

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044
County Clerk
County of: Merced
2222 M Street
Merced, CA 95340

From: (Public Agency): Merced Community College District
3600 M Street, Merced, CA 95348
(Address)

Project Title: Merced College AgTEC Innovation Center

Project Applicant: Merced Community College District

Project Location - Specific:
3600 M Street (Assessor's Parcel Number 230-010-006-000)

Project Location - City: Merced Project Location - County: Merced

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

Please see attached.

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MERCEDE COUNTY CLERK
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Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Merced Community College District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Merced Community College District

Exempt Status: (check one):

- Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
[X] Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: 15332. In-Fill Development Projects
Statutory Exemptions. State code number:

Reasons why project is exempt:

Please see attached.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Marcus Metcalf Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (209) 384-6005

If filed by applicant:

- 1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature: [Signature] Date: 11/15/22 Title: Sr. Dir. Capital Projects & Facilities

[X] Signed by Lead Agency [ ] Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR:

## **Attachment to Notice of Exemption for Merced College AgTEC Innovation Center**

**Project Location:** The Merced College AgTEC Innovation Center (project) site is located on the Merced College campus on the east side of M Street, north of W. Yosemite Avenue, in the City of Merced, Merced County, California (3600 M Street).

**Project Description:** The Merced Community College District (District) is proposing to construct a new AgTEC Innovation Center on the campus of Merced College to provide programs and facilities for innovative and interdisciplinary education in the food processing industry.

The proposed AgTEC Innovation Center would consist of a single-story building with 14,880 square feet of assignable space to be constructed on 2.3 acres currently occupied by buildings that house the Plant Science program. The project will include the following components: fruit and nut processing with exterior covered area, dry storage with exterior covered area, retail space with walk-in refrigerator, storeroom, and exterior covered area, administrative space, and sanitation. The exterior covered areas attached to the processing and storage spaces would serve as loading docks and the covered area attached to the retail space would be used primarily for marketing of products produced at the facility.

Existing buildings on the project site, totaling 12,800 square feet, will be demolished and all building materials from the demolition would be salvaged, recycled, or removed off-site.

**Project Beneficiaries:** Merced College, founded in 1962 and a fully accredited two-year community college, serves nearly 17,000 students at two major campuses in Merced and Los Banos, California. It is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with approximately 59% Hispanic, 54% low-income, and 51.5% first-generation students.

The project will serve as a resource for Merced College students to engage in an interdisciplinary curriculum that integrates technology with the complex food processing industry. Students will engage in developing skills in food safety, processing, distribution, and wholesale and retailing.

The project will provide space for product trials, digital data analysis, robotics, packaging, equipment testing and control, logistics, and product distribution. The retail area will support and train students in inventory, customer service, food preparation, and marketing. Also, the retail shop will support on-campus programs to sell “Made in Merced” student crafted products.

The food production sector, from production through food services and retail, remains one of the largest sectors of the economy in Merced County. Employers within the Merced region will benefit from trained, service-ready employees. Merced County is consistently one of the top three counties in the state of California with the highest number of core agricultural manufacturing businesses and jobs.

The overall economic impact of this project will be to provide a living wage and increase the quality of life for families in Merced region.

Construction of the new project is expected to be completed in the Fall of 2025.

**Reasons why project is exempt:**

15332. IN-FILL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS. Class 32 consists of projects characterized as in-fill development meeting the conditions described in this section.

- (a) The project is consistent with the applicable general plan designation and all applicable general plan policies as well as with applicable zoning designation and regulations.

The Merced College campus is designated “School” in the Merced General Plan Land Use Map and zoned “R-1-6” (Low Density Residential). Colleges and trade schools are permitted in the R-1-6 zone with a conditional use permit. Continued use as an educational facility is consistent with all applicable general plan policies and longstanding zoning practice for public education facilities.

- (b) The proposed development occurs within city limits on a project site of no more than five acres substantially surrounded by urban uses.

The Merced College campus is within the city limits of Merced. The addition of the project would involve construction on less than five acres of the existing campus. The project site is located within the existing campus and is surrounded by other campus uses. The campus is adjacent to urban residential development to the north, west, and south, with nearby medical, commercial, and residential development to the east.

- (c) The project site has no value as habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species.

The project is within the existing Merced College campus, which has existed at this location for 58 years. The campus consists of buildings, sidewalks, parking lots, turfed and landscaped areas, and campus agricultural land, and is substantially surrounded by urban development. Therefore, the site would not provide appreciable habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species.

- (d) Approval of the project would not result in any significant effects relating to air quality, water quality, traffic, and noise.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control (Air District) has established thresholds of significance for criteria pollutant emissions, which are based on the Air District's New Source Review (NSR) for stationary sources. Using the project type, size, and the number of vehicle trips, the Air District has pre-quantified emissions and determined values below which it is reasonable to conclude that a project would not exceed applicable thresholds of significance for criteria pollutants (Small Project Analysis Level [SPAL], November 2020). The project, at 14,880 square feet, would be substantially under the 74,400 square feet identified for two-year college educational uses (Table 5) and would also generate less than 1,000 average daily trips. Therefore, the project would not exceed applicable thresholds of significance for criteria pollutants. GHG emissions will be reduced and not considered substantial by complying with the regulations of the Air District and inclusion of energy efficient design features as described in the EDA Environmental Narrative, Section A, 2, Proposed Project and Construction.

The CEQA Guidelines provide that Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is the most appropriate measure of transportation impacts. The Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) *VMT Thresholds and Implementation Guidelines* (September 2022) provides screening criteria to determine whether projects may be presumed to produce a less than significant VMT impact. The MCAG guidelines

indicate that a project consistent with the General Plan may be successfully screened if it would generate fewer than 1,000 average daily trips. This project is consistent with the City of Merced General Plan and is expected to have substantially less than 1,000 trips per day due to the limited size of the facility and because many of the students that would use the innovation center would already be enrolled at Merced College. Delivery trucks would operate once or twice a month. On-campus parking capacity would not be exceeded as new parking spaces are included in the project and other nearby parking would be available.

The Merced College campus drains into the City's storm drainage system and will be subject to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System requirements. Water quality impacts, therefore, would be less than significant.

As with all building projects, there will be some construction noise, but the project site is not near any residential uses and the college would manage the construction of the project to have a minimal impact on existing college classroom operations.

Therefore, significant effects related to air quality, water quality, traffic, and noise, are not anticipated.

(e) The site can be adequately served by all required utilities and public services.

Since the project is within the existing Merced College campus, all utilities and public services are available and already in place. According to District staff, the new building can be adequately served with all required utilities and services.

The project does not meet any of the exemption exceptions specified in Section 15300.2 in that there is no appreciable cumulative impact associated with the project; the project would not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances; the project will not result in damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway; the project is not located on a hazardous waste site; and the project will not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.