



June 7-11, 2017
Five Best Days of Summer

35th District Agricultural Association

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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UC Merced Joins Merced County Fair's Food Drive Effort *Outreach and Education To Combat Hunger In Merced Is The Top Priority*

MERCED, CALIFORNIA, May 16, 2017: The Merced County Fair is excited to announce that UC Merced has joined its effort to fight hunger in Merced County as part of the Mercy Medical Center's "We Care Wednesday" Community Food Drive presented by EECU, which benefits Merced County Food Bank. Last year's food drive resulted in 4,800 lbs. of food collected in just two hours; a number Fair officials expect to grow with added support from its new partner.

"The purpose of this food drive is to bring our community together at the Fair in an effort to help one another. Every can collected truly makes a difference and provides nourishment for someone in our community," said Teresa Burrola, CEO of the Merced County Fair. "We know with the addition of UC Merced and its outreach channels, we can collectively tell the story of food insecurity in Merced County to even more people and encourage them to come out and help make a difference."

This year's community food drive will be held on Opening Day of Fair, which is appropriately titled Mercy Medical Center's "We Care Wednesday." 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 7 will get into the Fair for free. All food will be donated to the Merced County Food Bank.

"Hunger in our community, especially among students, is something we know all too well," said Vernetta Doty, Associate Director for the Office of Student Life and Civic Leadership at UC Merced. "We see students coming to school hungry and unable to focus. We see community members having to choose what days they can eat or feed their families. It is a sad reality that can only be combatted by our community coming together to help one another. For this reason, UC Merced is joining the Fair's effort to get our students, staff and faculty involved and help to make a difference one can at a time."

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 2016 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 28.9%, which means out of the roughly 80,000 teenagers and children in Merced County more than 23,000 of them have no reliable access to sufficient food.

A recent UC survey of its 10 campuses revealed 44% of students reported low to very-low food security, and 57% of UC Merced students reported to have low to very low food security. The UC Merced Food Pantry opened in 2013 and served 1,950 households and 3,778 individuals. In 2016, the Food Pantry served 3,059 households and 6,563 individuals for an increase of 56.8% in the number of households served and a 73.7% increase in the number of individuals served. 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."



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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 6,500,000 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 126 years of operation 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: President; Flip Hassett, First Vice President; Emily Haden, Second Vice President; Lori Gallo; Vicky Banaga; Mark Erreca; Lee Lor; Kim Rogina; Carol Sartori-Silva; and Dr. Santokh Takhar. Teresa Burrola heads up the daily operations in her role as CEO. The 2017 Merced County Fair will run June 7 - 11. 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 now Instagram (@mercedcountyfair).

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