

Amid abundance, some aren't getting enough

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Once a month, we highlight one of the true selling points of the coast: its rich foodie possibilities. You can find the June Food and Drink pages in the A section today. As usual, we talk about a new restaurant, opportunities to tour farm-fresh local operations and taste Coastside delicacies.

Amid such abundance, it's easy to forget that many of our neighbors have so much less. That fact was highlighted again last week in a California Food Policy Advocates report that estimates 14,169 children in San Mateo County don't eat as well in the summer because they are missing free or reduced-price school lunches. Again, more than 14,000 local kids are going hungry in the summer months.

The phenomenon is known as food insecurity. It refers to people — many from hard-working families — who don't have enough healthy food to eat or can't count on that next meal. Statewide, the advocacy group says 1.7 million low-income children are affected by this “nutrition gap” between the school months and the heat of summer.

The policy group is recommending an increase in federal nutritional assistance for low-income families and for California to prepare for that expanded Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children.

They say you are what you eat, and that seems to be particularly so for children. Some facts:

There is ample evidence that poorly nourished kids are more likely to get sick. They, therefore, miss school and fail to thrive in many ways.

It may not be obvious, but a lack of nutritious food contributes to obesity. Kids who don't have healthy meals are apt to fill their bellies with inexpensive soft drinks and junk food.

We know that school-age children who eat breakfast are less fidgety and perform better on a variety of functions.

There is evidence that we take our childhood eating habits into adulthood. If we are trained to eat well as children, we are much more likely to continue to do so. That cuts health care costs and makes for more productive citizens.

A well-balanced diet that includes calcium and vitamin D is essential for building bone mass and 90 percent of our bones are built before adulthood. Eating well as a child affects your risk for osteoporosis later in life.

For all these reasons and more, we can't afford to let our children go hungry.

It's food for thought as we enjoy the bounty that is available in our upscale grocers and local farmers markets. We should all benefit from these unique resources that are so close but remain out of reach for too many in our own community.