Serving the Underserved by Saving Surplus Food

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Food justice- an approach that advocates for fair distribution of food and that views food security as a basic human right.
Economic and Environmental Toll of Food Waste

• Globally, 40% of food that is produced is lost or wasted and with this, so are all of the resources that went into growing, processing and transporting it.
• Further, food in landfills exacerbates climate change.
Food Waste is a Social Justice and Food Justice Issue

- 16.7% of Merced County adults are food insecure.
- 61% of UC Merced undergraduates are food insecure.
- South Merced is a food desert.
- 23% of Merced County residents are considered to be "in poverty." "2 out every 3 children in Merced County, are living in poverty (less than 200% FPL)."
- Unemployment rate- 7.3%
- Homelessness is up 18% from last year (2018-514, 2019-607, 108 of which are children).
One Solution: The Bobcat Eats Food Waste Awareness and Prevention Program

- The program is a collaboration between the University of California, Merced and the Merced County Food Bank.
- Our goals are to reduce food insecurity especially amongst vulnerable and underserved populations and to reduce food waste (108 tons per quarter) in our County.
- There are three main components to this program.
  - One component is harvesting or gleaning food from Merced County farms, backyards and farmers’ markets.
  - The second component involves distributing more food to those in need. Community organizations, groups and non-profits which work with vulnerable populations are able to pick up free food from the Food Bank whenever there is surplus.
    - Examples- WIC, Bobcat Pantry, Apostolic Tabernacle, Meadows Community Center
  - The third component is increasing food donations coming into the Food Bank and food pantries from other food outlets such as grocery stores, cafes, food processors etc.
Program Timeline

- October 2017 - UC Merced’s Department of Sustainability and the Merced County Food Bank submitted an RFP to CalRecycle for a food waste reduction grant.
- March 2018 - UC Merced and the Merced County Food Bank were awarded grant funding to implement the Bobcat Eats Food Waste Awareness and Prevention Program.
- May 2018 - The Notice to Proceed was received from CalRecycle. A coordinator was hired on and program development and implementation began.
- September 2018 - One student staff were hired on allowing for program growth and expansion.
- September 2018 - We began doing food rescues on and off campus.
- January 2019 - A second student staff was hired on.
- March - April 2019 - The marketing campaign ramped up with the release of two news articles and one ABC 30 feature which led to an outpouring of volunteers, donors and organizations that were interested in serving as distribution sites.
- May 2019 - One year after launching, we have rescued more than 937,000 pounds of food.
- June 2019 - A GFI Fellow/Ambassador began working with the program.
Impact

“We here at Merced College have been receiving the leftovers from Starbucks and Bagel Tyme! It has been wonderful for our students! Every week we receive anywhere from 20-40 lbs of bagels. They don’t go to waste on our campus! Our students now know that on Thursdays they can get FREE pastries and bagels! This helps our hungry students and helps end food waste!"

“The program has helped the community we serve immensely. Bobcat Eats Waste Awareness and Prevention Program has aided us in giving food to those in need that would have otherwise gone to waste.”

“We have been very grateful to be the recipient of surplus food. We serve approximately 85 seniors in our assisted living locations. The food that we receive helps off set our food costs so that we can use those resources to help seniors in other ways. In addition to our assisted living locations, we have a home care division, in total we employ 110 people which are mostly entry level, minimum wage earners. Any food we receive is also distributed to employees and the gratitude that they express says it all.”

Bobcat Eats Food Waste Awareness and Prevention Program

22 New Food Distribution Sites
- WIC, Healthy House, ASMC’s Food Pantry, Bobcat Pantry, D Street Shelter, Merced Rescue Mission, Restore Merced, Meadows Community Center, FeedNeed and more!

24 Food Donors
- Cardenas, Starbucks, Jantz Cafe, The Lantern Cafe, UC Merced’s Campus Store and Marketplace, the Turkey Trot, Mi Casa, Produce on the Go, UC Merced’s Campus Community Garden, Food4Less and more!

