closer to what California's are,** so at any time you can go to the grocery store and get grapes, but there is only a certain time of year, which that window is getting larger, that they're grown in California, so it just depends on the commodity.

QUESTION: You mentioned the new generation of farmers. Can you give us examples of how they're working with CBOs such as Metro Ministry? Are they working to get any food that is left over from the seasons to CBOs?

Karri Hammerstrom: They are working on different programs to do that, and they work with the **Second Harvest** to see that some of that happens. Again, though, there is **still input and there are costs that go into harvesting and it's still costing the farmer.** It just depends on what their

window is and what variable to sustain the impact to be able to donate. There are **opportunities where the nonprofit organizations can still purchase that but at a cost factor where they pay wholesale price rather than a marked up retail price.**

QUESTION: Karri, do you see any potential from a farmer's standpoint of donating fields to be gleaned if there were that kind of an organization going?

Karri Hammerstrom: We have had some preliminary discussions in the past with the **Community Food Bank. It has to do with insurance. Someone else has to be willing to have insurance. If you have someone else coming onto your property to glean if they were to get hurt the farmer doesn't want to be responsible for that, and we're such a litigious society that we have to work with an organization that would have to have insurance coverage. I think there would be farmers open to that if that opportunity was there where they would be covered.**

QUESTION: How do you see that working from the farmer's standpoint?

Karri Hammerstrom: It's going to vary from farmer to farmer and what their commodity is. I'll use myself as an **example.** We have a variety of nectarines that we need to switch out and we only picked three times this year instead of four, so on that third pick we had them strip the trees. **There could have been the opportunity where someone could have come in and picked, but it would have had to have been real timely. You have a time factor** because you've got to come in and get those trees prepped and you've got other things that you need to do. So, **if there was a gleaning program that was able to come in and out at the time that was needed I see that as an opportunity.** There are a lot of issues that would have to be addressed and it would have to be very **well coordinated.** I wouldn't want anybody on my property without knowing that there was **insurance coverage.**

Edie Jessup: So the state Samaritan law wouldn't...?

Karri Hammerstrom: No. I wouldn't go there. I would want insurance in place to know that I was covered.

Edie Jessup: Thank you. That's important to know. Thank you so much, Karri. I think that we have a lot of work to do together and possibly we can be very successful in some of this. I think that there is enough interest.

I now would like to introduce **Danielle Blacet and Mark Hayden,** and they are from **Western Growers.** I know Danielle because we sit on the State Joint Steering Committee together for the Nutrition Network.

Danielle Blacet, Western Growers: Thank you very much. Actually, I'm going to be sitting on the Food Security Task Force board with you as well soon. Basically, I have been working with Western Growers since December of 2001 and prior to that I've pretty much worked in politics. I grew up in almond country up in Northern California, but this is my first job in agriculture and so it's been a learning experience for me as well. Right now **Western Growers is really putting an emphasis on nutrition because we understand that our growers, who are strictly fruit, vegetable, and nut growers, grow the healthiest food on the planet and so we really want to make that connection for people who have lost it in between nutrition and agriculture.** Right now I'm working with the Sacramento Hunger Commission, California Five -A -Day as Edie said, and also assisting with Fresno Fresh Access and some other groups, hopefully Food Policy Advocates, on making sure that **not only children but adults and especially low-income communities understand how important it is to get five fruits and vegetables every day.** Also, I have a four-year-old son and so it's extremely important that I introduce him to fruits and vegetables in a timely manner.

