

# BLUEDOOR

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## THE GREAT OUTDOORS ISSUE

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Harold Herrmann and Erik Cutter  
at Second Harvest Food Bank's  
Alegria SoxxBoxx Farm.

# SALAD DAYS

Buying boxes of incredible organic greens grown in the Second Harvest Food Bank parking lot helps fund programs to feed the hungry.

**By Kedric Francis**  
**Photos by Brett Hillyard**

**Some of the best produce ever grown in Orange County is thriving in a parking lot next to the railroad tracks in Irvine. Some 20 varieties of organic and nutrient-rich leafy greens are harvested each Friday from impeccably organized and maintained planting beds.**

Shiny, fresh, and fragrant Romaine and red leaf lettuce, Tuscan kale, Swiss chard, lemon sorrel, purple basil, lavender, edible flowers, and more are placed beautifully into boxes and delivered directly to homes and available for pick-up that same day.

What could be better with so many of us cooking and dining at home these days?

Better than the produce itself is the fact that each \$30 FarmBox provides sufficient funds for Second Harvest Food Bank to purchase 85 pounds of food to be distributed to those in need in Orange County communities.

And that need is great. Second Harvest delivered some 26 million pounds of food in the first five months of the COVID-19 pandemic, double what they distributed during those same months last year.

The Alegria SoxxBoxx Farm on the Second Harvest facility parking lot is the result of a partnership between Alegria Fresh, Second Harvest Food Bank and Bank of America.

Each FarmBox includes enough organic greens to make half a dozen salads. And it's far fresher and more nutrient-rich than typical produce harvested half a state away and delivered to a local farmers markets days later, says Erik Cutter, the founder of Alegria Fresh and a pioneer in regenerative, zero-waste urban farming.

He explains that the SoxxBoxx farming system used at the Second Harvest parking lot includes elevated planters containing individual planting bags, or socks, each filled with a regenerative organic soil blend developed with Kellogg Garden Supply.





“Kathy Kellogg has been supporting me for 10 years while we’ve been developing blends of soil to try to push the envelope on how good of an organic soil we can put together,” Cutter says. He also cites the crucial support of Shari Battle, Market Manager for Bank of America. “She’s been working with me for more than four years, and when the opportunity came to work with Second Harvest, she said, ‘This is the perfect marriage.’”

Bank of America’s support includes providing emergency grants to support the development of the Alegría SoxxBoxx Farm at Second Harvest Food Bank.

The FarmBox project isn’t just about selling organic greens to affluent folks with refined palates as a way to raise funds to buy more food to feed the hungry, as crucial as the need is.

“This is not just a revenue generator. It’s also an incubator of an idea to bring this level of fresh produce directly to people in need,” says Harald Herrmann, the innovative and energetic CEO of Second Harvest.

Cutter points out that marginalized communities are getting hit the hardest by COVID-19 for many reasons, with a key one being “because they don’t have any access to this kind of food, or food at all sometimes.” Lack of fresh food contributes to obesity, chronic diseases, and conditions cited as co-morbidity factors.

“This can be duplicated in lower-income communities throughout Southern California,” Hermann says. He estimates that there’s as much as 40 square miles of land—unused and underutilized parking lots and similar space—available in the region. “Imagine farms like this on those parking lots, generating produce locally for those who live in the community.”

And it doesn’t hurt that the Alegría Fresh micro farms are beautiful to behold.

“You eat with your eyes first and we realized that this prototype farm needs to also give people a sense of the art of the possible,” Hermann says. “Something this pretty, vibrant, and green could live in the middle of an upscale shopping center, in the middle of a housing community, attached to a church or a school. It would be an asset for any business or community.” 🌱

**Freshly-harvested produce ordered by Wednesday will be delivered to locations within a 15-mile radius of Second Harvest, and is also available for pick-up at the Food Bank on Fridays between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm.**

**Second Harvest Food Bank**  
8014 Marine Way  
Irvine  
[feedoc.org/farmbox](https://feedoc.org/farmbox)