



June 5-9, 2019  
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35th District Agricultural Association

## **Merced County Fair and Partners Look Garner More Community Involvement for Food Drive Effort**

### **UC Merced Returns as Partner to Help Combat Hunger; MERCO Credit Union Joins Effort with Pre-Fair Collection Locations**

Merced County Fair is focused on getting more community involvement during this year's Community Food Drive as part of the Mercy Medical Center "We Care Wednesday" presented by MERCO Credit Union. Proudly supported by University Industrial Park and held in partnership with University of California, Merced and Merced County Food Bank, the collection is an effort to create awareness of and to fight hunger in Merced County. Last year, the Community Food Drive collected 6,640 lbs. to benefit the local community.

This year, with UC Merced continuing its involvement and the addition of MERCO Credit Union as a pre-Fair collection location at its Merced and Atwater branches, the Merced County Fair is hopeful that collection totals will increase as the unwavering need for food assistance in Merced County grows.

"The continued 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. "This year we hope to collect 8,000 lbs. as part of our food drive, but we need the community's support and help in spreading the word of course turning out to donate to achieve that goal!"

This year's Community Food Drive will be held on Opening Day of Fair, June 5, as part of the Mercy Medical Center "We Care Wednesday" presented by MERCO Credit Union. Anyone who brings five or more cans of food to any Merced County Fair gate between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 5, will get into the Fair for free. Debuting this year, a pre-Fair food drive will provide the opportunity to drop off donations at Merced or Atwater MERCO Credit Union branches through Tuesday, June 4, and receive a voucher that will allow for free Fair admission between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 5. All food donated goes directly to the Merced County Food Bank to support their fight against hunger in Merced County.

According to recent census data, 25.1% of County residents and 35% of Merced city residents live in poverty. Merced County Food Bank's 2017 report listed Merced County's overall food insecurity rate at 15.5%, higher than the state average of 13.9%. Among the most vulnerable groups that are food insecure are individuals 18 years of age and younger, where the overall food insecurity rate was a staggering 27.3%. This 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



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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 continue to be involved in this Fair effort!"

A 2017 UC survey of its 10 campuses revealed 44% of undergraduate students reported experiencing low to very-low food security, with 60% of UC Merced undergraduate students reportedly experiencing low to very-low food security. The UC Merced Food Distribution opened in 2012 and served 1,950 households and 3,778 individuals during its first year of operation. In 2017, the UC Merced Food Distribution served 2,580 households and 6,096 individuals, and the number continues to grow. Merced County Food Bank identifies UC Merced's Tri-College Center distribution site as the largest site in Merced County.

"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. Its mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of residents affected by hunger through the acquisition, storage and distribution of nutritious food. Through its network of food assistance partners and direct food distributions programs, the MCFB serves nearly 17,000 people per month. MCFB collects food from hundreds of resources, which with the help of 1,300 volunteers annually is then distributed through a network of more than 100 partner agencies. Since 2004, MCFB has distributed more than 25 million pounds of food. For more information visit <https://mmcfb.org>.

**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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 Distribution, 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. More details at <https://basicneeds.ucmerced.edu/resources>.

**About MERCO Credit Union:**

MERCO Credit Union has provided a wide range of personalized financial services to Valley-area residents for 65 years. MERCO is local and member-owned. It is a full-service financial institution that currently serves over 12,000 people and provides superior products and services to meet your family's needs for convenience and financial health. Anyone who lives, works, worships, or goes to school in Merced, Mariposa, Madera or Stanislaus Counties can join. <http://merco.org>.