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**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Contact: Trixy Joy Manansala**

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**SAN DIEGO, CA - The University of California San Diego increases healthy food access for thousands of underserved households across San Diego County.**

The University of California, San Diego Center for Community Health at the Altman Clinical and Translational Research Institute, in collaboration with Alliance Health Clinic, City Heights Latino Organizing Committee, Foodshed Cooperative, Foodsmart, SBCS, Union of Pan Asian Communities, Vista Community Clinic, Yasukochi Family Farms, and other community-based organizations across San Diego County is providing home-delivered farm-fresh produce boxes and healthy food cards (each valued at about $50 a month) to community members experiencing health disparities, including nutrition insecurity. To date, over $1,100,000 of nutrition incentives have been provided to 2,385 households, including the home-delivery of approximately 35,437 farm-fresh produce boxes through UC San Diego’s ¡Más Fresco! Plus Program.

¡Más Fresco! Plus is a research project that aims to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, and improve nutrition and health status among underserved community members. Based on survey responses from nearly 200 program participants, the program has achieved significant success:

* Reducing barriers (high costs, transportation) and increasing access to locally grown, nutritious fruits and vegetables
* 9 of 10 follow-up survey respondents report feeling they had enough fruits and vegetables for themselves and their household since joining ¡Más Fresco! Plus.
* Helping families be able to shop for healthy foods with dignity and respect, and reducing stressors related to food access and nutrition security
* 3 of 4 follow-up survey respondents report worrying less about being able to feed healthy and nutritious food to their household.
* Increasing knowledge of nutrition/healthy eating
* 9 of 10 follow-up survey respondents report increased healthy eating knowledge.
* Encouraging healthy eating habits/choices and increasing healthy eating behaviors including fruit and vegetable consumption amongst participating households
* 9 of 10 follow-up survey respondents report eating more fruits and vegetables than before.
* Supporting improved health and management of chronic health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol
* 99% of follow-up survey respondents report the program improved their overall health and nutrition. 59% report being in good health at follow up compared to only 34% of the same participants at baseline (74% increase in self-reported positive health status). Over half (51%) report decreased use of unexpected health services/expenses.

With extra funds allocated during the pandemic having come to an end in March of 2023, low-income families in California have found themselves stretching their resources even further than before, finding it more difficult to afford healthy food for their families. “With limited money for food, cheap is where I gravitated. I have high blood pressure, high cholesterol and arthritis. I had been educating myself and building up my courage to make better choices about my diet...I am truly grateful to this program because my last two cholesterol tests have shown improvement and my blood pressure is not fluctuating as it had been,” said L.W., a ¡Más Fresco! Plus program participant.

According to the San Diego Hunger Coalition, as of June 2023, nearly 1 in 4 (24%) San Diegans experience nutrition insecurity, or are unable to provide three, nutritious meals per day for themselves and/or their families. Out of the 790,000 total people estimated to be nutrition insecure in San Diego County, 202,000 of them are children, 161,000 are older adults (age 60+), and 134,000 of them are living with disabilities.

“The ¡Más Fresco! Plus program represents a groundbreaking approach in addressing nutrition insecurity. This program inclusively extends benefits to those identified as food insecure by healthcare providers or community-based organizations. This strategic move targets aid to those who often fall through the cracks, ensuring that the individuals most impacted by health disparities receive the support they need. This model not only addresses immediate nutritional needs but also serves as a blueprint for effectively reaching the most underserved in our communities,” said Trixy Joy Manansala, Program Manager of the ¡Más Fresco! Plus program.

Thanks to funding provided by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, and administered through the San Diego Health and Human Services, Self-Sufficiency Services, ¡Más Fresco! Plus is providing underserved households with much needed support. “As Chairwoman, I am proud to be a part of a project that provides significant social and economic benefit,” said San Diego County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Nora Vargas. “This project reduces nutrition insecurity, improves health for participating families, and provides significant financial support for our local San Diego farmers.”

To learn more about ¡Más Fresco! Plus, please email Trixy Joy Manansala at tmanansala@health.ucsd.edu.

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