

## San Diego Hunger Coalition Connecting Local Farmers to Schools



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*The growing desire for fresh, local produce is finding its way into school lunch programs. The San Diego Hunger Coalition is working to reduce hunger through collaborative initiatives with local school districts. One of the ways SDHC accomplishes its goals is through making connections among members. One of these connections is Bob Knight, a fourth generation orange and kiwi farmer in Redlands. He is the founder of Old Grove Orange, Inc., an organization that helps small, local farmers connect with the school market. "I want to help make farm-to-school a consistent reality in San Diego County," he states.*

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SDHC and its partners are making important connections for Bob Knight, a fourth generation orange and kiwi farmer in Redlands. He is the founder of Old Grove Orange, Inc., an organization that helps small, local farmers connect with the school market. "I want to help make farm-to-school a consistent reality in San Diego County," he states.

With the help of San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, a program facilitated by the Community Health Improvement Partners (COI), SDHC aids Knight in his cause by helping him establish relationships. When these two organizations stepped in, Knight was already working with Vanessa Zajfen, a Farm-To-School Specialist with

the San Diego Unified School District, to provide produce for school nutrition programs through southern California growers. "We helped connect him to as many school food service directors outside of San Diego Unified as possible," says Sadie Sponsler, RD, Anti Hunger Network Manager at SDHC. "It can be challenging for busy Directors who do not have a Farm To School Specialist on staff to make the connections." Farmer Knight is now sourcing food to San Marcos, Fallbrook, Coronado, Oceanside and more. Since 2009, Sponsler has worked closely with Julianna Arnett of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative and facilitator of the San Diego Farm To School Task to connect local growers like Farmer Knight to schools throughout the county.

Knight makes impressive use of the aid that these organizations give him. After SDHC and COI connected him to the San Diego Farm Bureau, Knight learned about a farmer who had recently lost his contract with Home Depot. This farmer had rows of greenhouses that would have fallen into disuse without the contract. Bob Knight saw an opportunity. "I was looking for someone to grow baby cucumbers and other small vegetables to sell to schools," Knight explains. Now the greenhouses are being put to use and the farmer has a new income stream.

Bob Knight's efforts aid schools by opening up the option for fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables. His efforts also aid farmers-some of whom lose contracts with big buyers. "I'm proud to be a fourth generation orange grower," Knight says. "I don't want to see any more groves disappear."

SDHC, COI and Knight work vigilantly to make farm-to-school a reality. "The students and the Nutrition Service Directors we have connected Bob to are loving his produce," states Sponsler. "He speaks the language of the Nutrition Service Director and provides a beautiful, affordable, local product for the students. It's a win-win for the growers and the Directors."

The San Diego Hunger Coalition mission is to build a successful anti-hunger network that eliminates food insecurity in San Diego County. SDHC positively influences public policy regarding hunger and nutrition

and engages community members in fighting hunger and obesity. SDHC focuses on the scope of the whole food system, not simply one part, as hunger and food insecurity are inextricably linked to obesity and weight-related illnesses. For more information about the San Diego Hunger Coalition, please visit [www.sandiegohungercoalition.org/](http://www.sandiegohungercoalition.org/)

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