



June 6-10, 2018
The Biggest Show In Town
35th District Agricultural Association

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CONTACT: Danielle Griffin | (559) 967-3604

Merced County Fair Sets Sights On Big Growth For Food Drive Effort

UC Merced Returns As Partner In The Effort To Educate And Connect To Combat Hunger In Merced

MERCED, CALIFORNIA, May 30, 2018: As the 2018 Merced County Fair quickly approaches, Fair Management is focused on continuing to grow its food drive effort in partnership with UC Merced and Merced County Food Bank to fight hunger in Merced County. Last year the Mercy Medical Center's "We Care Wednesday" Community Food Drive saw a 46.7% growth in collection totals, increasing to 7,088 lbs. of food collected up from 4,800 lbs. in 2016. UC Merced first joined the food drive effort in 2017, playing an active role in creating awareness of this effort and recruiting participation, ultimately helping increase collection totals.

"The purpose of our food drive is to bring the community together – that's participants, volunteers and partners – to build awareness of food insecurity in our region and give to help one another while also saving on their trip to the Fair!" said Teresa Burrola, CEO of the Merced County Fair. "Last year we almost doubled our collection totals from the year prior. This year we hope to collect 10,000 lbs. as part of our food drive, but we need the community's support and participation to achieve that goal!"

This year's community food drive will be held on Opening Day of Fair, June 6, as part of Mercy Medical Center's "We Care Wednesday" and is supported by University Industrial Park and UC Merced. Anyone who brings 5 or more cans of food to any Merced County Fair gate between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 6 will get into the Fair for free. All food donated goes directly to the Merced County Food Bank to support their fight against hunger.

According to the latest census data, 25.1% of County residents and 35% of Merced city residents live in poverty. Then based upon Merced County Food Bank's 2017 report, Merced County's overall food insecurity rate is 15.5%, higher than the state average of 13.9%. Even more sobering is the fact that the food insecurity rate among individuals 18 and younger was a staggering 27.3%, which means out of the roughly 80,000 teenagers and children in Merced County more than 21,870 of them have no reliable access to sufficient food.

"Hunger in our community is experienced everywhere – by our students, our neighbors and the people we pass in our everyday lives," said Vernetta Doty, Associate Director of UC Merced's Community Engagement Center. "Many don't know when they'll eat their next meal, or they must choose between feeding their families or themselves. Getting our students, staff and faculty involved is another way UC Merced can help create positive change in our community, and we are happy to be a part of this important effort by the Fair to serve Merced County."

A recent UC survey of its 10 campuses revealed 44% of undergraduate students reported experiencing low to very-low food security, and 57% of UC Merced undergraduate students reported experiencing low to very low food security. The UC Merced Food Pantry opened in 2013 and served 1,950 households and 3,778 individuals. In 2017, the Food Pantry served 2,580 households and 6,096 individuals. Merced County Food Bank identifies UC Merced's Tri-College Center distribution site as the largest site in Merced County.



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“Unfortunately, the need for food assistance in our community continues to grow,” said Bill Gibbs, Executive Director at Merced County Food Bank. “Partnerships and food drives like this one with the Merced County Fair and UC Merced are essential for us to continue to try and feed the growing need. We are grateful for their continued partnership and look forward to this year’s food drive effort.”

About Merced County Food Bank:

The Merced County Food Bank (MCFB) is a private non-profit organization that serves Merced and Mariposa Counties. Through its network of food assistance partners and direct food distributions programs, such as USDA Commodities, Senior Brown Bag and children’s programs, the MCFB serves nearly 17,000 people per month. Since 2004, **MCFB has distributed more than 25 million pounds of food**. Last year alone, the Merced County Food Bank delivered over 7,400,000 pounds of food through 225,000 individual distributions to low-income people, including over 25,000 to seniors and 75,000 to children who rely on their programs and services to receive much needed nutritious food. In its service area of 3,442 square miles, Merced County Food Bank serves low-income individuals and families at 83 community sites; 24 USDA commodity food distribution sites; 18 senior citizen sites; and distributes food to more than 100 other non-profit organizations serving people in need.

About UC Merced and UC Merced Food Pantry:

UC Merced opened in 2005 as the newest campus in the University of California system and the first American research university built in the 21st century. The campus enjoys a special connection with nearby Yosemite National Park, sits on the cutting edge of sustainability in construction and design, and supports highly qualified first-generation and underserved students from the San Joaquin Valley and throughout California. The UC Merced Food Pantry, a supplemental food assistance program with the Merced County Food Bank and the U.S. Department of Agriculture with help from United Way, helps to address the issue of hunger by serving hundreds of students, staff members and community members monthly.

About The Merced County Fair:

The Merced County Fair, first founded in 1891, represents the 35th District Agricultural Association and is celebrating its 127th anniversary this year. More than 70,000 people from throughout Merced County and beyond attend the five-day Merced County Fair each June. Members of the Board of Directors include: Emily Haden, President; Lori Gallo, First Vice President; Carol Sartori-Silva, Second Vice President; Vicky Banaga; Mark Erreca; Flip Hassett; Lee Lor and Kim Rogina. Teresa Burrola heads up the daily operations in her role as CEO. The 2018 Merced County Fair will run June 6 – 10. For more information about the Merced County Fair, please visit www.MercedCountyFair.com. Connect with the Fair on Facebook (@mercedfair), Twitter (@Merced_CA_Fair) and Instagram (@mercedcountyfair).

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