I have on the back table a bunch of fruits and vegetables (**Oranges and Strawberries**) that come from California. **Unfortunately, this is all that your local Save Mart has in the supermarket that comes from California. Everything else is from other countries.** Let me tell you that right

now, that is not what's being produced in Fresno. **Two billion dollars' worth of fruits and vegetables are grown in Fresno every year. Six out of the ten top commodities are fruits and vegetables, so there is a ton more of different commodities that are local that could be put into your stores, and as Karri said, it's very important for you to make it known to your local produce manager that you would like to see more California fruits and vegetables.** We also represent Arizona so I have to say Arizona grown as well. Also, please feel free to take some as you're leaving today. Please take all the produce that's back there. Basically, that kind of gives you an idea. **I picked up the Save Mart add and it actually touts the fact that there are nectarines that are specifically from Chile and they use a specific ripening protocol, so they use something artificial on them to ripen them because they take so long to transport from Chile to California.** It could be a week or even longer. **Nectarines from California can be in your field one day and in your supermarket the next,** so it's really a good thing to try and get as much California-grown produce as possible. You can also utilize your **local farmers' markets.** They are a great resource. **Make sure they're certified because that way you know that they are actually the growers who are selling them, not someone who has taken it off the back of a truck and selling it at the farmers' market.**

I wanted to give you a little bit of an introduction about what **Western Growers** is and what it does. **We have been in business for about 75 years. Originally it began as a marketing protective organization to combat rate hikes in the railroads. We have 3,000 members throughout California and Arizona and we grow 90 percent of the vegetables and 70 percent of the fruits and nuts in California and Arizona, and that constitutes about half of the nation's produce.** We ship our products overseas and throughout the nation. There are **several commodities that are strictly grown in California such as almonds and I believe we grow about 99 percent of the kiwis, so if you eat an almond anywhere it's a California almond.**

We offer a variety of different services to our membership. I am a lobbyist. I lobby on nutrition and also water quality and supply issues, but we also provide insurance for our members. **We are the number one health provider for farm workers in Fresno County and California. Eighty-five percent of our membership fully ensures their field workers and that's something that's very important to us because we understand that a healthy worker is an efficient worker and so it's an extremely important part of what we do for our membership.**

As you know, Fresno County is the number one Ag county in the nation and that's something to be very proud of. Like I said before, **fruits and vegetables bring in over \$2 billion to your local economy** and nearly 10 percent of our growers grow their commodities here in Fresno. **Our mission is to provide the healthiest food in the world to your families and to our own families. We are family farmers. As Karri said, the majority of farms are not large. There are some that are in the thousands of acres, but especially with the urban sprawl most are 300 to 500 acres and so we do what we can with the limited space that we have. Our members in Fresno are very active in the community. We have several that supply literally tons of produce for food banks. We have one member in Bakersfield who provides I think three tons of potatoes every year for the local food banks in their area.** They make donations as much as they can, and as Karri said, there are a lot of increasing costs that make it very difficult for us to stay in business, but we do contribute and donate any time that we can.

Part of what I'm here today to discuss is **why is it that there is such an abundance of agriculture here in Fresno but 40 percent of people in Fresno are *food insecure* at one point during the day.** I'm sure that most of you are familiar with that term, but just in case you aren't it just means that they don't have access to fresh nutritious food during the day. One of the most important things to consider is the **perishable nature** of our product. **We have to sell our product in a very short amount of time. It could be three to four days. There could be a window of hours in which our commodity has to be picked, and so it's extremely important that we do it on a timely basis.**

One of the largest problems for us is **retail consolidation** and that is basically how 50 years ago you had the mom and pop store on the corner that sold all your fresh fruits and vegetables and **now it's the big-box stores that are putting all those mom and pop stores out of business and**

they basically will set the price for the farmers. We're what they call *price takers, not price makers*. I think we're the only industry that has to face a business climate with that issue. What that means is the grocery stores say, "Here is what we're going to pay you." If you don't want it, go take your ten tons of lettuce somewhere else." Unfortunately, with lettuce there is really no where else you can take it. **You have to sell it to them. A lot of times even though the big-box stores do set the price for the produce the smaller mom and pop stores are the only ones available in a lot of areas. I'm sure you've experienced that because sometimes the big grocery chain stores will not go into certain neighborhoods and so that causes a lot of low-income communities to have even less access to fresh fruits and vegetables.**

