

# Mandela Partners

Delivering Affordable, Fresh Produce When It's Most Needed

STOPWASTE  
Grantee Highlight



Mandela Partners deliver fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables to over

**1,000 families**  
each week.



West Oakland-based nonprofit Mandela Partners was founded over 15 years ago with a simple vision: Improve access to fresh fruit and vegetables for all Oakland residents, while supporting local family farmers and community-based businesses. Today, the organization buys sustainably grown produce from numerous small farms within a 150-mile radius and makes it available at locations throughout Oakland where fresh food was historically hard to come by.

Until spring 2020, this included 10 small grocery and corner stores in addition to eight community produce stands. Then the pandemic hit. Schools and public venues closed, including the nonprofit's weekly produce stands. Meanwhile, the need for healthy food has increased rapidly as many residents have lost their income and students no longer have access to free or subsidized school lunches.

## Adapting under COVID-19

Mandela Partners quickly reorganized. Instead of selling produce, they raised emergency funds to donate it to those hit hardest by the pandemic while continuing to support their network of underserved farmers of color who are also feeling the effect of a slowed down economy.

Arrocena shares the impressive results: "We've been able to get fresh, locally grown, seasonal fruit and vegetables to an average of 1,000 families in need each week." Packed in paper bags, residents can pick up their produce at six locations throughout Oakland, including two libraries and a community garden.

To make the produce donations financially sustainable, Mandela Partners set up a paid Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, promoted with the help of StopWaste grant funding. Customers who purchase their CSA online directly support the donation program and ensure families are fed the healthy food they deserve.

The nonprofit also adapted their community outreach program, shifting from in-person to online. "This is where the grant from StopWaste has been such a huge help," says Arrocena. "We are able to partner with other local organizations to help families make the most of their food." Offerings include video cooking demos, an online pickling class, recipes for the wellbeing of people and the planet, and more.

Arrocena concludes: "We know that a lot of the folks we work with already live sustainably, out of necessity. But this work also allows us to uplift the many cultures we serve and to make healthy, waste-free eating more accessible—and fun!"

To learn more and place your CSA order visit [www.mandelapartners.org](http://www.mandelapartners.org).

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