**Oct 31, 2011 SFGate.com Vivan Ho** vho@sfchronicle.com.**San Jose, CA** Milk does the body good, but milk banks around the country are running low on the goods.

The demand for donated breast milk for babies with medical needs has never been higher, and milk banks like Mother's Milk Bank in San Jose are finding it difficult to meet that demand.

"In the 12 years I've been executive director, I've never been short," said Pauline Sakamoto, head of the San Jose milk bank. "We've had to cut back on some of the hospital orders just so we can service more. We had to cut back on some outpatient kids because we didn't have that supply. I've never had to do that, and I hate to do that."

Mother's Milk Bank has seen a steady 15 to 18 percent growth each year in the amount of donated breast milk it provides to hospitals and families in need, Sakamoto said. The milk bank gave out 420,000 ounces last year.

The 37-year-old milk bank, which operates out of a small trailer behind Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, is the only one on the West Coast and one of just 11 nationwide. It provides milk for babies at high risk, such as those born prematurely or who have undergone gastric surgery, Sakamoto said.

Babies at high risk often need human milk because they have trouble digesting foreign substances such as formula.

"The problem that we're facing is that we have a lot of kids that need milk," Sakamoto said. "The preterm infant rate is not going down, and doctors are prescribing it more prolifically. And the milk's just not coming in."

She added, "We're the only milk bank in California. There are no milk banks in Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, Maryland, and they get their milk from us, too. Now hospitals in Idaho and Wyoming are asking for donations. It's a horrific problem when we get to this level, because these are kids who are really in need."

COMMENT BY DONOR: I am a milk donor, and it has been very rewarding. The application process is simple and requires filling out a medical questionnaire, getting blood work, and receiving approval from mom and baby's doctors. I spend 15 minutes each morning pumping, and the bank pays to have my milk shipped via Fed Ex every six weeks or so.
Many of the recipients of this donated milk are babies in the NICU. I learned that one baby may only need two ounces of milk for the entire day. It doesn't take much to make a difference, so please consider donating or pass this article along to a friend. TO DONATE breast milk go to: [www.milkbanking.net](http://www.milkbanking.net)