

Nearly 40 percent of food produced in the US is wasted

BY MICHAEL BISCH
Special to The Sacramento Bee



One in four Californians lack sufficient nutrition. Nearly half of all families in Yolo County and more than one-third of all families in the Sacramento region don't earn enough to meet their basic needs.

People of color have even higher rates of food insecurity, and the COVID-19 crisis has left them even more vulnerable. Not only did the pandemic triple the need for food assistance, it also

highlighted the inequities in California's food system.

At the same time, about 2.2 billion pounds of perfectly good, nutritious food is dumped in landfills every year statewide.

Forward-thinking California legislators passed Senate Bill 1383 in 2016, providing the multiple benefits of reducing waste and greenhouse gas emissions, while nourishing those most in need. Full implementation in early 2022 could help unsold food from businesses get to the people who need it most.

Almost 40% of the food produced in our country is never eaten; instead, it's sent at consumers' expense to rot in landfills, emitting

methane, a gas 84 times more potent than carbon dioxide. In fact, food and other organics in landfills produce 20% of this climate super pollutant in California. Committing to and investing in surplus food recovery will nourish people instead of landfills, and slash methane emissions.

Wasting 40% of our food makes no sense when millions of families need it. Surplus food recovery programs, such as Yolo Food Bank's, create sustainable systems to collect unsold food from grocers and other large-scale food businesses and distribute it to struggling families.

Starting Jan. 1, SB 1383 mandates that cities and counties implement and

fund programs to ensure that grocers and other large food businesses donate surplus, edible food to food recovery organizations. Yolo Food Bank is working with local officials in Yolo County to maximize this edible food recovery, yet success isn't assured.

The new law is the best hope in decades of building an equitable, sustainable local food system to feed the people most in need throughout the state. CalRecycle has been a steady advocate over the past five years for the potential of SB 1383 to elevate both food security and climate outcomes. By administering a grants program to build food waste prevention and rescue infrastructure,

CalRecycle has ensured that food for more than 115 million meals reached Californians in need thanks to \$24 million in food rescue grants statewide, funding 76 projects preventing greenhouse gas emissions. This is equal to removing 21,000 cars from roads each year.

Yolo Food Bank was awarded two CalRecycle grants in the past two years. In 2019, a \$500,000 award funded equipment, software and vehicles for our new food recovery warehouse and operations facility, quadrupling our intake and distribution of surplus food to Yolo County's most vulnerable. This investment, along with substantial private donations, helped the food bank rescue food for more than 8.3 million meals to residents without enough to eat in 2020.

Nearly 70% of this food was donated by major grocers, food distributors

and processors throughout Yolo County. The other \$300,000 grant will rescue enough food for an additional 1.5 million meals still needlessly thrown in the Yolo County Central Landfill.

Just six months before the launch of massive mandatory surplus food donations from large food businesses, many food recovery organizations are poised to save both people and the planet from poor outcomes thanks to the foresight of SB 1383 and investments by CalRecycle and inspired private donors.

What's needed now is the political will and commitment to social and climate justice by local and state jurisdictions to invest in the critical infrastructure and programs to ensure that surplus edible food in California provides the nutrition that everyone deserve.

Michael Bisch is the executive director of the Yolo Food Bank.

Project HomeKey isn't enough; California's homelessness funding needs a Plan B

BY GARY PAINTER
Special to The Sacramento Bee



Gov. Gavin Newsom's budget includes the largest funding package for combating homelessness in our state's history — but it isn't enough. As COVID-19 restrictions ease, Newsom must establish a Plan B for using these critical funds or risk leaving billions of dollars idle during a time when more than 161,500 Californians are experiencing homelessness.

I'm encouraged by the breadth of support the governor included and investments in proven programs like Project HomeKey. The success of this initiative — allotted \$7 billion in Newsom's new budget — is conditional on the willingness of motels and hotels to rent or sell available rooms and properties. This formula worked during the pandemic, but may not fare as well in our reopening economy.

Businesses are reopening, people are booking trips, corporate travel is on the rise and, consequently, hotels and motels are finally seeing a resurgence of customers. According to CoStar, hotel occupancy hit a pandemic high of 58.9% in late-March 2021, with the third largest gains in California. Revenue per available room reached 69% of 2019 levels, moving many state markets from "recession" to "recovery" categories.

Amid this growth, one thing is clear: there's a strong likelihood that the incentive to participate in Project HomeKey will diminish.

I'm not suggesting that Project HomeKey is doomed to fail. The project and its Project Roomkey predecessor have seen success. At Project Roomkey's peak, Sacramento housed 1,356 individuals. As of April 10, 2021, 468 are still sheltered and the project is expected to continue through August.

Thanks to Roomkey's success, Project HomeKey was created to produce long-term living spaces through hotel and motel purchases. In Sacramento, 174 people have been permanently housed.

Earlier this year, Alan X. Reay, president of Atlas Hospitality Group said, "without Project HomeKey, California would have seen 26% less individual hotel sales and 61% less in total dollar volume."

