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**"Weight-loss surgery changed my life."**



# Removing hurdles for hungry in S.J.

Several bills signed recently by Gov. Jerry Brown should enable more people to access food stamps

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By **Zachary K. Johnson**  
Record Staff Writer  
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STOCKTON - The growing population of San Joaquin County's hungry has something to celebrate.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed a raft of food-policy bills into law earlier this month, and local hunger advocates are grateful.

Inside the new laws are changes that make it easier for people to receive benefits through CalFresh, the state's name for the program more commonly known as food stamps. Local advocates have joined the statewide call that only about half of those eligible in California were actually receiving the benefit, which meant less food for needy families and lost millions in the county economy.

### Hunger task force

The Hunger Task Force for San Joaquin is holding its biannual meeting at 9 a.m. Friday at the Emergency Food Bank of Stockton/San Joaquin, 7 West Scotts Ave., Stockton.

Stockton/San Joaquin.

The change in food policy is going to be cause for celebration when the group next meets Friday.

California will be the last state to get rid of a requirement that food-stamp recipients get fingerprinted, according to advocates. It was part of AB6, introduced by Assemblyman Felipe Fuentes, D-Sylmar, but it's been on wish lists for a long time.

"That's something folks have been working on, year after year, for 10 years," said Alexis Fernandez, nutrition policy advocate with California Food Policy Advocates.

The requirement reduces participation in the program, and it does little to prevent fraud, for which there are other safeguards, she said. The same law also reduces the number of times a year people receiving the benefit have to report information to the

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The need for help in California is great, she said.

"We have never seen this level of need for so long," Fernandez said.

As the recession hit and the recovery limped along, San Joaquin County agencies and local charities also have noticed the need growing.

It's been a combination of the growing need and increased outreach that has seen the number of people receiving food stamps to continue to rise in the past year, according to county officials. The number of people receiving the CalFresh benefit has grown from 88,320 in August 2010 to 101,750 two months ago. That works out to about one in seven people in the county receiving the benefit.

The county has taken steps to increase access in recent years, including replacing face-to-face meetings with telephone interviews and launching a program that allows people to apply online. And people were able to receive CalFresh benefits for a full year before having to report to downtown Stockton for fingerprinting.

The change in state law will help even more, said Brian Taing, program manager at San Joaquin Human Services Agency.

"This will enable us to help a lot more clients who are in need," Taing said.

Exact details on how to implement the new law are still to come, he said. The fingerprinting requirement will be removed by Jan. 1, but the reporting changes don't go into effect until 2013.

The new laws also will help growers and food producers in San Joaquin County, who can put money in their pockets while helping those in need under legislation that provides tax credits for those making donations.

Philanthropy already drives donations, but there's still the cost of harvesting and transportation that could prevent even more, said Eric Manke, policy and communications manager with the California Association of Food Banks. Contributions can also help growers reach new markets.

The tax credit in AB152, another Fuentes bill, adds another reason to donate. "It provides just one extra incentive to the list," he said.

"It was a very good year if you are trying to get fresh, healthy foods into the hands of people who need it most," he said.

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