FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Confluence of Poverty and Fire Demands Increased Response from the Redwood Empire Food Bank

Santa Rosa, CA – August 8, 2018 – Since the onset of the devastating Mendocino Complex Fire on July 30th, the Redwood Empire Food Bank (REFB), the largest hunger-relief organization serving north coastal California, has made six critical deliveries of emergency food to Lake County. This past weekend alone, the REFB’s Station 3990 emergency food distribution at Redbud Park in Clearlake delivered more than 60,000 pounds of fresh produce, frozen Kitchen Collective meals, Clover Sonoma dairy products, fresh bread, frozen chicken, healthy snacks, and bottled water to more than 1,700 Lake and Mendocino county residents impacted by fires burning throughout the region.

"We've had evacuation orders given, and lifted, and given again for weeks. That's hard on grocery budgets," said Carol, distribution volunteer and owner of the Clearlake Grocery Outlet. "Families buy food and then they're evacuated. They come home to spoiled food, restock, and are evacuated again. That's why we are grateful for [the Redwood Empire Food Bank]. My store posted about this distribution on our Facebook page. It's our responsibility as local business owners to look out for our community, to help our neighbors when they are experiencing need. This community needs so much help. We want people to know about this resource."

With its high rates of poverty and food insecurity, Lake County is in dire need of hunger-relief programs. In 2017, more than 20% of the population lived in poverty according to current US Census data. The REFB’s own internal analysis of the area based on data provided by Feeding America shows that 8 out of 12 census areas are experiencing food insecurity rates of 20% or higher. These alarming numbers indicate that Lake County is undeniably one of the most impoverished counties in California.

Rural areas, such as Lake County, not only face higher rates of food insecurity than urban regions but also face significant challenges in overcoming food insecurity, including: a concentration of low-wage jobs, higher rates of unemployment or underemployment and lower levels of education.
A myriad of studies describe the detrimental effects of hunger on development, health, learning, behavior, productivity and illness. In children under the age 12, hunger negatively impacts school performance and academic achievement while resulting in developmental and behavioral challenges. In seniors, hunger can lead to or escalate illness, such as heart disease or type 2 diabetes. In adults and children, hunger contributes to obesity when low-income people must purchase the cheapest, least healthy food available. At every age, severe hunger makes learning and concentration difficult, if not impossible.

According to data collected by Feeding America, a food insecure family of four is estimated to need the equivalent of nearly 100 additional meals a month because they lack enough money to buy food. The REFB’s hunger-relief programs serving children, families, seniors and individuals in Lake County address a critical need: weekly access to fresh produce and healthy staple foods, including perishable and non-perishable protein, for low-income residents who might otherwise go without adequate food and nutrition. Fresh produce is central to the REFB’s distributions because it is often too expensive for low-income individuals and families to purchase, yet is essential to good health.

For those facing hunger in Lake County, access to healthy, nutritious food can instantly improve quality of life while also providing the energy to focus on other aspects of wellbeing, such as healing from an illness, contributing at work, raising children or excelling in school.

The confluence of poverty and fire are leaving a devastating mark on the Lake County community. But, there is hope. In response to the heavy losses, displacements, and evacuations, the REFB has and will continue to provide emergency food to those facing hunger. The poverty rates are alarming and the burden caused by these fires is vast – but not too vast to help.

As the Mendocino Complex Fire continues to burn, the REFB will continue to meet the increasing need for food assistance throughout Sonoma County and its entire north coastal service area. REFB staff will return to Lake County this Thursday, August 9th, to offer a second Station 3990 drive-through food distribution at Redbud Park in Clearlake. Operating from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm, this distribution will, like all REFB Station 3990s, serve all those in need of emergency assistance.

“These deliveries have been making a significant impact in the lives of people living through a very stressful time,” said Steve Armstrong, the REFB’s Director of Operations who attended Saturday’s distribution in Clearlake. “I am humbled not only by the gratitude of those we are helping, but by the way
our team has adapted to a very fluid situation to ensure assistance is available."

With many Lake and Mendocino county residents evacuating to Sonoma County, the REFB will bolster their regularly scheduled Station 3990s emergency response distributions throughout their service region with more food for all those in need of help as the result of recent fires.

The REFB is responding to the increased and urgent needs of families and individuals impacted by the Mendocino Complex Fires, which requires additional, unplanned financial resources. Generous support from the community is essential to ensuring a robust offering of food assistance is available to sustain this vulnerable population.

**Donations can be made through the REFB’s website at refb.org. Anyone seeking help or more information about Station 3990 emergency food distributions can call the Redwood Empire Food Bank Food Connections referral office at (707) 523-7903.**

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**About Redwood Empire Food Bank**
The Redwood Empire Food Bank (REFB) is the largest hunger-relief organization serving north coastal California from Sonoma County to the Oregon border. Since 1987, the REFB has provided food and nourishment to those facing hunger, currently serving 82,000 children, families and seniors in Sonoma County, while striving to end hunger in our community. The REFB collaborates with local and regional partners to obtain and distribute 15.5 million pounds of food annually, the equivalent of more than 35,000 meals every day. Through more than 200 of our own direct service distributions and partnerships with 170 other hunger-relief organizations, we form a network of over 450 weekly and monthly distribution sites serving low-income residents in Sonoma, Lake, Del Norte, Mendocino and Humboldt counties.
Visit [www.refb.org](http://www.refb.org) or call 707-523-7900 to learn more.