

Food Insecurity and Finding Solutions  
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Our project involves finding solutions to battle not only food insecurity but nutrition insecurity. Solving food insecurity goes beyond simply providing food for individuals who struggle to afford food or have limited availability to food. To better explain this, if individuals suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, etc., they require nutritious foods that won't aggravate their condition and instead help improve their symptoms. With increased disparities, it leads to poor mental health due to stress and malnutrition. If we can improve food insecurity and reduce barriers, we can support long term economic stability as well as well-being. Therefore, a healthy, balanced diet is essential to help them stay nourished and maintain their health.

For our direct service, we partnered with Alchemist Community Development Corporation who has a Cal Fresh booth at the farmer's market. We worked primarily with the Midtown and Elk Grove Farmers Markets. At these booths they have a program called market match for individuals with Cal Fresh. This involves a transaction similar to an ATM where individuals take out money from their Cal Fresh/EBT card and receive vouchers (money) to shop at the market with. By participating, individuals receive additional free vouchers called market matches which go up to \$15. For instance, if an individual takes out \$10, they will receive \$10 from the market match. Individuals can receive market matches once per day per market, meaning if they visit other markets, they can participate in the market match again. The difference between the Cal Fresh and market match vouchers are the products eligible. For example, the Cal Fresh vouchers can be used for fresh produce, honey, oil, meat or dairy products, baked goods, etc. However, the market match vouchers are limited to fresh produce only. It is recommended that individuals use the market match vouchers first to buy their produce and use the Cal Fresh vouchers to buy the rest of their items.

The significance of this program is that it facilitates shopping for healthy foods since individuals can make the most out of their Cal Fresh benefits at the market. There is a wide variety of products offered for customers, allowing them to obtain a healthy and balanced diet in an affordable way. Throughout our volunteering, we were able to observe the huge diversity of the vendors and cultural options available. As mentioned above, food insecurity goes beyond simply giving food to those in need but addressing the barriers they face. A vast majority of individuals who struggle with food insecurity are cultural minorities. For this reason, it is incredibly helpful to see all the options offered at Midtown Farmers Market; this includes vendors selling ingredients to make cultural food such as seasonings or salsa, already made cultural food items such as baked goods, hummus, naan bread, etc. The diverse environment encourages individuals to continue to visit the market knowing they can access healthy and various items. Similarly, in the feedback received from customers at the Midtown location, they shared how the market match program allows them to afford healthy food: shopping for and cooking homemade meals becomes easier. Without a doubt, the Cal Fresh Market Match program has had a great impact on individuals struggling with food insecurity.

The pamphlet we all worked on covers things you can have in your pantry as well as what is in season. As Benjamin Brumer, Alchemist program associate, stated in the interview, berries and pitted fruits are sweeter in the spring and summer months, with greens and root vegetables being more flavorful in the fall and winter months. The front side of the pamphlet consists of what is in season, such as leafy greens and root vegetables in the fall/winter and stone fruits (cherries, peaches) in the summer months. The back side has information on how to build your pantry, including things like condiments, baking ingredients, seasonings, produce, and carbohydrates, to include a little from each food group. The produce and other ingredients listed are staples in what you should keep stocked, so you can open your pantry and get a better idea of what's available.

Along with the pamphlet, we also created cultural recipes that are affordable and are a mix of vegetarian, vegan, and whole-food ingredients. These recipes will be available through a QR code added to our pamphlet. We included tips to modify the recipes based on underlying conditions or any diet restrictions people may have. The purpose of including our e-book in the pamphlet is to hopefully inspire individuals to cook more homemade meals. It is a great way to eat balanced and nutritious meals that help manage or improve health conditions. The meals included are some we eat regularly in our households, are easy to prepare, and can be easily modified. Additionally, it can also help guide individuals shopping at the farmers market on how to use certain items they bought. For example, how to make a meal with a new vegetable they bought, how they can use a new seasoning or exploring new cultural foods. Furthermore, by making more meals at home, it can also prevent food waste by allowing individuals to use ingredients they have at home before they expire.

