

FoodCorps and School Gardens Provide Fresh Food to Butte Fire Evacuees

During the devastating Butte Fire in Calaveras County, FoodCorps and the Calaveras Unified School District (CUSD) joined forces to get fresh vegetables to community members affected by the fire. FoodCorps Service Members Emily Metzger and Lucas Hill, along with students and staff at three schools donated and distributed more than 300 pounds of fresh vegetables from school gardens to families in need.



With the wheels in motion, several organizations stepped up to support the effort. The American Red Cross, the Resource Connection Food Bank, UCCE Central Sierra, Community Emergency Response Teams, FoodCorps, Calaveras FFA and others jumped on board. Fresh food came from three garden programs at the Toyon Middle School garden, the Calaveras High School Farm and the Valley Springs Elementary School garden.



FoodCorps Service Member, Lucas Hill was busy serving the community in many capacities during the fire and evacuation. He spent time harvesting at the school garden/farm with Calaveras High School students and FFA members. Then they arranged for the produce to be delivered to the different campsites, Food Banks and distribution centers where evacuees were located. He cooked in the Valley Springs Elementary School Garden outdoor kitchen with a group of high school-age students who were living in the gym at the school after their boarding school was evacuated. They loved his Baba Ganoush! Lucas also worked with a team of high school and middle school students to finish the garden bed enclosures at San Andreas Elementary School, where many of the students were affected, to have the garden ready to go when students returned to school.

Emily and Lucas also helped host a garden activity day and lunch for families at Valley Springs Elementary. Students and families who were out of school and those that have been displaced to the campgrounds near Valley Springs were invited to attend. The hope was to give them a good, healthy option for spending the day during a very stressful time. The group completed the day by heading to the Food Bank where they helped sort and pack 2,000 bags of food that were distributed to CUSD students.

In addition to donations, the food and gardens were used during the evacuations by FoodCorps, a national nonprofit organization that places volunteers in schools to educate about food, nutrition, and agriculture. Hosting FoodCorps service members at the CUSD schools is a joint project of the UCCE Central Sierra Nutrition Education Program, CUSD, and Gardens to Grow In, a local non-profit organization.

Keven Hesser, garden teacher and Gardens to Grow In founder, was quoted as saying:

“We could not be more proud of Emily and Lucas and their incredible dedication to our community, schools and families through this tragedy, and each and every day they step foot in our schools and represent us all in our community. This will be a long road to recovery, and what our FoodCorps service members are providing in these schools will be an integral part to the long term healing and health of these students and families...healthy food...good role modeling...bright spirits...we are so grateful for their presence, support and leadership.”