Let me give you some additional examples of what farmers receive and what retail is for certain commodities. *For a head of lettuce the farmer, packer, shipper, everyone involved in the growing process, receives \$.21. I don't know about you, but I've never paid \$.21 for a head of lettuce. It's usually about \$1.00 to \$2.00 for each head. Potatoes are \$.58 for a 10-pound bag, and it's about \$4.00 retail. A lot of times the markup is over 1,000 percent because in the supermarket the meat and the produce departments, the very things that are the best for you, are the profit centers and so grocery stores only make maybe single digits when it comes to overall profit, but it is the produce and the meat departments where they do make their profit.* It's important to speak with your policy makers and with the grocery stores about the fact that they are doing this. Obviously, **it wouldn't be very difficult to lower their prices a little bit and still make a good profit on produce.** In addition, something that few people think about is **because farmers are price takers if we have an increased cost we cannot pass it on to the grocery store or to the consumer or anyone, so we've had 200 to 300 percent increases in Workers' Comp and we have the highest rates of all taxes because of the nature of our business but we're not able to pass that on.** Everything is absorbed into our profit margin, which leads to especially a lot of the small farmers going out of business.

Again, like I said, another way to get fresh local produce is to go to your **farmers' market** if that is available. **I know that there's a struggle right now because the Food Stamp EBT card that's available is not being accepted at certain farmers' markets,** but I'm hoping that situation is remedied soon so that a lot of different people can get reasonable cost of fruits and vegetables.

Western Growers is doing different things to improve the access to fresh produce and connect nutrition and agriculture for both children and adults. I am dedicating a large portion of my time as a lobbyist to making sure the policy makers understand that **we need to have more access to food stamps and that the car requirement needs to permanently go away.** I know there are some legal issues happening right now with that because **it's federal money, it's money coming into California. More fresh fruits and vegetables will be purchased with that money just by the nature of what people buy if they have the ability to, and so I'm working with a lot of the different assembly members and senators to make it known that Western Growers is very supportive of that.** We also are sponsoring nutrition legislation this year. We're actually actively looking for an idea for a bill and we have not put that forth yet, so if you have an ideas for what you'd like to see done in the nutrition arena please get in contact with me because in the next couple weeks we are going to be putting forth some sort of **nutrition legislation to get more fresh fruits and vegetables into the mouths of Californians.**

On the **federal level** we sponsored legislation called the **Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act that will provide grants for every state to increase the access of healthy food to its residents.** I'm not sure of the bill number, but it's called the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act, so please support that on the federal level to your local congressman or senator. We really would like to see the **expansion of the free fruit and vegetable pilot program. We think that's a great way to get more fruits and vegetables into the hands of our little ones in schools.** Right now for some reason California is not included as one of the four pilot states but they're trying to expand that along with the **Child Nutrition Reauthorization. It's very important to understand that it's the policy makers who are going to be dictating a lot of what happens in the future as far as improved access.**

There is a lot that we can do at the community level, but when it comes to the **real big changes that need to be made that's something that has to be done on the state or the federal level**, so that's a reason why Western Growers is becoming so actively engaged in that process.

We also recently launched **a school garden program that gives grants to schools throughout California and Arizona for children to start gardens on their campuses. We provide each school with a cash grant, drip tape irrigation, seeds, other curriculum, and a host of different resources on how to grow fresh fruits and vegetables on campus.** We believe it's critically important to **start the learning process at a young age** and for children to have hands-on experience growing fresh fruits and vegetables to not only understand the importance of eating five a day, but also to be **better stewards of their land and community** because once they make a connection it will be with them for life. I don't know if you're familiar with Centennial Farm down in Orange County, but there was a recent tour down there and a young child went to the docent and said, "I know you planted this carrot from Albertsons because I know that carrots don't grow in the ground." Children just don't understand. They're just completely **disconnected from their agrarian roots**, and that's something that we really would like to see change. **We actually funded two local schools here in Fresno. One was Burroughs Elementary, which is actually sponsored by Assembly member Sarah Reyes. We have a legislative garden program in which a legislator gets to choose a school in their district and we will fund it and they will be a local supporter trying to bring awareness to the policy makers. The other school is Roosevelt Elementary School.**

Growing with Children, which is the name of our school garden program, is hosting a 5-K run here in Fresno on October 16, 2004, and what we want to do with that is to create awareness for both the school garden program and also nutrition and hunger efforts here in Fresno County and we're hoping to **allocate a portion of the proceeds to local hunger and nutrition efforts**, so please get in contact with me if you'd like to partner with us because we're very excited about the event. We've already partnered with Five-A-Day and we're looking to work with the American Heart Association on the run as well. It's going to be in Woodward Park, I believe.