### The Importance of Tackling Food Insecurity

Previously, we talked about how important nutrition insecurity is along with food insecurity. As we volunteered at the Midtown and Elk Grove farmers markets, we saw the different produce items, ingredients, and the fresh meals they make. A lot of the items at these markets are fresh and are beneficial for people with digestive issues. For our project, we focused a lot on nutrition and looked at the benefits of consuming these fruits and vegetables, while also looking at nutrition labels to see what you are eating. During our interview, we also talked about the importance of the “[My Plate](#)” and making sure to get in all the different categories (dairy, grains, vegetables, fruits, and protein) but one of the major ones that was missing was fiber. Not getting enough fiber in your diet can cause digestive problems and that emphasizes why we should encourage people to eat foods that contain fiber in them. On the other hand, we also want to mention another benefit to fresh produce: vitamins. The 4 main vitamin deficiencies are Vitamin D, B12, A and Folate, which can often cause fatigue, weaker immunity, and cognitive issues. It is essential and beneficial to our health and maintain it and prevent the development or worsening of any conditions.

### Creating a Healthier Food Environment: Harman

When we went to do our direct service at the Midtown farmers market, each day we went we got a chance to do and learn something new! I saw how diverse and positive the community is and how everyone treated each other so nicely. At first, I felt like I would not be helpful or not know what to do, but because every one of the staff and volunteers was very helpful, I was able to help out quickly. One of the things I noticed was how the majority of vendors sold food/drinks that were really healthy. I saw a couple of vendors selling sourdough bread, kombucha/fruit juices, honey, a few different kinds of meat, and other freshly made goods. I really liked that the vendors made everything fresh because that helps with how well we can digest food. We

can maintain our health through fresh food and drinks rather than the ones we find at several stores that add in a bunch of preservatives and dyes, which make it harder for people who have underlying conditions. When I would help out with transactions, I saw a few people who said they really appreciate what Alchemist does and it was nice to hear messages similar to that one because I like that Alchemist is working on creating a positive environment and experience for anyone who comes. Even if it was someone's first time coming and they were unsure of the process, Benjamin and the other staff explained super nicely and that was something I admired. I also liked that the things we learned from our discussions in class was something I got to experience through my direct service, which was how reflections can make us more intentional with our actions and making connections. I am glad that we did our direct service at the midtown farmer's market because I got a chance to see one of the ways Alchemist helps to tackle food insecurity as well as nutrition insecurity.

### Addressing Barriers to Nutrition - Andrea

Throughout our direct service at the farmers market and creating our project, I was able to reflect on the importance of solving food insecurity. It is more than not having access to food; it also takes a toll on emotional and physical health. There are so many factors to take into consideration including transportation, language barriers, underlying health conditions, or cultural restrictions. At the farmers market, I noticed that a lot of these barriers were addressed to help individuals struggling with food insecurity. For instance, I noticed that a few individuals rode their bikes to the market or came to the market with family or friends facilitating the barrier to transportation. The Midtown Farmers Market also offers diverse cultural foods and items, therefore creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all individuals. I also noticed that vendors communicated with customers in their native language facilitating communication. Additionally, the market offers fresh produce, fermented foods such as kombucha and kefir as well as homemade baked goods, sourdough, etc. All these healthy options make it easier for people to obtain a balanced diet and maintain good health especially if they have any diet restrictions or underlying conditions. I am grateful to have been able to take part in working with Alchemist helping individuals obtain access to healthy food in an easy and affordable way. They are making a positive difference in helping solve the issue of food insecurity. I admire how they take the time to get to know the individuals, greeting them every time they visit the market and even checking in with those who are regulars. I connect this to what we have discussed in our service-learning class, not seeing our service as transactional but as collaborating to achieve a certain goal. In this case, we are assisting individuals in getting access to affordable and healthy food. Lastly, we learned about the importance of separating individuals from their situation and getting to know them as a person without making assumptions. The market match program is only one of the ways that Alchemist contributes to solving food insecurity. If you are interested in learning more about their organization or if you would like to volunteer, you can visit their website: [Alchemist CDC](#).

### Elk Grove Farmers Market- Mykea

The farmers market in Elk Grove on Laguna Boulevard is a smaller market and that's where I did most of my service. I thoroughly enjoyed doing my service there. The Cal fresh booth is highly utilized in this location. Farmers Market are usually seen as something that is a luxury and a place you go when you have disposable income. The fact that families are incentivized through the market match program for shopping and receive the highest quality of fruit, vegetables, honey, and bread. The farmers and vendors' profits are increased now

because the market is now accessible for a demographic that may have not visited the markets traditionally. The farmers market run by Alchemist is so rich in community and mutual benefits for everyone involved, farmers, patrons, and volunteers alike. If you ever have time, visit your local farmer's market.

#### References:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9710417/#:~:text=Iron%2C%20folate%2C%20zinc%2C%20iodine%2C%20and%20vitamin%20A%20are,morbidity%20and%20mortality%20%5B1%5D>.