

Candidate Hunger Action Challenge

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Running for:
San Francisco Board of Supervisors, District 3

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What do you think are the root causes of hunger, and what do you see as the government's role in addressing them?

The root causes of hunger are deeply intertwined with economic inequality, housing instability, lack of access to affordable healthcare, and systemic barriers to education and employment. In San Francisco, the high cost of living exacerbates food insecurity, making it difficult for low-income individuals and families to afford both housing and nutritious food. Additionally, marginalized communities, such as people of color and immigrants, often face systemic discrimination and limited access to resources that further contribute to food insecurity.

The government's role in addressing hunger must be multifaceted. It should focus on ensuring a strong social safety net that includes robust food assistance programs, affordable housing initiatives, healthcare access, and workforce development. Local governments, in particular, can strengthen partnerships with organizations like the SF-Marin Food Bank to improve outreach and ensure food distribution to underserved areas. Furthermore, the government should promote sustainable urban development that includes access to healthy food options in all neighborhoods. Addressing the root causes of hunger requires long-term economic and social reforms that close the wealth gap, improve access to education, and create opportunities for upward mobility.

If elected, how would you ensure coordination between the multiple government departments that fund and administer food assistance programs?

If elected, I would prioritize establishing a centralized task force or office specifically focused on food security to ensure seamless coordination between the multiple government departments involved in food assistance programs. This task force would act as the hub for all food-related initiatives, ensuring that programs are not siloed, and resources are allocated efficiently. Here are some specific steps I would take:

Create a cross-departmental working group: This group would bring together key representatives from the Department of Public Health, Human Services Agency, Housing Department, and other relevant agencies. Its primary function would be to ensure that food assistance programs are aligned, avoid overlap, and leverage existing resources more effectively. Regular meetings and clear communication channels would ensure a coordinated approach to addressing food insecurity.

Utilize data to track and improve service delivery: I would advocate for a unified data-sharing platform that enables all departments to access up-to-date information on food insecurity rates, program participation, and geographic coverage. This would allow us to identify gaps in services and better direct resources to areas in need. It would also help streamline the process for residents by ensuring they can access multiple services through a single point of entry.

Develop a streamlined application process: Currently, residents often have to navigate different systems to access food assistance. By centralizing these programs, we could create a single, user-friendly application for all food assistance programs, reducing administrative barriers and improving access for those who need help the most.

Foster partnerships with local organizations: I would work to enhance coordination between city agencies and organizations like the SF-Marin Food Bank. By having clear points of contact and regular collaboration between government and nonprofit partners, we can ensure that food assistance is distributed efficiently and that government programs support and complement community-based initiatives.

Hold departments accountable through measurable goals: I would set clear benchmarks for all departments involved in food security initiatives, focusing on outcomes such as reducing food insecurity, improving access to services, and the effectiveness of program delivery. These goals would be regularly assessed and publicized to ensure accountability and transparency.

By creating a coordinated framework across departments and leveraging partnerships with community organizations, we can improve efficiency, reduce bureaucracy, and ensure that all residents in San Francisco have access to the food assistance they need.

Studies have shown food can be medicine. If elected, how do you plan to use your position to improve food-related health disparities?

As Supervisor, I would take a proactive approach to addressing food-related health disparities by leveraging the concept of “food as medicine” to improve the well-being of residents, especially in underserved communities. Here’s how I would use my position to tackle this issue:

Support and expand medically tailored meal programs: I would champion the development and funding of programs that provide medically tailored meals to residents suffering from chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, or obesity. These programs, like those already piloted in various cities, have shown great success in improving health outcomes and reducing hospital readmissions. Partnering with local health providers and organizations like the SF-Marin Food Bank, we can expand access to these vital services in San Francisco.

Integrate food access with healthcare: I would work to establish formal partnerships between the Department of Public Health, local clinics, and food assistance programs to ensure food security is recognized as a critical component of preventive healthcare. By enabling healthcare providers to “prescribe” healthy food and refer patients to food assistance programs, we can bridge the gap between food and healthcare, ensuring that nutrition is treated as a vital aspect of overall health.

Promote access to affordable, healthy food in underserved areas: In neighborhoods facing high levels of food insecurity and limited access to healthy options, I would advocate for incentives to bring more grocery stores, farmers markets, and community gardens into these areas. Programs that offer subsidies for fresh produce or vouchers for healthy food—redeemable at local stores or markets—could be expanded. By improving access to healthy food, we can reduce diet-related health disparities.

Implement nutrition education and food literacy programs: I would support funding for community-based nutrition education programs that teach residents how to make healthy, affordable meals with accessible ingredients. These programs can be offered in schools, community centers, and senior living facilities, empowering individuals and families with the knowledge they need to make informed choices about their diet.

Advocate for food policies that promote healthier options: I would support policies that incentivize the production and distribution of nutritious foods while disincentivizing highly processed, unhealthy foods. This could include implementing city-level taxes on sugary drinks, supporting local farmers, and encouraging urban agriculture to ensure fresh, local produce is readily available.

By integrating food into our healthcare systems, expanding access to healthy food, and educating the community, we can use food as a tool to combat chronic illness and health disparities, ultimately improving the health outcomes of San Francisco residents.

The San Francisco-Marin Food Bank will be closing all Food Bank-run Pop-up Pantries by June 2025 due to cuts in government pandemic funding. This program currently serves 11,400 households, 75% of which are estimated to lose access to free weekly groceries when the funding ends. If elected, what would you do to ensure that all San Franciscans have access to nutritious foods?

The closure of the SF-Marin Food Bank’s Pop-Up Pantries is a major concern, especially with the significant number of households that will be affected. If elected, I would prioritize ensuring that all San Franciscans continue to have access to nutritious food, even as pandemic-era funding ends. Here are the key steps I would take:

Advocate for local government funding: I would push for the city to allocate emergency funds to keep these essential food pantries running. By identifying areas of the budget where resources can be redirected, we can provide immediate support while we work on long-term solutions. Food security should be a top priority, especially in a city like San Francisco where the cost of living is so high.

Leverage public-private partnerships: I would work to forge partnerships with local businesses, philanthropic organizations, and tech companies to help fund food assistance programs. By engaging the private sector, we can tap into new streams of funding and increase the capacity of the SF-Marin Food Bank and other nonprofits that provide critical food services.

Expand access to existing food programs: We can increase enrollment in CalFresh and other food assistance programs by launching a targeted outreach campaign, particularly focused on underserved communities that may be unaware of their eligibility. By simplifying the application process and collaborating with community organizations for outreach, we can make sure more residents are taking advantage of these state and federal resources.

Support community-based food initiatives: I would encourage the development of community gardens, local urban farms, and neighborhood food co-ops to create more sustainable, localized food systems. By offering city support and grants for these initiatives, we can empower communities to provide for themselves and reduce dependence on centralized food pantries.

Introduce legislation for long-term food security planning: I would propose legislation that mandates the city to develop a comprehensive food security plan, ensuring that food access is a permanent part of San Francisco's social safety net. This plan would include contingencies for future economic downturns or crises, preventing the need for emergency measures and ensuring continuous access to nutritious food for all residents.

Ensure coordination with healthcare and housing services: Food insecurity is often tied to housing instability and health issues. I would work to integrate food access into housing programs and healthcare services, ensuring that residents receiving housing support or healthcare also have access to nutritious food through partnerships with local organizations like the SF-Marin Food Bank.

By taking immediate action to secure funding and develop sustainable solutions for food security, we can ensure that no San Franciscan is left without access to nutritious food, even after pandemic-era programs end.