We're doing our best as farmers to improve access to fresh produce. We grow it, we harvest it, we do what we can to get it to the markets that will take it, but we are faced with a lot of different and unique challenges that make our job increasingly difficult. **We need your help to advocate for the local farmer, for the Fresno farmer, and for the California farmer to let your community members and your business leaders know that it's very important that we support them.** Farming provides \$28 billion, I think was the latest number, to California's economy. This is not only something that **helps our economy, but we also grow the safest food in the world** and it's definitely something that we're looking to increase the consumption of in California, but we need your help. If you have any other questions I would be happy to answer them.

QUESTION: Rev. Walt Parry: With farmers' markets usually what they charge is not that different from what's in the supermarket. Is that because of the extra labor? Question two is: are there places where organizations would buy what's left at a farmers' market at the end of the day? Rather than people having to pack up their trucks and take it back, could an organization, whether a food bank or whoever, buy it so they are getting maybe a reduced cost, the farmer is getting some money, and the food's going to be used quickly?

Danielle Blacet: I do understand that there are a lot of times that the price is similar to what it is in the supermarket, and that has a lot to do with the fact that **there is the extra labor involved. If the farmer is the one out there he has to take an entire day off from what he's doing to be out there. Typically what I find when I go to a farmers' market is it is less expensive, but I'm sure it varies depending on whether they're a specialty crop.**

The definition of **specialty crop is anything other than wheat, corn, soybean, pretty much anything grown in the Midwest, so anything grown in California is pretty much considered a specialty crop when it comes to fruits and vegetables.**

As far as having things purchased from the farmers' market at the end of the day there is the **California Certified Farmers' Market Association** and they do have a website. I'm not sure of the

address but it has a list of all the certified farmers' markets in Fresno and a host of other information and I'm sure **if you contacted the director there he could give you some information on what happens with that produce at the end of the day.**

QUESTION: Rev. Walt Parry: Do food banks and food agencies ever buy produce from local farmers or do they generally depend strictly on gifts? Also, if there was some way that we could find a way to market locally produced fruits and vegetables where the farmer is getting more than they're getting at the supermarket, at what point would they risk the supermarket saying, "Okay, we're going to forget you. We don't need you. We can get the fruit from other sources." At what point would they antagonize supermarkets so that they're cut off from selling to them if there were a substitute arena where the farmer gets more but people would still pay less?

Danielle Blacet: That's a very interesting question. **It is often a very difficult and tenuous relationship between the farmer and the supermarket because not only do they charge whatever price they want to for your commodity but they also sometimes will charge you slotting fees.** If you have two competitive products they'll say, "Okay, we're going to charge \$10,000 if you want to have your peaches here." It's very competitive so I know that it would have to be a **fine line** as far as if you were to create a source such as a farmers' market or something else where the local residents could buy that produce but at the same time they could sell it in the supermarket.

Participant comment: The grocery store basically wants to know that that supply is always going to be there, so that makes it a little tough, too.

Danielle Blacet: We have quite a few growers in the Salinas Valley who grow specifically for Dole, so even though it's under the Dole name it's actually grown by growers in the Salinas Valley so that is very true. Groceries need to make sure that they have a consistent supply.