Types of Food Saved
- Fruits (seedless watermelon, bananas, grapes, persimmons, fruit salad cups)
- Vegetables (bell peppers, lettuce, beets, tomatoes, carrots)
- Canned and packaged goods (canned sardines, canned fruit, canned vegetables, beans, Saltines, protein bars)
- Baked goods (pastries, bagels, donuts)

Between June 1st, 2018 and May 31st, 2019, 936,997 pounds of food was diverted from the landfill and redirected to those in need which is enough for 780,831 meals.

18,921 pounds of this food were perishable items that were rescued and immediately distributed to community partners/distribution sites.

This resulted in the reduction of 962 metric tons of CO2 emissions from the atmosphere. Saving food saves our environment!
Impact

- 65 gallons of milk
- 94 pounds of pastries, salads and other food

Total- 679 pounds
Success Factors - Communication and Outreach

- The program utilizes the media (university communications, TV interviews etc.) and social media to conduct outreach, engage the community and encourage program participation.

- Two University Features on the Program:

- FeedNeed and Elim Elementary Collaboration

- [ABC30 Feature](https://news.ucmerced.edu/)

- [Merced County Times Article](https://news.ucmerced.edu/news/)

**Fight food waste, join downtown Salvage Social Hour**

UC Merced’s culinary team and local Merced restaurants and businesses will join together for what is being called the “Salvage Social Hour” on Tuesday, March 19, from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Parian, 432 West Main St., in Merced.

Reserve your spot, and enjoy “upcycled” appetizers and learn about food waste prevention.

Alongside local businesses that include Taste in addition, they will be offering samples of Curb Trail Ale, a beer that incorporates the ends of bread loaves in the brewing process.

The Parian is opening their beautifully remodeled patio for the event and their bar will be open for all of your cocktail needs during this Salvage Social Hour. Image Makers UC Merced Bobcat pint glasses are available for the first 90 guests!

With 61 percent of UC students experiencing food insecurity, according to Mitch Vanston, the executive chef of UC Merced’s dining services, the Bobcat Pantry serves as a critical source in providing food and connecting students to additional basic needs resources.

To reserve your spot at the Salvage Social Hour, please make a tax-deductible donation to UC Merced’s Bobcat Pantry.

There is no set amount needed to register, but for every $10 you donate, you connect UC students with 10 nutritious meals. Suppose you give $20 — That’s a typical restaurant bill for one person. For the price of one meal, you could support 20 meals for a student in need.

Don’t miss the chance to support student success at UC Merced.

‘Glean’ New Deal...

businesses to serve as food rescue and food distribution partners.

Residents can also register their farms and trees for gleaners. Thus far, the record haul for one day is 704 pounds of food saved.

Organizers are seeking farmers, gardeners and backyard growers with surplus food. If you have extra food and you would like volunteers from the Food Bank to come out and help you deliver it to those in need, please contact Linus arguments in support of their proposal.
Success Factors - Collaboration

- Partnership with several UC Merced departments (Sustainability, Community Engagement, Basic Needs Security, UC Merced Dining) and the Merced County Food Bank
- New partnerships with local businesses, organizations and nonprofits
- Carson House Living Learning Community
Success Factors - Students!
Challenges

- Potential food donors concerned about liability when donating food
  - Educate about Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act
- Potential food donors not knowing about the benefits of donating
  - Educate and inform them about the benefits (i.e. tax incentives, good PR)
- Irregularity of donations in terms of frequency, quality etc.
  - Address quality issues early on with management
- Losing food donors
Future Work

- Scale
- Prevention
- Create more distribution sites
Questions?

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Photo Credit

- Just Seeds
- Visual.ly
- Pinterest
- NRDC
- GIPL
References

- **Food Justice**
- **NRDC**
- **Merced County 2016 Community Health Assessment**
- **Homelessness is getting worse in Merced. New report shows troubling spike in population**
- **EDD State of California**
- **US Census Bureau**