However, Project Roomkey never achieved its full potential, housing only 8% of the homeless population. In part, this was due to hotel operators refusing to participate due to a variety of issues. It is imperative to learn from these lessons when planning the use of Project HomeKey funds.

To maximize the budget's impact, the Legislature should establish a check-in to evaluate Project HomeKey's progress and the ongoing potential of hotel/motel purchasing projections. If the initiative isn't approaching its target numbers in a timely manner, California leaders should have the option to divert Project HomeKey funding to existing programs like Rapid Rehousing, Housing for a Healthy California and CalWorks Housing Support.

Newsom could use idle Project HomeKey funding to take bold action on improving overall housing stability. Before the pandemic hit, a recent study found that 48% of households in Central and South Los Angeles paid over 50% of their income on rent. Similarly, a research brief from the Homelessness Policy Research Institute showed that 1.3 million California households met the definition of severe rent-burden. This same report proposes an average subsidy of \$6,400 per impacted household to reduce pressure on extremely low-income families so they pay no more than 50% of their income on rent and utilities.

A well-funded budget is only as effective as the strategy attached to it. Project HomeKey has the potential to succeed — but in a market where hotel and motel sales could stagnate, we have to have a Plan B.

Gary Painter is a professor at the University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy, chair of the Department of Public Policy and director of the Sol Price Center for Social Innovation and the Homelessness Policy Research Institute.



Don't weaponize antisemitism to ignore Palestinians' persecution

BY DAVID L. MANDEL
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Concerned by reported attacks on Jews linked to a recent surge in Israeli-Palestinian violence, I attended a May 27 rally against antisemitism organized by the Sacramento Jewish Federation. I stood aside, however, put off by the Israeli flags waved by and literally draped over the crowd of about 100.

Remarks from legislators and Federation leaders mostly avoided conflating criticism of Israel or Zionism with antisemitism. Some, admirably, called for protecting other communities, notably Muslims, when they come under attack. Business leader Kais Menoufi, who is of Egyptian heritage, emphasized, to some consternation, the importance of differentiating "between the state of Israel and (being) Jewish."

But the loudest applause came when Rabbi Lionel Moses proclaimed, "Whether we live here as Americans or live in Israel, for Jews, the state of Israel is our homeland. ... Anti-Zionism is a synonym, an identical word, to antisemitism."

That's wrong and dangerous. It paints all Jews with a pro-Israel brush; it feeds the trope of disloyalty to our actual home; and it negates sincere



PAUL KITAGAKI JR. pkitagaki@sacbee.com

Demonstrators block 16th and J streets in support of freedom for Palestinians during a peaceful protest on May 21 in Sacramento.

concerns about the displacement, occupation and systemic discrimination inflicted on the Palestinian people — what two widely respected human rights organizations, one Israeli, recently concluded constitutes apartheid.

Unlike the vast majority of American Jews, I'm also an Israeli citizen and lived there for a decade. If ever asked, "Do you feel a strong emotional attachment to Israelis?" I would say yes, as hundreds of close relatives and friends, Jewish and Palestinian, remain. But I would then be wrongly construed a strong "supporter of Israel."

I joined hundreds of local Palestinian Americans at recent protests downtown against Israel's violent assaults on Jerusalem worshippers and Gaza civilians.

Rejection of Zionism, a political movement that has always been opposed

by significant numbers of Jews, is not antisemitic — nor is criticism of Israeli state policies. But those who insist on conflating "Israeli" or "Zionist" with "Jew" should not be surprised when, occasionally, anger at Israel wrongly targets Jews.

In the Arab world, anti-Jewish sentiment is not a major cause of enmity between Palestinians and Israeli Jews but mostly a consequence of it — and of misguided insistence that Israel represents all Jews.

As for the recent attacks, every prominent leader of the movement for Palestinian rights has rushed to denounce actual antisemitic acts when they occur. Moreover, some witnesses have disputed who actually started the melees, alleging that some of the viral videos were tendentious edited.

More problematic, however, is that such

reports mostly cite the Anti-Defamation League regarding the "surge" of attacks, despite its history of conflating political critique with antisemitism. Here are two examples from ADL's current antisemitism tracker:

"A Jewish man ... was walking in downtown Chicago ... when a demonstrator from a pro-Palestinian rally yelled at him, 'Jewish people yes! Zionism no!'"

"A rally in Houston included signs that read, 'One Holocaust doesn't justify another.'"

The first makes a clear distinction. The second comment's Holocaust citation may be insensitive and counterproductive, but there's a vast difference between accusing Israel of Nazi-like behavior and actual Nazi-like behavior that attacks Jews as Jews.

The Trump years witnessed a resurgence of the latter, from "Jews will not replace us" chants in Charlottesville to swastika scrawling, cemetery vandalism and synagogue shootings.

Antisemitism is real, but it's one particular form of racism, to be denounced and fought. It's not okay to weaponize it to deflect from the persecution of Palestinians. Instead, let's commit to the principle that safety for any group depends on safety for all.

David L. Mandel is a former journalist and legal aid attorney now involved with Jewish Voice for Peace, Democratic Socialists of America, National Lawyers Guild and the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, where he is an elected member of the state and county central committees.