Karri Hammerstrom, Fresno County Farm Bureau: **The small growers that I have worked with cannot get into the big markets because the big markets, the Vons and the Save Marts, they want truckloads of identical sized peaches, tomatoes, etc., so the small growers will go to farmers' market or they'll go to mom and pops with their trucks. They are actively marketing out of the main marketing channels because they can't get into the main marketing channels. A lot of the small growers here go to the Bay Area and to L.A. sometimes as much as three or four times a week with different family members because they can't get into the big chains.**

Danielle Blacet: That is very, very true. It's very competitive. Even some of the large growers that we have, including Driscoll Strawberries, Sunkist Growers, and other the big names, sometimes have issues because it is so competitive. **Retail consolidation is a huge issue, especially for the produce section because it is so perishable and we have to get our wares to market.** Any other questions?

Participant question: Would you go back over what you said about health insurance for the workers?

Danielle Blacet: Sure. **At Western Growers 85 percent of our members provide insurance for their employees, and we're the number one insurer of farm workers in Fresno County and in California when it comes to the fruit and vegetable industry.** It's something that is extremely critical to us. We have set it up so that **one of the main things that Western Growers does is provide insurance programs not only just for health insurance but also crop, casualty, Workers' Compensation, unemployment insurance, any different sort of thing.** We're increasingly trying to get into more arenas that we traditionally don't such as health fairs. **A lot of our larger growers will provide health fairs to their employees that will do preventative screenings.** We do that a lot. Right near the Mexico-California border we have a lot of different health fairs that will do glucose, cholesterol, and other **preventative things for some of the different workers that**

don't get health insurance. It is difficult when it comes to seasonal and part time work, as with any other industry, to provide health insurance, but we do provide it to as many members as we can. With the recent mandate SB 2 that came out the employers who have over 50 employees have to insure every employee by 2006. That will be a unique challenge for us. We have some different programs that we're working out for that, but it's also being challenged in the court system.

Rev. Walt Parry: How do you deal with schools where they say that basically they have to know there is always going to be a consistent supply of the food they need and by law they have to have everything the same size, this type thing? Is there some way to get around that so that our schools could utilize local produce more than they do now?

Danielle Blacet: The connection between schools and local produce is a new challenge because typically the food will come from the Department of Defense, the USDA program, and so typically it will be the canned peaches, things that aren't fresh and if it is fresh it's horrible quality because it may be three weeks old. That's something that we are addressing because it's not only getting that produce to the schools but it's also the red tape that's involved with making sure that we're not competing with the USDA. They're very proprietary when it comes to providing food. The *Santa Monica-Malibu district does a great job of having farmers' markets bring their leftover produce to schools or the actual garden itself that they grow at the school will provide the fresh produce for the cafeteria.* It's not so much of an issue of making sure they're all the same size or that they're specifically like the supermarket requires, but it's similar in that they have other issues like transportation and costs because the farmer also has to take into consideration what the school can pay.

Gwen Huff, California Alliance with Family Farmers: I've been doing some farm to school work and actually working with that problem of the connection of the farmer and the cafeteria and the biggest thing is the food service cafeteria person has only so much time to order their produce and they're not going to call five farmers and see what's available and who is going to deliver it and see what they are going to pay for the delivery. We've been working on getting a distribution amongst local growers so that there is a central point where the food service director can make one call and say they want this and that and that, and they will know because they're ordering from this entity that it will all be from local growers. If that entity can't supply everything, which they can't for items such as salad in the middle of summer if it's a summer feeding program or apples at the wrong time of year, they will have another broker that they traditionally will go to such as Sysco or Fresno Produce or Okay Produce. In working with the food service director to see that they are interested in buying seasonal, fresh, locally-grown produce you have to have prices comparable to Sysco's prices. *When available they will buy locally, but you have to have a distribution system so that they only have to make the one phone call.* They're working on a distribution system like that in Ventura right now and we hope to get one going here in the San Joaquin Valley. That's been a problem that we have found.

Another problem is that the small local growers here want to just give carrots when the school wants carrot sticks or the grower wants to give heads of lettuce when the school wants salad mix, so who is going to do the processing? We're also actually working with the California School Food Service Association on the state level to address some issues statewide where perhaps we could create some sort of a standard program that would make it a lot easier for the food service directors to do that because they are reluctant to go to all the legwork that sometimes is needed. I think that's a great program to bring the farmers and schools together.

