

# HealthWatch

*Fostering a Healthy and Equitable Community for All in Pajaro Valley*

A publication of Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley

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## Our Mission

The mission of Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley is to foster a healthy and equitable community for all in the Pajaro Valley through leadership in advocacy, collaboration, and wellness.

## Our Vision

We envision an equitable Pajaro Valley with health, wellness, and a full quality of life for all.



## State of Health Today

**2021 brought our attention to the positive health benefits of having access to healthy, fresh food. Unfortunately, many residents have difficulty accessing nutrient-rich foods due to location and cost, to name a few. Through partnerships and programs, CHT focused on tackling this basic need.**

Using an integrated approach, CHT supported the nutrition education provided by DHC with programs aimed at providing the food itself. Programs such as VeggieRx launched to provide eligible individuals prescriptions for free produce available onsite at the Mini Mercado and our health and wellness-centered weekly farmers’ market, El Mercado.

In this way, individuals can receive the food and educational support they need to make a lasting difference. For example, a young couple shopping at El Mercado. They took advantage of a free DHC

health screening at the market, followed by a consultation and enrollment in the VeggieRx program. Later that summer, they reported an improved diet filled with fresh veggies and more physical activity resulting in healthy weight loss for the couple.

Another approach included tapping into the rich local knowledge of farmers and growers. CHT took on the Carey-Davis Community Garden to create an opportunity for residents to put their hands in the soil and grow their own fruits and vegetables. Residents benefit from the produce they cultivate and the support network they develop from belonging to a community garden.

Having access to this fundamental need can make a world of difference, and CHT looks forward to finding even more ways to increase access to healthy food and make a healthy community possible.

## THANK YOU!

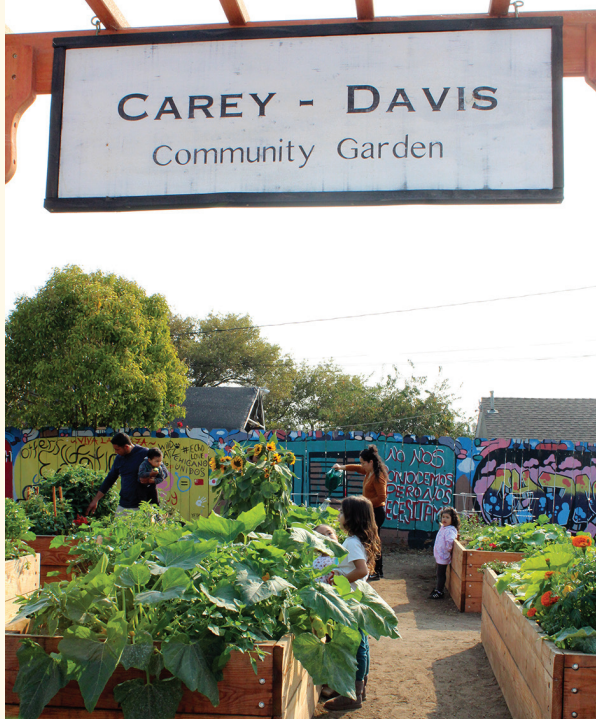
### We couldn’t do this without you

To our generous supporters, we are so grateful for you! We have been honored to serve and provide vital resources to the Pajaro Valley Community as we continue to navigate the impacts of COVID-19. None of it would have been possible without the commitment from our donors and community partners. We sincerely hope you continue to entrust us with your contributions as we work to increase equitable access to wellbeing and health for every member of our Pajaro Valley community.

**Thank you so much for all you do and all you give.**







# Sowing the Seeds of Health and Community

**By: Teresa Martinez, Program Manager  
— Community Gardens**

**As part of a multi-faceted approach to addressing food insecurity, one of the ways CHT aims to bridge the gap is by developing local community gardens to allow residents the opportunity to grow their own fruits and vegetables.**

In March of 2021, the City of Watsonville brought in CHT to revitalize and manage the daily maintenance of the Carey-Davis Community Garden. In addition to the garden being open to neighborhood families, through Watsonville’s PAL program, local youth are also given access to the community garden to learn the importance of growing their own vegetables and healthy food choices.

CHT has re-introduced family gardening to the Carey-Davis community, growing vegetables, supporting youth involvement, reinforced by nutrition education from the Diabetes Health Center. “No solo le diste vida a nuestro jardín,” said one of the gardeners, “le diste el amor que tanto necesitaba”.

