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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

USDA Joins State and Local Partners to Offer Summer Meals with a California Twist

Natomas Unified hosts California Thursdays event with local food and fun activities

SACRAMENTO, CA, July 21, 2015 ... This Thursday, July 23, Natomas residents of all ages are invited to enjoy a free lunch featuring locally grown food as part of the summer meals program. Six other school districts across the state – Chico, Elk Grove, Fallbrook Union, Los Angeles, Pittsburg, and Riverside – will also serve California Thursdays summer meals that day.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials will join representatives from California Department of Education, Center for Ecoliteracy, Natomas Unified School District, and community partners at South Natomas Community Center from 11am to 1pm to bring attention to childhood hunger and the role that local foods can play in addressing the issue.

During the school year, more than 21 million children rely on free and reduced priced meals provided by USDA's National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, but only 3.8 million participate in USDA's summer meal programs. That means families who may rely on school meals to keep hunger at bay are at higher risk during the summer months. And in California 25% of all children under the age of 18 live in households that experience food insecurity.

“We know that hunger doesn't stop just because school is out,” says Jesus Mendoza, Jr., Western Regional Administrator of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. “Providing nutritious meals to children throughout the summer helps them return to school ready to learn. And incorporating local produce helps make the healthy choice the easy choice.”

California Thursdays is a collaboration between the Center for Ecoliteracy and a growing network of 42 public school districts working together with the shared goal of serving healthy, freshly prepared school meals made from California-grown food. And students are responding: districts report an average 12% increase in participation on California Thursdays.

“California Thursdays is predicated on the simple logic that California children and our communities will benefit from serving more fresh California-grown food in school,” says Zenobia Barlow, executive director of the Center for Ecoliteracy. “Extending this effort to summer meals is a natural next step.”

USDA’s summer meal programs align well with the peak growing season, which allows schools and non-profit organizations to serve products in their freshest state and keep children nourished and engaged while school is out.

Seven school districts across the state will incorporate the California Thursdays fresh and local foods-focus into their summer meal offerings on July 23. In addition to Natomas, the group includes Chico, Elk Grove, Fallbrook Union, Los Angeles, Pittsburg, and Riverside School Districts.

**WHEN: Thursday, July 23, 2015
11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

**WHAT: Free BBQ for kids and adults made with freshly prepared California grown ingredients
Activities including cooking demos, farmers markets, and bicycle smoothies**

**WHERE: South Natomas Community Center
2921 Truxel Road
Sacramento, CA 95833**

For more information, please visit:

USDA’s Summer Food Service Program: www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp.

California Thursdays: www.californiathursdays.org. An online pressroom, including photos and background information, can be found at www.californiathursdayspr.org.

Natomas USD Nutrition Services: <http://natomasunified.org/blog/free-barbecue-lunch-thursday-to-celebrate-summer-meals-program/>

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