FSU Ag food drive growing
Ever wondered what happens to all that dorm room mac n' cheese when it's time to move out for the summer? At Mississippi State University, students have the opportunity to get involved in their communities by donating leftover non-perishables to a food drive at the end of the year. Although this year's drive is in the planning stages, faculty and students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in the MSU Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine, are hoping that many different student organizations will participate.

“We want students to understand that they are more than just a student,” said Dr. Chiqutia Beley, assistant professor in the Department of Food Sciences, Nutrition and Health Promotion. “They are members of the community and they have the opportunity to make a difference – even in very small ways, such as choosing not to dump food that someone else who needs it can.”

In past drives, students have assisted in boxing proceeds so that the food can be delivered to food banks in the Golden Triangle area. Contact Starkville Habitat for Humanity at (662) 324-7008 or visit www.starkvillehabitat.com.
As the University of Southern Mississippi celebrates its 100th anniversary, organizers are working to ensure that a day of community service work becomes an annual event. More than 400 volunteers are registered so far to participate in “The Big Event”—a university-wide day of community service set for April 10.

From repairing and building homes to beautifying local communities, volunteers will spend the day working to improve areas around Hattiesburg and the Gulf Coast.

“Being that it’s our centennial, we really had time to reflect on why Southern Miss is here, and we came to the conclusion that it’s our community that’s allowed us to grow and prosper,” said Jessica Gilliland, a USM sophomore and “Big Event” student coordinator.

“Whether it’s as small as raking somebody’s yard to building a wheelchair ramp, we want to do anything we can to give back because our community has given us so much,” she added.

Although USM offers various ways for students to participate in community service work throughout the year, “The Big Event” is expected to be the largest service initiative in the university’s history.

Projects on the day’s agenda include cleaning yards, beautifying parks, working on small construction, and helping churches and local schools. On the Gulf Coast, volunteers will work with Habitat for Humanity as the agency moves residents into new homes.

“We’ve had significant enthusiasm from students on having this as a marquee event of our centennial celebration,” said Brooks Mouser, associate Dean of Students at USM. “This allows them to partner with our Greater Hattiesburg and greater Gulf Coast communities, a way of giving back and saying thanks and integrating into our local community,” he added.

Junior Erica Price, a “Big Event” Coordinator, said the event will help students to connect with the community. But she added “this is much larger” than just one day.

“We’ll see this becoming a campus tradition,” she said. “I love to see this become something we do for the next 100 years.”

Food: 2,700 lbs donated by MSU in last two years

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area. About 2,700 pounds of non-perishable foods have been collected over the past two years. Mississippi State University students have participated in other service projects related to rectifying hunger issues in the state including bagging 67,000 pounds of sweet potatoes over the past three years to help feed low-income families.

“The Sweet Potato Drop,” as it is called, is a result of gleaning fields after produce has been harvested by farmers. “Many students that go to MSU are from Mississippi,” Dr. Britley said. “I think it’s nice to know that you’re doing something to help your state. To me, that’s a really big deal.”

The fact that elementary education majors at the University of Mississippi receive field hours for their work at the Summer Reading Camp is really just a bonus.

“It’s the service aspect of the project—giving children a place to make progress in a free camp that assists them in reading for fun—that is truly rewarding,” said Angela Rutherford, director of the Center for Literacy Training and Development.

This year the camp, which is sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Literacy Instruction and funded by the Hearin Foundation, will be offered to fourth- through six-graders at an Oxford public school on June 14-18.

“This initiative gives kids something positive to do during the summer and fosters reading for pleasure,” Dr. Rutherford said. “Sometimes with assigned reading, pleasure reading gets lost during the school year.”

The Center trains teachers and supplies books, but undergraduate students do most of the hands-on work with campers throughout the week under supervision from university faculty.

Independent and cooperative reading is promoted through literature circles and responsive activities; the week concludes with a major final project at the end of the week.

This year, AmeriCorps members in several schools in the Oxford area with Mississippi will have the option to replicate the camp, Rutherford added.

For more information about the camp and other youth reading initiatives at UM, visit www.careah.olemiss.edu/youth/summer-reading/.