

KQED PERSPECTIVES

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Seeds of Innovation

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1 min

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I'm almost 80 and have spent my entire working life in the food business. But you don't need to be a food expert to know it takes more than throwing seeds into a field to yield a bountiful crop. You have to tend the land and build for the future.

That's how ideas are - they're seeds - and you need to nourish them.

When I was 56 my first wife passed away and I decided this was my opportunity to give back, and it was the most

rewarding decision I ever made. I ended up at my local food bank...this was back when they just gave out canned and boxed food. But I had a seedling of an idea to ask farmers to donate their excess food. So I drove up and down the Central Valley and throughout California talking to growers.

I got a lot of no's...but no's were part of the job. So I kept at it.

One day, we got a call from a grower who had a truckload of stone fruit he wanted to give away. It was just going to end up in the dump, so I figured out how to get it into the hands of hungry families and seniors.

Little by little, it grew into a big program. Today, 17 years later, more than 180 million pounds of produce is distributed each year. That produce goes to 600,000 Californians, nourishing them and their families.

Some folks say I was innovative. I say it was just a small kernel of an idea that luckily took off. Everyone has lots of small ideas every day, and anyone can make a difference in the world. When someone says no - and there are going to be a lot of no's - you keep on plugging away. That's what innovation is all about.

With a Perspective, I'm Gary Maxworthy.

In 24 years, Gary Maxworthy has gone from volunteer to board member of the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank. His Farm to Family program serves nearly every food bank in California.