

Governor Northam Awards Funding to 15 Projects Addressing Food Insecurity in Underserved Communities

Grants will support initiatives aimed at expanding food retailers, increasing access to fresh produce

RICHMOND—Governor Ralph Northam today announced that 15 projects across the Commonwealth will receive a total of over \$620,000 in the inaugural round of Virginia Food Access Investment Fund (VFAIF) grants. The Governor made the announcement at an event with Richmond Food Justice Alliance, which will receive funding to support a new mobile food market with Shalom Farms.

First [launched in 2020](#), the VFAIF provides grants between \$5,000 and \$50,000 to support business development, construction, rehabilitation, equipment upgrades, or expansion of grocery stores, small food retailers, or innovative food retail projects that increase food access in underserved communities. VFAIF follows the Equitable Food-Oriented Development model of using food and agriculture to create economic opportunities and healthy neighborhoods in historically marginalized communities.

“Hunger and food insecurity are a reality for too many Virginia families, and the pandemic has only underscored the urgency of this crisis,” **said Governor Northam**. “At its core, the Virginia Food Access Investment Fund is about addressing the root causes of low food access and increasing equity and justice in our local food systems. I am pleased to see the innovation and dedication of businesses and organizations who are helping to advance our shared goals of building strong, resilient food supply chains in historically marginalized communities and making fresh, nutritious food available to Virginians in every corner of our Commonwealth.”

In 2020, Governor Northam signed [House Bill 1509](#), sponsored by Delegate Delores McQuinn, and [Senate Bill 1073](#), sponsored by Senator Jennifer McClellan, creating the Virginia Food Access Investment Program and Fund. The VFAIF program supports the [Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger](#), a unified set of goals and strategies to prioritize food

security during the current public health emergency and beyond. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 850,000 Virginians were food insecure, including 250,000 children. Rates increased by approximately 20 percent during the ongoing public health crisis, with an additional 150,000 Virginians experiencing food insecurity.

“I have spent many years advocating for equity in providing healthy and affordable food options to all citizens of the Commonwealth,” **said Delegate Delores McQuinn**. “This investment program is a great start to address the ongoing challenge of food insecurities that have been so prevalent in this period of social and economic deficit. I am grateful to the Governor for his leadership and commitment to addressing food inequities across Virginia.”

In addition to supporting equitable food access in food deserts, the program works to increase the availability of fresh, healthy foods. VFAIF projects include a food retail component that accepts federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and offers the Virginia Fresh Match nutrition incentives program. Virginia Fresh Match doubles the value of SNAP benefits for fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets, increasing access to healthy foods and supporting local farmers.

“Studies have proven time and again that people in areas without access to fresh food are disproportionately affected by negative health consequences, including obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure,” **said Senator Jennifer McClellan**. “Not only does the Virginia Food Access Investment Fund help alleviate this disparity, it pushes investment into historically underserved communities that have often struggled to access capital.”

“Addressing food insecurity has been and continues to be a priority for the Northam Administration,” **said Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring**. “The Virginia Food Access Investment Fund achieves three important goals of providing access to healthy and nutritious fruits and vegetables while also investing in local economies and supporting Virginia agriculture.”

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services provides technical assistance and works with applicants in developing projects. The VFAIF application can be accessed through the [VDACS website](#).

The following projects are receiving funding in the inaugural round of Virginia Food Access Investment Fund grants:

Beans and Rice, Pulaski County

\$50,000

This project will support a fresh food mobile market that will operate four days per week with stops determined in partnership with area churches, community members, and local governments, including the Pulaski County Department of Social Services, to ensure maximum benefit to food insecure residents.

Browntown Farms, Brunswick County

\$50,000

Funding for Browntown Farms will support a multi-purpose facility with cold storage, aggregation of local produce, and “barn to door” online ordering and delivery service.

