



CERES COMMUNITY PROJECT

The Center for Food, Youth & Community

The Need for Food as Medicine in the North Bay

We face an epidemic of nutrition-related chronic disease in the United States, with the consequences disproportionately impacting people of color. Poor diets are at the root of this crisis. Thankfully, there is a growing movement to improve access to healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food, including integrating evidence-informed food interventions into health care as fully reimbursable medical benefits. Peer-reviewed, published research shows that medically tailored meals, medically tailored groceries and produce “prescriptions” can improve nutrition security and health outcomes while reducing health care utilization and costs. Ceres was instrumental in the work in California to include Medically Supportive Food & Nutrition Services as a Community Support in MediCal. The Center for Food, Youth & Community is essential to meet the need for these targeted medical nutrition interventions across the five-county area of Sonoma, Marin, Lake, Napa and Solano that Ceres will be serving by the end of 2024. In Sonoma County alone, there are 1,310 MediCal members living with uncontrolled diabetes, 1,280 MediCal members living with uncontrolled hypertension and more than 2,400 new cancer diagnoses annually. Today Ceres serves just 1,400 – 1,500 clients per year; the new Center will increase that to at least 6,000 when fully scaled.

About Ceres Community Project

Founded in 2007, Ceres Community Project is the only organization north of San Francisco that prepares and delivers medically tailored meals (MTMs) to people of all ages living with serious, chronic and complex medical conditions. 83% of Ceres clients are living on less than \$29,000 a year, more than half are living alone without support and 42% are younger than 60 with no other option for home-delivered meals. Ceres’ unique model embeds a Youth Development Program into the center of our work. More than 325 youth from 50 schools across Marin and Sonoma County volunteer as gardeners and chefs each year. In the process, they learn about growing, cooking and eating healthy foods, gain job and leadership skills, and experience their value and belonging as contributing members of the community. And they carry these lessons into their lives. Ceres is also the only medically tailored meal provider in the country committed to 100% organic food to maximize nutrition for our clients and support a healthy, just and sustainable food system for all.

Why a New Facility?

Responding to unprecedeted demand during the pandemic, Ceres scaled meal production and delivery from 79,000 meals in 2019 to 216,000 meals in 2023. We have reached capacity in what was three kitchens until SAY filed for bankruptcy; as we've just learned, leased kitchens put too much of our

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PO Box 1562 | Sebastopol CA 95473 | 707.829.5833 | info@ceresproject.org

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production capacity at risk; and none of the kitchens can be modified – for example, to add much-needed refrigeration. In addition, at this level of scale, our current model is not efficient. We expect to reduce per meal costs by at least 12% within the first year in the new facility.

A Regional Center for Food, Youth & Community

A new central headquarters and meal production facility will allow us to scale meal delivery from 200,000 to 800,000 annually over the next decade; expand youth engagement by 50%; and add vital new programming such as nutrition education for low-income families and youth job training.

The new location is at 1237 Apollo Way in southwest Santa Rosa, the neighborhood with the lowest outcomes for health, education and income and we have been meeting with a range of community partners to understand how we can bring value locally. The location is central for delivery and for most of our existing volunteers, and most importantly, is within a 15-minute drive of 6 major high schools so we can reach and serve more youth. We own the 1.52-acre parcel and have received entitlements; we expect to receive construction permits by May 2024, and to break ground in September.

Sustainability & Community Resilience

Northern California faces increasing threats from climate change. Ceres has been engaged in emergency food work since the 2017 Tubbs Fire when we supported eight shelters. We are now the emergency food provider for the County of Sonoma, providing all of the meals to county-operated shelters when they are activated. We supported the development of the Mass Feeding Plan in Marin County and serve on the Food Working Group there as well as on the COAD and COAD Emergency Food Group in Sonoma.

To ensure that we can meet the needs of our clients and the broader community during disasters, the Center will be a 100% electric facility with 60% coverage from on-site solar and a microgrid battery back-up system enabling us to operate for 12 days without power. Our analysis shows that per meal energy cost will drop by 65% and per meal carbon output by 81% due to these important investments.

Community engagement work in southwest Santa Rosa highlighted a community resilience center as one of the most needed resources in that community. We imagine being a place where people can warm/cool, charge electronics, get information about resources, and pick up shelf stable groceries and medically tailored meals.

Project Summary

The Center is a \$22 million project. More than \$14.9 million is committed and we expect to confirm another \$2.25 over the next month. Another \$2 to \$3 million is in active conversation with individual, corporate and foundation partners. We will be leveraging New Market Tax Credits and because of the location, must close on that deal by July 2024.

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