

Dairy Farmers Nourish Communities

A Role More Important Now Than Ever



Dairy farmers Maureen, Nevin, and Darin Lemos deliver milk to Modesto Gospel Mission.



In September, 735 gallons of milk were distributed at the Lemos family's Sixth Annual Community Milk Giveaway.

As we enter the holiday season, it is important to recognize that many families in our communities experience inconsistent or uncertain access to nutritious foods. According to California Food Banks, one in four California adults (and one in three adults living with children) currently struggle with food insecurity. Charities are reportedly being pushed to their limits as demand for food assistance reaches record levels.

"Food insecurity" is limited or uncertain access to enough food to lead a healthy, active life. Access to nutritious foods plays a vital role in supporting individual health, children's development, and the overall well-being of our communities. Dairy farm families are proud to be part of the solution, helping nourish people by producing wholesome milk and dairy foods that provide essential nutrients.

Local dairy sector efforts include pilot programs delivering product and refrigeration resources to food banks, nutrition education training, regular milk and dairy product donations, and special event donation drives. Efforts like these are not only happening in California. Through long-standing partnerships with organizations like Feeding America, **the U.S. dairy community has delivered more than 1.5 billion servings of milk and dairy foods annually to families in need.**

Milk continues to be one of the most requested items at California's local food banks, which are facing a sharp surge in demand driven by federal food assistance (SNAP/CalFresh) and Medicaid cuts, high inflation, rising fuel costs, and holiday needs. One of the biggest drivers of inflation in October was food, with prices rising 0.5 percent last month and about 3 percent since the same time last year. California's grocery store prices are the highest in the contiguous U.S. More than 40% of Californians live in households that earn too little to cover the basics where they live.

For third-generation dairy farmer Maureen Lemos of Stanislaus County, it's a good feeling to be able to do something to help. For the past six years, Maureen and her family have organized and carried out a milk drive during September (Hunger Action Month), giving away hundreds of gallons of milk to local families in need. In the first year (2001), 200 gallons of milk were distributed. The local Waterford Unified School District shared information about the opportunity with families most likely to be in need. Given the Covid-19 pandemic at the time, the milk was handed out through car windows as part of a drive-through giveaway event.

The Lemos family continues to hold their Annual Community Milk Giveaway at the same local school, and they are now able to interact more with the participants. The giveaway includes bags of educational dairy activity books for kids, Clarice the Red Cow stickers, chocolate milk straws, nutrition education literature, and contact information to answer any follow-up questions. Most importantly, every family who comes to the event receives one gallon of Real California Milk.

“My favorite part is to feel like we are helping,” said Maureen Lemos. “I really want to do that. I know there are a lot of people who are struggling. When you hand someone a gallon of nutritious milk, that can be a big deal for people, and they are truly thankful.”

The Lemos family also enjoys seeing other people come together to help them support those in need. Maureen promotes donations though her social media accounts. She works with their local grocer to order and coordinate the milk purchase, their local school district for storing milk in the school cafeteria, and a local food bank for distributing any leftover gallons following the giveaway event. Local large animal veterinarian offices have helped provide matching funding support. This past September, a record 735 gallons of milk were provided to families in need. Maureen appreciates it when people she runs into recognize her as part of “the family who gives out milk.”

“We love our community,” said Maureen. “We have been here for so long. We just want people to know us and trust us as the dairy farmers that are here in this community.”



Dairy farmer Nicole Morris and her family have been helping address food insecurity in their community since 2020.

The Lemos’s aren’t the only dairy farmers who help families in their hometowns. In fact, fourth-generation dairy farmer Nicole Morris and her family held their first milk drive in June 2020 to bring some relief to local food banks and shelters during the Covid-19 pandemic. That year, Nicole also began working at Modesto Junior College (MJC) as a dairy science instructor. The Morris family continued to host their June milk drive for four consecutive years. Meanwhile in 2021, Nicole also engaged her students in coordinating what has become an annual September (Hunger Action Month) milk drive at the school that is still going strong. The CMAB was then inspired by Nicole and her MJC students to create the Inter-Collegiate Give a Gallon Challenge, an annual program in which university dairy clubs across the state raise money for milk donations to local shelters.

“Over the last six years, MJC has donated more than 4,000 gallons of milk to Stanislaus County with this project. It is heartwarming to know that we have donated about 65,000 servings of fresh, California milk to those less fortunate in the Central Valley through our efforts to promote Hunger Awareness in our community,” said Nicole Morris, California dairy farmer and MJC dairy science instructor.

California dairy companies and organizations make many important year-round contributions. This includes an annual June Dairy Month partnership between Real California Milk and Raley’s Food for Families program to match customer donations made in-store and online during the month of June, raising more than $70,000 to supply California dairy products to 12 partnering food banks. Additionally, the Dairy Council of California—a dairy farmer- and processor-funded nutrition organization—works daily to build partnerships that nourish communities and elevate the health of children and families by promoting lifelong healthy eating patterns. In addition to providing nutrition education for California communities, their efforts include raising awareness of assistance programs to help families improve access to nourishing foods like dairy. Efforts like supporting summer meal food distribution events are examples of working together to ensure children continue to receive balanced meals while school is out. Additionally, California milk processors via Got Milk? recently launched their A Latte of Kindness campaign that will donate at least $150,000 to Feeding America. Through ongoing efforts, California's dairy community is working to help more families have access to the nutritious foods they need—not just during the holidays, but throughout the year.

Dairy farmers are dedicated to caring for their cows, land, and rural communities. Their most important contribution is to nourishing lives.

Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care. Our members include Bar 20 Dairy Farms, Clover Sonoma, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America, Dairy Institute of California, F & R Ag Services, Hilmar Cheese Company, Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O’Lakes, Inc, Milk Producers Council, Valley Milk, LLC, Yosemite Farm Credit, Zenith Insurance Company, and others. For information, visit DairyCares.com. To subscribe to the newsletter, contact news@dairycares.com.

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