Edie Jessup: Thanks, Gwen, for bringing that up. The Department of Defense and USDA program, because they are theoretically for schools, are the place schools are supposed to get their fresh produce and we know it's not very fresh.

Is there work that could be done on a demonstration level that Western Growers might be able to engage in with Fresno County in terms of developing something that is a little better

than that, particularly since we're evidently going to be building a state-of-the art multimillion dollar food processing center? It seems to me that if we're going to be building that it would be wonderful if it were built to actually handle produce in a way that could put more fresh local produce into the schools.

Danielle Blacet: Right. **Definitely that's something that we can work on and something that the federal government is taking an increased interest in.** You can see it in the different types of legislation that are coming out with the **free fruit and vegetable pilot** and the **reauthorization legislation** and getting more fruits and vegetables to children in schools and the school breakfast and lunch program and even the redesign of the food pyramid. **USDA is extremely interested in starting to do that. I think that would be a great idea, and what better place to start than Fresno?**

Edie Jessup: My other question is similar. We've got the issues of utilizing fresh produce here and we have the issues of **lack of cold storage** here in Fresno in order to utilize it. The other thing, **when we were talking about rescuing local food for the gleaning process the big issues seem to be insurance, and you have said that you're really into the insurance business, so what I'm asking is perhaps there could be some conversation about what it might take to find insurance so that we could go rescue her (Kerri Hammerstrom's) nectarines in some way where she would be satisfied in terms of concerns about insurance.**

Danielle Blacet: I think that would be great. We provide pretty much every kind of insurance under the sun from certificates of insurance, crop, casualty, anything you can think of, so I think that would definitely be something worth looking into. For instance, **A.G. Kawamura, the new Secretary of Agriculture, is a long-time Western Growers member and director and he spearheaded the school garden campaign. He has had groups gleaning on his lands for years. He has green bean fields and strawberry fields and he has several different groups glean. I think Second Harvest, the Orange County food bank, is the major group that does it. The Incredible Edible School Yard is the other one that has gleaning programs as well, so it definitely can be done. A.G. is one of the biggest proponents of it. California Department of Food and Agriculture is another great resource that everyone here should tap into because it's different now than it ever has been with a leader such as A.G. He understands the connection between food stamps, hunger and nutrition, agriculture. He absolutely gets it and he is one of the few leaders in Sacramento who has ever been in charge of the Department of Food and Agriculture that really understands how important it is for nutrition to be an integral part of agriculture because they are really connected.** The entire department is very willing and able to listen to ideas and different proposals about what the Food and Agriculture Department can do that would help out. He's met with the food banks and other groups like that.

Edie Jessup: That's excellent. I know advocates on hunger issues and nutrition issues are very excited that he's the new department head.

Rev. Walt Parry: Do you know the legal parameters and challenges of taking a video camera into a Vons or Save Mart to document what you found out about California-grown food? I know it's private property but can you be prevented from doing that? I also have a question for Tim. When you get food from farmers how much is donated and how much do you pay and related to say Catholic Charities or Salvation Army, that same question for them.

Danielle Blacet: I'm sure that it would be an extremely controversial issue. I think you'd have to discuss it with your local supermarket. That's something that I really couldn't answer. I really think that if you were to go it would depend on the light that you portrayed on what they provide. **I don't know the answer to that question.**

Edie Jessup: I do want to say that **Fresno Metro Ministry is doing a Community Food Assessment and we are going into markets with surveys to take a look at the quality. We do**

not have a question on there about California-grown produce and maybe we need to add that to the survey.

Danielle Blacet: We also have an issue with country-of-origin labeling that's being delayed right now, but that would mean that for every piece of fruit or vegetable that you buy you would know exactly where it came from and so would the grocer. That's a huge controversy right now because it's all up to who's going to pay for the labeling, but that would be another way to know where the produce comes from.

