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OPINION

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Invite the needy for Thanksgiving?

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My Word

WHAT IF you could invite every Bay Area adult who has struggled to put food on the table to join you for Thanksgiving dinner? You'd need 350,000 place settings, 43,750 pumpkin pies and 23,333 turkeys. But it wouldn't end there.

While you're at it, you'd invite their entire household because when adults go without food, it's likely the children in their lives are doing the same.

It's easy to be thankful when the food is plentiful and the company great. Unfortunately, if your guests didn't have enough food the day before Thanksgiving, it's pretty likely things will be the same the next day, too.

In a state that produces enough food to supply a great portion of our country, it simply doesn't make sense that people go without. Yet, they do.

It's simple. When money starts to run out and you have to pay all the same bills, you skimp on discretionary items; often that's food. The thing is we know food is important, both in amount and quality.

Children who are food insecure are more likely to be ill and absent from school; achievement drops as perfor-

mance dwindles. Adults suffer as well; food insecurity has been associated with higher rates of stress and poor health outcomes, including obesity.

It's pretty clear that we all need healthy and nutritious food to function at our best. So what are we doing about it?

The good news is that things are looking up these days. President Barack Obama has committed to work toward ending domestic childhood hunger by 2015, creating new strategies to address hunger at the federal, state and local levels.

In addition, the federal stimulus package increased funding for the food stamp program. The California Department of Public Health estimates that households can receive a boost of about 14 percent in benefits. For a family of four, that could mean an additional \$80 a month.

What's more, the food stamp program doesn't just help those who receive the benefit. Food stamps have the greatest economic multiplier effect of all public programs. For every federal food stamp dollar received by

participants, California benefits from about \$1.84 in economic stimulation. That extra \$80 in benefits received through the stimulus package comes out to about \$147 in economic activity for all of California. It seems like a win-win situation because it is.

This is a complicated issue with many potential solutions, but one stands out. We know it works, and works now. We need to continue supporting improvements in the food stamp program, urging our legislators to consider public policy geared toward increasing quality, access and enrollment, policies focused on eliminating an unnecessary hardship faced by an unacceptable number of Californians.

Thanksgiving marks the start of a season that involves a whole lot of giving. This year, spend a little time giving your local legislator your opinion on ending food insecurity in California. I just don't think any of us can manage a Thanksgiving dinner for all of the needy Bay Area folks (though I wish I could).

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