As the Garden Manager, I have seen extraordinary friendships develop between the gardeners. They have become a family. The seeds that grow and come to life in their garden boxes bring more than just ingredients for a healthy meal; they bring joy, a sense of belonging and community, and support.

Looking to the future, CHT hopes to support more community gardens and orchards that can benefit the entire community. Just like planting a seed and witnessing its growth- we look forward to the continued growth of our communities through access and support from CHT.



# VeggieRX, a Prescription for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

At the Diabetes Health Center, tactics that promote healthy eating — like incorporating more fiber and fresh veggies at each meal — are at the heart of our approach to addressing diet-related conditions. And yet, these seemingly simple solutions are not readily accessible for many of our clients. The reality is that 85% of individuals seen at the DHC are experiencing food insecurity, which underscores the need to impart more than nutrition education, but nutrition access as well. To this aim, in April 2021, CHT launched VeggieRX, a program designed to increase access to fresh produce through use of a “prescription” for FREE fruits and vegetables.

Fast forward seven months and through the DHC and trusted partner, Salud Para la Gente, some 400 individuals experiencing food insecurity are enrolled in the VeggieRX Program; receiving nutrition tips, healthy recipe suggestions, and a \$20 voucher for fresh, organic produce each week.

When enrollees’ household size is considered, the 400 individuals benefitting from this program more than quadruples to 1,620 individuals. These families span the tri-county region, with nearly 300 individuals residing just over the bridge in Pajaro, a particularly underserved pocket of North Monterey County. We know that 68% of the 400 enrollees report a diet related illness, and that 100% of individuals surveyed report that this program has improved their access to fresh produce and helped families to incorporate more fresh fruits and vegetables into their daily diets.

To date, some 1,900 of 2,200 VeggieRX vouchers have been redeemed at our El Mercado and Mini Mercado farmer’s market locations. And while we are pleased with this impact, the discrepancy between distribution and redemption highlights those persistent barriers– things like geographic isolation,



lack of transportation, and inflexible work schedules –which prevent individuals from fully accessing this resource.

As we continue to assess ways to improve food access, CHT is working on ways to expand the VeggieRX program. Some potential expansion areas being considered are new redemption sites and mobile delivery to underserved pockets of the community.

We are grateful for the support of our community partners who have enabled us to have such a significant first year and look forward to continuing our goal to promote better health and equity in the Pajaro Valley through this basic need.







## El Mercado: Watsonville’s First Health-Conscious Farmers’ Market

*By: Gustavo Indarose, Program Assistant, CHT*

**On April 20, 2021, Community Health Trust launched a new business venture at Ramsay Park – Watsonville’s second certified organic farmer’s market, El Mercado. With several pockets of Watsonville recognized as food deserts, the primary intention of El Mercado is to improve access to fresh produce for people living in the surrounding neighborhoods.**

Accordingly, El Mercado hosted an average of 15 vendors each week over its 7-month inaugural season, half of which offered fresh, EBT-qualified produce. In addition, El Mercado also featured vendors offering health-conscious prepared foods and a variety

of wellness resources in partnership with local nonprofits, the school district, and other healthcare agencies from around the community. Notably, El Mercado served as the redemption site for over 1,600 VeggieRx vouchers, representing approximately 84% of the total produce distribution. Likewise, a similar produce redemption program was created in partnership with PVUSD’s Headstart program, with over 60 families coming to El Mercado to get their weekly produce.

CHT and market staff are excited to continue building the market’s reputation as a health resource by increasing awareness among community members that El Mercado has more to offer than just veggies. CHT looks forward to hosting community events, collaborating with local businesses, and focusing on activities



that youth and families can enjoy. In addition, the host location, Ramsay Park, will undergo a remodel before the next market season begins. Between the exciting new park design, increased outreach efforts, and a collaborative mindset, CHT plans to make El Mercado a lasting symbol of health and well-being because the healthy choice should be the easy choice for everyone.







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*of Pajaro Valley*

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WE COULDN'T DO THIS WITHOUT YOU!**

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Palo Alto Medical Foundation and Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center,  
Santa Cruz County Bank, Driscoll's, Salud Para La Gente, and Santa Cruz Naturals

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