

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Building Food System Resiliency and Equity in Virginia's Northern Piedmont

Grant Program Purpose

The USDA's Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) program supports partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems. The program focuses on strengthening the viability and resilience of regional food economies through collaboration and coordination, including pandemic response and recovery. The application deadline is May 16. The period of performance is three years, with projects scheduled to begin in October 2022.

Proposed Project Summary

The Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission seeks to build on its past efforts to foster a more sustainable food system in the Rappahannock-Rapidan Region by working with key partners to help address identified needs in value-chain coordination, distribution, food access, small farmer training in food business management, and local food marketing. In 2015, the Commission adopted the Rappahannock-Rapidan Farm and Food Plan, with nine priority projects. One of those projects was to develop a regional food council, which the Commission established in 2016.

The partnership collaborating on the RFSP application is an outgrowth of the Rappahannock-Rapidan Food Policy Council's efforts and several of the partners are active members of the Council. Project activities will help implement three other priority projects called for in the Plan as well as food access needs that arose during the COVID pandemic and are projected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Following are additional details on the specific project activities by grant partner:

4P Foods, a private food hub business that operates in the region and throughout the DC metro area, plans to provide decentralized, cost-effective cold storage and transportation infrastructure powered by renewable energy that serves and supports the mid-tier value chain (producers, processors, distributors, and food access organizations). The necessary elements include:

- Small cold-storage units powered by solar panels shared by grower communities, processors, and organizations that provide food to underserved communities
- Electric trucks running regular routes between cold storage units and the different partners in the region
- Low-tech, asynchronous solutions for inventory management and tracking of product (bar coding and entry into a phone or computer)
- A cost-sharing and scheduling model that reflects demand for system resources (app for reserving storage and transport space)

The George Washington Carver Food Enterprise Center (GWCFEC), a subsidiary of the 501c3 nonprofit George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center proposes to hire an Outreach and Training Coordinator. This staff person would coordinate the efforts of, and collaborate with, organizations and entities working across the region on issues related to food production and food security. The Coordinator would also provide training around the region to help farmers and food entrepreneurs with food business development. Where possible, the trainings would be folded into existing training programs in the region. 60 workshops over 3 years are proposed to be carried out through the grant project. The food business incubator's commercial kitchen/processing facility is currently under

construction at the Carver Center in partnership with Culpeper County, and due to open within the next year. This position will help extend the reach of the Center beyond the building's footprint.

The Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition (MAFRAC) proposes to hire a Coordinator to expand their stakeholder calls, coordinate excess food within the area and conduct regional food system network building and maintenance. MAFRAC was formed during the pandemic to connect those who have food with those that need it, a need that still continues. They mobilize schools, food hubs, food banks, commercial kitchens, taxi, and delivery fleets, and more to form a supply chain that will get nutrient-dense food to those who need it, whether at a community pick-up site or at home. MAFRAC is a nonprofit in the process of establishing 501c3 status.

Minority and Veteran Farmers of the Piedmont (MVFP) is a volunteer-led 501c3 non-profit organization that educates people in the region on sustainable and scalable agricultural practices and provides mentorships for minorities, veterans, farmers, and youth. They are seeking funding support to provide facilitators and print materials at education and training sessions for small farmers, which their volunteers will coordinate. Grant funds would also be used to hire a consultant to provide technical assistance in strategic planning and organizational best practices so they can more effectively expand their activities.

Northern Virginia Food Rescue (NOVA-FR) proposes to rent a warehouse in Fauquier County to receive bulk donations and large quantity food purchases which can be separated, sorted, stored, and then redistributed to food distribution partners throughout the county. This space would also be used as a staging location for building and distributing weekend backpacks for schools, food storage for organizations like Fauquier FISH and Fauquier Food Bank, pickup site for CSAs, support home deliveries, and be a Hub for Catholic Charities as a staging point for deliveries of food into Rappahannock County. Fauquier Food Rescue staff would run the warehouse and coordinate logistics and transportation. Grant funds would also be used to hire a Warehouse Manager and a part-time delivery driver, and a refrigerated trailer (a box truck will be purchased with other funds due to grant restrictions). This nonprofit organization's volunteers would be utilized to assist in warehouse operations.

Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC) proposes to provide grant administration and coordination for the overall grant project. RRRC staff would also provide technical assistance and facilitation to the grant partners on improving value chain coordination in the region, including assisting in bringing other stakeholders to the table via the regional food council's network. Additionally, RRRC proposes to conduct an assessment of its Purely Piedmont regional food and beverage marketing program, and expand it to better meet producers' needs, particularly small, beginning and minority farmers.

Budget

Partner Organization	Cost	Grant Funds	Cash Match Needed	Partner Cash Match	In-kind Match
RRRC	\$60,000	\$48,000	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$0
4P Foods	\$335,000	\$268,000	\$67,000	\$20,000	\$7,000
GWCFEC	\$240,000	\$192,000	\$48,000	\$18,000	\$12,000
MAFRAC	\$255,000	\$204,000	\$51,000	\$51,000	\$0
MVFP	\$60,000	\$48,000	\$12,000	\$6,000	\$14,300
NOVA Food Rescue	\$264,900	\$211,920	\$52,980	\$20,000	\$226,700
PATH Foundation	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$130,000	\$0
TOTAL	\$1,214,900	\$971,920	\$242,980	\$257,000	\$260,000

The maximum grant award is \$1 million. RRRC will request \$971,920 in grant funds, with \$48,000 going directly to the Commission for its project activities. The RFSP grant program requires a cash match of 25% of the grant funds requested, which is much more difficult for small food businesses and nonprofits to provide than in-kind match. All organizations have provided some amount of cash match via signed commitment letters. Those that did not provide the full 25%, provided in-kind match which provides bonus points during application review. The PATH Foundation has committed to provide \$130,000 of cash match, more than making up the difference and ensuring the application will be more competitive.