

WFF INNOVATION COMPETITION APPLICATION

PROJECT NAME: Locally Grown at {CENTER}

TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET: \$148,625

HOW MUCH FUNDING ARE YOU APPLYING FOR? \$20,000

BRIEFLY SUMMARIZE THE PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT/PROGRAM. PLEASE ALSO INCLUDE HOW IT WILL PROVIDE IMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEALTHY LIVING OR INSPIRING DOWNTOWNS WITHIN BENTON COUNTY.

Feeding America recently released their “Map the Meal Gap 2015” report which estimated that 13.9% of the population of Benton County (31,660 individuals including 15,000 children) are facing the physical, emotional, behavioral and academic challenges related to hunger and food insecurity on a daily basis. The greatest need is for the 35% of those food insecure families who are likely not income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance.

For families facing food insecurity, it is extremely difficult to find affordable ingredients for a healthy diet, particularly locally grown produce. When making the choice between paying rent or utilities and feeding their families, there is simply no money (or benefits) left to “splurge” on fresh produce. Children’s tummies are placated with cheap, calorie-dense foods to stave off hunger. Low-income parents are especially vulnerable to overeating once food becomes available. These are situations in which we begin to see poorer diets, more obesity, and long-term effects on overall health and development.

We recognize that the mindset of “anything is better than nothing” is dangerous when it comes to the nutritional aspect of most feeding programs, and is limiting and degrading to the individuals facing hunger. As part of our nutrition initiative, we desire to become more nutrition-driven, with a stronger focus on locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Due to the high cost and unavailability of bulk purchasing (required to sustain our programs) of locally grown produce, the environmental impact of food production and transport, and the lack of fresh produce donations, the {CENTER} developed a 15,000 square foot organic garden. The {GARDEN} annually harvests over 6000 pounds of produce distributed to clients at the {FOOD PANTRY} and through meals served at the {SOUP KITCHEN}. This only accounts for one-quarter of the produce needs for the {FOOD PANTRY} and {SOUP KITCHEN}, and is unable to meet the supply demand to be incorporated into {CHILDREN’S FEEDING PACKS}.

Each year the {SOUP KITCHEN} serves over 94,000 meals to our hungry neighbors, while the {FOOD PANTRY} provides food and personal care items to 49,000 persons (including 21,000 children). The {CHILDREN’S FEEDING} program partners with 60 Benton County schools (elementary through high school) and early childhood sites, focusing on providing weekly nutritional support to 3100 children identified by school personnel as being at highest risk for hunger or food insecurity on the weekends and school breaks. {CHILDREN’S FEEDING PACKS} include 8-10 healthy snack food items which have been selected based upon the ability to meet older children’s nutritional needs while keeping the items easy to open and prepare for younger children or children in difficult situations such as homelessness or living in motels with no cooking facilities. During the summer months, we partner with 14 feeding

programs (schools, churches, day camps, other non-profit organizations) across Benton County to provide over 1000 {CHILDREN'S FEEDING PACKS} for weekly distribution to every child participating in these various programs.

Our next effort in our nutrition initiative is to expand the {GARDEN} to include: 200 feet of blackberry plants and 100 feet of blueberry plants; lighting for the Garden's hydroponic system to provide year-round harvest of romaine lettuce; improving the efficiency of planting and harvesting by utilizing tiller attachments; and implementation of apiculture (beekeeping) to provide high value pollination and increase crop yields. These efforts will not only increase the amount and variety of locally grown produce and local honey that we can provide to clients served through the {FOOD PANTRY} and {SOUP KITCHEN}, but will also allow us to begin incorporating locally grown fruit into {CHILDREN'S FEEDING PACKS} distributed at our Rogers center during the summer months.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH THROUGH THIS PROJECT? PLEASE INCLUDE PERFORMANCE MEASURES TO INDICATE HOW AND BY WHEN YOU WILL MEASURE SUCCESS.

Our goal is to provide our clients with year-round access to a greater amount and variety of locally grown produce to enhance the nutritious balance needed for a healthy diet. Specifically, our target is a 10% increase in locally grown produce available to {FOOD PANTRY} clients and a 10% increase in locally grown produce used in {SOUP KITCHEN} meals. We anticipate berries being available for harvest and distribution in summer 2017 to allow for planting and crop maturity. Romaine lettuce will be available for harvest and distribution beginning spring 2016 and throughout the entire year with the increased production due to hydroponic lighting.

We anticipate providing 150 children at the {CENTER} Rogers location with a {CHILDREN'S FEEDING PACK} including fresh, locally grown produce each week during the 2017 summer break. These children will face an immediate decreased risk of hunger or food insecurity on the weekends during summer break. Distribution statistics including total number of {CHILDREN'S FEEDING PACKS} and produce distributed and total number of children served are collected monthly.

Project specific data to be collected on a monthly basis includes the pounds of produce harvested, pounds of locally grown produce available to {FOOD PANTRY} clients, pounds of locally grown produce used in {SOUP KITCHEN} meals, number of meals prepared using harvested plants, and number of {CHILDREN'S FEEDING PACKS} which include locally grown produce. This data will be used to measure increase in locally grown produce available to our clients as well as the increase in overall produce needs supplied by the {GARDEN}.

We will conduct a project evaluation to determine necessary changes and feasibility of expanding the incorporation of produce within {CHILDREN'S FEEDING PACKS}, either to additional sites during the summer distribution or to begin delivery of produce during the school year.

IS THIS PROJECT OR PROGRAM SUSTAINABLE BEYOND 2016?

The purchase of berry plants, hydroponic lighting, tiller attachments, and necessary apiary materials and garden equipment will be a one-time expense that will allow for increased amount and variety of locally grown produce for decades beyond 2016. The cost of maintaining the {GARDEN} including the greenhouse, apiary and ongoing supplies are included in the program costs, all of which are covered by profits generated by the two {CENTER} thrift stores. Due to the honey bee accounting for 80% of all