Doña Fer Grocery Store, Rockingham County

\$22,046

This project will fund a new cooler and repair an existing cooler at a small grocery store serving the Latinx community in Harrisonburg to meet the customer requests for more fresh foods, including milk, meat, and produce.

FRESHFARM, Fairfax County

\$50,000

FRESHFARM will establish new fresh food mobile markets in food insecure areas of Northern Virginia in partnership with the Virginia Farmers Market Association. These markets will generate revenue for family-owned farms in Virginia and expand a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) program for SNAP users.

Henry’s Marketplace, Scott County

\$25,000

Funding for Henry’s Marketplace will support expanded retail space, coolers, and local produce sales, as well as a new outdoor market and community event space featuring local artists and musicians.

Honaker Wholesale, Russell County

\$25,000

Honaker Wholesale is a small grocery and general goods store in rural Russell County, where additional grocery options are at least a 25-minute drive away. Funding will support the purchase of a new walk-in cooler enabling volume purchases and the storage of fresh products, lowering costs, and increasing the availability and variety of fresh food to customers.

Jon Henry General Store, Shenandoah County

\$25,000

Located in New Market, Jon Henry General Store is one of the only food retailers offering a produce box CSA-style program for SNAP/EBT customers that provides access to fruits and vegetables while also leveraging the Virginia Fresh Match program. Funding will support expanded cooler capacity and enable an expansion of this program.

Norfolk Food Ecosystem, City of Norfolk

\$50,000

Funding will support a new fresh food market in the underserved St. Paul's community of Norfolk to increase access to fresh food, serve as a Fresh Food Pharmacy, offer health education, and provide information about how to access SNAP and Virginia Fresh Match.

Northside Food Access Coalition, City of Richmond

\$50,000

Northside Food Access Coalition is a community-led organization that aims to increase fresh food access along the Brookland Park corridor in Richmond. This project will convert an existing community-owned building into a cold storage facility and a new hybrid farmers' market CSA program serving the more than 35,000 area residents, 56 percent of whom experience low food access.

Project GROWS, City of Staunton

\$49,642

Project GROWS will operate a mobile market to increase fresh food access in a number of underserved communities in Staunton, Waynesboro, and Augusta County. Market locations will include elderly and fixed-income communities, low income housing complexes, and afterschool programs.

Richmond Food Justice Alliance and Shalom Farms, *City of Richmond*

\$49,000

This project is a collaboration between the non-profit organizations Richmond Food Justice Alliance and Shalom Farms, and will support a community-led process to inform the establishment of pop-up markets in the Mosby Court, Fairfield, and Creighton Court neighborhoods in Richmond. Skills development and entrepreneurship opportunities will be available for neighborhood residents, centered around community wealth-building and increased access to fresh food.

River Street Market Education, *City of Petersburg*

\$50,000

River Street Market Education is the non-profit arm of Petersburg's River Street Market. This project seeks to establish youth-led mobile markets and to create more local purchasing opportunities at existing Petersburg farmers' market. VFAIF will support this project by providing needed cold storage infrastructure for food aggregation and retail distribution.

Surry Marketplace, *Surry County*

\$50,000

This project will support the establishment of a new grocery store in Surry County, which currently lacks a market, and will feature an online ordering platform and delivery service, workforce development, and increased access to fresh food.

Tommy T's Marketplace, *Brunswick County*

\$25,000

Tommy T's Marketplace will address an identified food desert in Lawrenceville by transforming a vacant convenience store into a multi-purpose retail facility with an

emphasis on providing healthy, fresh food options. Funding will support infrastructure, hiring local community members, and a mobile market component.

Youth Earn and Learn, *City of Norfolk*

\$50,000

Youth Earn and Learn is a non-profit that takes a multi-pronged approach to increasing food security, including through youth-led mobile markets and entrepreneurship training, local sourcing of fresh produce, and business literacy. This project expands a proven youth and community development model which focuses on job training and skills development to benefit historically marginalized youth and underemployed residents in the Norfolk area.