Mark Hayden, Western Growers: Stores are also advertising on the fliers, they're really pushing fruits and vegetables from other countries, from other states, and from other regions as a marketing tool, so **California Grown and Five A Day are being pushed out there as an advertising tool**; but there is also Ohio Grown and Texas Grown for some of their products. **In the advertising insert that we pulled today they're specifically advertising fruits and vegetables from other countries, from other states. They're seeing it as a benefit. It's perceived that California Grown doesn't have to be the end all where obviously most people here would like to see that be turned around quite a bit.** We pulled four products out of maybe 60 that were California Grown and they were very specifically marketing other states and other countries. That's kind of where they stand. At a maximum they might have throughout the entire year no more than 50 percent ever that's California Grown.

Danielle Blacet: Vons said between 15 and 20 percent of their produce was California Grown, and we went over to SaveMart to grab these fliers. The other thing that's really important to remember is that when it comes to California and Arizona grown not only do we know exactly where it comes from and the regulations that are placed on the farmers in order to grow it, you guys can understand and know those regulations as well from water, air, pesticides, labor, etc. In other countries a worker may get paid \$2.00 a week, not \$6.75 an hour or more than that. Our average wage for workers is between \$8 and \$11 an hour. Also you don't know what pesticides they're putting on. Honestly, in my experience and my talking to other people who have been in agriculture for many decades 99 percent of any issue when it comes to pest problems comes from another country because they don't have the kinds of regulations and environmental protections that we have here in California and in the United States in general, so it's really important to make sure for the **safest food that you have it be from the United States.**

Tim Reese, Executive Director, Community Food Bank: As the new kid on the block with these issues I'm on a steep learning curve but I'm excited to be here because there are solutions to many of the things that we're struggling with. To answer your question about buying produce, I don't know for fact that we are currently purchasing produce and that's not to say that we could not purchase it. I think there are resources available to be able to purchase. Our 200 members of our network want higher quality food and they are buying retail to fill in the gaps where we cannot provide for them. They are willing to pay reasonable rates for quality produce needs, etc. It's a distribution issue.

My number one priority is to deal with and solve the cooler issue. If we had an adequate facility locally we could transform the availability of distribution of quality food in our community and at the same time support the Ag industry and support farms and bring additional dollars to the table for the farmers and the growers. It's ironic that so much has to be tilled under and donated. To literally get rid of food it goes elsewhere, to northern California. The vast majority of produce available locally for food banks does not stay here. It's shipped outside the area. We have a lot of challenges, but to solve that is going to require dealing with the cooler issue and I think we can do that.

Rev. Walt Parry: It really is ironic that we have food available but if it's got to be in cold storage you've got those terrible utility bills so it becomes a very expensive deal.

Participant comment: Recently up in Folsom there was a local food bank that started out as a closet and was basically two people out of a church and as it grew they got to the point where the **food storage brought a whole level of health issues from Department of Health. They actually had to stop what they were doing, raise \$10,000, put in commercial quality floors and mats, and then put together a whole procedure that they have to follow even for volunteers, so there is a whole training curve now for volunteers that they have to set up.** They actually are running in the red for the next couple of years. They were able to do it but it's not just one thing. It brings on a whole host of things. **The more that you're actually adding projects like that the more that you have to deal with regulations which could be from a city standpoint, county, state, whatever.**

Rev. Walt Parry: Are there ways to solve transportation issues and distribution issues so there's not a need for cold storage?

Participant comment: The challenge with the distribution is that **the ultimate distributor throughout the county, the small pantry, the church-run pantry, they have no cold storage at their facility and so literally the produce has to arrive within an hour of distribution to the client and there is no ability to store it over.** That is a challenge. **If we have the cooler then getting it out is another piece of the distribution, but it's all solvable. It can be done through partnerships and coordinating efforts.**

Evelyn Blank, Local Health Care Coalition: I think you're **partially inaccurate in your statement that local food pantries and churches don't have freezers and coolers. I know we do** for one, and I'm not sure of the commodities that they have at other churches but we have a freezer and we have a refrigerator.

