



COMMUNITY HEALTH TRUST

of Pajaro Valley

PRESS RELEASE

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Community Health Trust Received Two Major Grants to Address Food Insecurity in the Pajaro Valley

[Watsonville, CA, April 10, 2023] The Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley (CHT) received two significant grants to address food insecurity in the Pajaro Valley. El Mercado Farmers Market has been awarded \$198,245 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA-AMS) and VeggieRx, CHT's Produce Prescription Program, has been awarded \$200,000 from Central California Alliance for Health (the Alliance).

"CHT is honored to be a recipient from both a local organization like the Alliance and a national organization like the USDA-AMS. VeggieRx and El Mercado are programs that work together to provide our community members with access to the fresh produce they need," DeAndre James, Executive Director of CHT.

CHT first launched El Mercado and the VeggieRx program in 2021 with the goal to make shopping for nutritious food easy and accessible for Pajaro Valley residents. El Mercado is a weekly farmers market that provides access to fresh produce, delicious foods, local community resources for healthy living, and activities for the whole family. El Mercado runs from April through October at Ramsay Park and serves as a VeggieRx redemption site.

Local residents who are Medi-Cal recipients, have a diet-related illness, and are facing food insecurity are eligible to register for the VeggieRx program where they receive a weekly \$20 voucher for fresh produce. Program participants also receive health-conscious recipes and are enrolled in a series of health and nutrition classes provided by CHT's Diabetes Health Center.

With grant funding, CHT plans to build the long-term organizational capacity of El Mercado by doubling the foot traffic, increasing VeggieRx participants, increasing the number of agricultural producers and average gross sales over a three-year period. The proposed strategies of growth have been methodical and focused on sustainability so CHT can continue to address the needs of Pajaro Valley residents experiencing food insecurity and access to healthy food.

Funds from USDA-AMS will sustain and build the capacity of El Mercado, a California-certified, seasonal, and health-centric farmer's market aiming to decrease food insecurity and improve access to health-promoting resources for Pajaro Valley families. The project will enable the



expansion of a direct producer-to-consumer market, increasing access to and availability of locally and regionally produced agricultural products.

Funds from the Alliance will support the refinement of VeggieRx, including the implementation of more robust educational components that will result in improved metrics and understanding of program impact. The addition of a third VeggieRx redemption site at the Watsonville Farmer's Market will increase consumption of nutritious food and program completion rates by reducing barriers to program participation; and for ongoing operational support of El Mercado.

El Mercado is sponsored by the Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley, Kaiser Permanente, Granite Construction, Lookout Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County Bank, and California Giant Berry Farms.

To enroll in the VeggieRx program, contact CHT's Community Health Worker, Ofelia Garcia, at (831) 732-5397.

About Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley: Founded in 1998 and serving a tri county area, the Community Health Trust is recognized for its leadership as a convener in the South Santa Cruz County area. CHT is motivated to foster an equitable Pajaro Valley with health, wellness and a full quality of life for all through access to resources, activities, and choices that help prevent illness and improve quality of life.

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