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News from Merced College

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LOS BANOS COMMUNITY INVITED TO PRESENT IDEAS FOR FOOD FOREST PROJECT

Merced College's Los Banos Campus will host a community meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 20 at 5:30 p.m. about the progress of the Campus's food forest project, and to gather feedback and suggestions on the project from the Los Banos community.

The public is invited to attend the meeting, which will be held on the Los Banos Campus in Room A-103. The Los Banos Campus is located at 22240 Highway 152.

A food forest is a design concept in which landscaping patterns mimic that of a forest. The goal of the Los Banos Campus Food Forest is to repurpose a biologically inactive space (a one-acre plot adjacent to the Los Banos Creek) into a sustainable woodland ecosystem, while providing healthy organic produce to students and surrounding community. The project is funded in part through a \$50,000 *Wells Fargo Environmental Solutions for Communities* grant. Merced College was selected among 54 environmental nonprofits to receive grant dollars totaling \$3 million from the 2014 *Wells Fargo Environmental Solutions for Communities* grant program, which supports projects focused on land and water conservation, energy efficiency, infrastructure, and educational outreach in communities across America.

The primary objectives of the food forest project are to provide an aesthetically pleasing landscape feature which will serve as nocturnal habitat for native animals currently using the adjacent riparian corridor along the banks of Los Banos Creek; an example of environmental responsibility and

sustainability by composting campus green waste to encourage complex soils to store water within their root systems, which will require little or no ongoing maintenance; an organic food source for students and the community at large; and a living laboratory in which principles of conservation biology can be taught to complement the science curriculum at the Los Banos Campus.

The meeting will be conducted by Margaret Harrison of Harrison Designs, a landscape architectural firm with a specialty in designing food forests. Harrison will introduce the concept drawings for the food forest while gathering ideas and feedback to help her construct the final design plans, especially the scale and composition of a proposed amphitheater within the forest which will serve as an open air classroom and a living lab. A tour of the food forest site will follow the meeting.

The food forest project has received support from the Los Banos Rotary Club, whose members have expressed an interest in developing community gardens, as well as the local San Luis National Wildlife Refuge who see this project as keeping with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Landscape Conservation Cooperative.

FOOD FOREST OCTOBER 2015

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