Danielle Blacet: Something to keep in mind is that **with our growers as soon as the commodity is harvested it immediately goes into cold storage. Within an hour of when it's picked it goes into cold storage and it has to remain there and throughout the transportation process it will remain in cold storage in order to last more than a day or so. There really is no way to get around not having cold storage for your fresh produce.**

Edie Jessup: I want to call your attention to the back of your agenda. On the issue of fresh produce and our supply of food and its distribution we have three meetings that are not on this Calendar. **We've been meeting once a month as a Food Resources/Gleaning Task Group.** We'll be meeting with the **Food Banks** and other folks who are bringing large quantities of food into Fresno for distribution on the 18th and we're having a **Farm Fresh Meeting** with Gwen and some small farmers on the 23rd and on the 24th we're working with our **Senior Nutrition Task Group** trying to look at how we can support expanding the rescue efforts here in Fresno. **There is no gleaning operation other than Plant a Row, which is doing citrus gleaning,** so call us if you're interested in participating. I also want to call your attention to Friday the 13th from 9 to 10:30 the Child Nutrition Group meeting is at Metro Ministry and we are honing in on recommendations to the school board on a School Nutrition Policy. You're welcome to be there and to participate in issues that we'd like to take to the school board fairly soon. We have a Food Stamp Advocacy Group; I was really glad to hear Danielle talking about Food Stamps and how that's a way for people to buy food, and what that could mean in terms of income here to our county.

Laurie Labett, Plant a Row for the Hungry: Edie, can I just highlight our Plant a Row donation day? **The final donation day for this winter for citrus is going to be on Saturday the 21st at the Garden of the Sun.** I have extra fliers. **If any of you live in neighborhoods where you know the fruit is just going to go to waste I'm dropping these fliers off at people's houses at this point to encourage them to donate the produce, and I think that movement is really growing throughout Fresno.**

Edie Jessup: I know that it has and I know that Plant a Row and their volunteers have picked over ten tons of oranges and the food bank is helping to get those out to people. **It's that cooperation**

and building on that I think that is very, very important. I have one other announcement. **At the back of the hall we have put up last year's Summer Lunch sites and we've done a map and it has little stickers on it, yellow and green, that show where Summer Lunch was served in Fresno and parts of Fresno County last year. You will see that it hardly covers the need. We know that 75 to 85 percent of our kids in school in Fresno County are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. When it is summer they are without that meal during the day and the more sites that we can find Fresno Unified has said that they will work with folks and provide the food so we just need the sites and some adult supervision.** You can call Sponsors Fresno Unified or you can call Gary Joseph at EOC who also can serve up to 40 sites in the county. They can do all the paperwork, they can provide the food, and you could provide **sites and volunteers.** We will also need your help with doing **outreach** so more kids know about the program and more parents know about the program. Take a minute to take a look at where Summer Lunch Sites were last year and **know that we need many, many more sites this year.**

I thank the Fresno County Farm Bureau and Western Growers very, very much for coming. It's been very helpful. I think that we have a handful of things that we might be able to work them on for better food access. Their advice and information could be very helpful to us here locally. The Community Hunger & Nutrition Forum really appreciates your being here and your active participation.

American Heart Awareness Month

Edie Jessup: I want to mention that I'm wearing red today for **American Heart Association Awareness.** I wish I had a red dress because that is the symbol this year to call attention to women with heart disease. We know that frequently heart disease and good nutrition do not necessarily happen at the same time. The situation, for women and minorities, is particularly disturbing in terms of numbers that have heart disease. One year ago today I was 50 pounds heavier and I did not have a heart stent, but I do now. I have had to change my diet even though I didn't think it was that bad. I've had to change my exercise routine even though I thought I was getting exercise. And, I am a healthy person as a result of it. It's important to know that I have had a lot of support in making changes, in making the changes that will contribute to my good health. I happen to have good community support and family support. I also have an employer who provides health insurance, and I'll tell you, that makes a lot of difference in being paid attention to by the medical profession and accessing the best of intervention and recovery treatment, and I know that I was very fortunate.