Office of the Food Security Advocate

New Jersey Food System Enhancements Program (FSEP)

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

November 20, 2026

Applications Due: January 8, 2027 at 5pm ET

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Background & Purpose

New Jersey's food system, including small-scale to large-scale producers (e.g., farmers, ranchers, fishers, and other growers), holds tremendous potential to improve food access and availability, while promoting economic stability, especially through investments in local food infrastructure and development.

At the beginning of 2026, the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) released the New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan. This Strategic Plan, developed through cross-sector community engagement, identified expanding community-based food infrastructure and market channel creation as a key focus area (see Focus Area 2).

This focus area aims to build a more inclusive, regionally grounded food economy. It centers on strengthening the physical and economic systems that support the movement of adequate food from producers to communities, while ensuring that communities have the purchasing power necessary to pay food producers fair, sustainable prices for their products. This focus area emphasizes locally tailored, community-rooted solutions and supports infrastructure across the food supply chain that improves community food access. It promotes investments in shared infrastructure like food hubs, community gardens, urban farms, and local market channels and emphasizes that these investments are amplified when leveraging the purchasing power of institutional procurement and public programs. As a result, communities gain improved food access, stronger local economies, and greater agency over their food environments.

In support of advancing this focus area, OFSA launched the New Jersey Food System Enhancements Program (FSEP) to support eligible entities to enhance the provision of food supplied by New Jersey-based agricultural producers to New Jersey residents.

Intended outcomes from implementing strategies within this focus area include:

- Increased availability and geographic access to fresh, locally produced foods. [1], [2], [3]
- Expanded economic opportunities for farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food workers. [4], [5]
- Strengthened local supply chains and reduced dependency on external food systems. [1]
- Greater land access and ownership opportunities for food-producing communities. [6]
- Stronger integration between food production, distribution, and public nutrition programs.
- Improved community health. [7]

Program Overview

Available Funding

A total of $625,000 is available for FSEP grants. Funding will be awarded through a Request for Applications (RFA) process. Applicants can apply for up to $150,000 in grant funding. There is no cost sharing or matching requirement for funds. Up to 7 grantees will be awarded. The project period will begin in January 2027, depending on when a fully executed grant agreement is finalized between OFSA and the grantee, with project periods extending up to 18 calendar months.

Eligible Projects

Projects must directly advance Focus Area 2 of the New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan: *Expand Community-Based Food Infrastructure and Market Channel Creation for Enhanced Ongoing Food Access, Utilization, and Availability*. This focus area emphasizes locally tailored, community-rooted solutions that strengthen the physical and economic systems that support the movement of nourishing food from producers to communities, while ensuring producers receive fair, sustainable prices for their products. Projects will address one or more of the following strategies:

- **Food Access and Availability Infrastructure:** Increase investment in transportation, technology, and infrastructure improvements to increase availability and access to food across the food supply chain and access to food/nutrition programs.
- **Agriculture Workforce and Land Access:** Promote community-centered approaches that support the agricultural workforce and increase access to land for food production.
- **Market Channel Creation:** Leverage federal, state, institutional, and charitable food purchasing dollars to support farmers and regional supply chains, expand local procurement opportunities, and build long-term demand for a variety of New Jersey-grown foods.
- **Food Enterprise Investment:** Invest in community-rooted food enterprises and infrastructure to strengthen appropriate and preferred food utilization and economic opportunity.

Explore Appendix A for expanded descriptions of each of these strategies.

View examples of eligible projects in Appendix B. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of fundable activities.

Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants

Eligible FSEP applicants include:

- **Agricultural entities:** A New Jersey–based entity engaged in one or more stages of the food system, including food production, aggregation, processing, distribution, transportation, storage, preparation, or market facilitation. Eligible agricultural entities may be nonprofit, for-profit, cooperative, or producer-led organizations. Examples include, *but are not limited to*, farms and ranches, food hubs, agricultural cooperatives, producer collectives or associations, fisheries and aquaculture operations, value-added food processors, shared-use or community commercial kitchens, distributors and aggregators, mobile or wholesale market operators, and other food system enterprises rooted in New Jersey. For-profit entities are eligible to apply; however, projects must demonstrate a clear and measurable benefit to the broader community. Funding may not be used solely to subsidize routine business operations or activities that primarily increase private profit.
- **Local governments:** New Jersey local (county and municipal) governments and their agencies. Examples include, *but are not limited to*, school districts, health departments, boards of social services, departments of human services, departments of agriculture, and departments of transportation
- **Nonprofit organizations:** A New Jersey association, cooperative, or other organization with IRS 501(c)(3) status. Examples include, *but are not limited to*, community-based organizations, community health centers, hospitals, public housing sites, colleges and universities, cooperative extension services, migrant health centers, faith-based organizations, unaffiliated food banks, pantries, and community kitchens, nonprofit advocacy organizations and coalitions.

Applicants must be physically located and operate in New Jersey.

Coalitions that do not have a formal legal or organizational structure may apply through a designated member organization that serves as the lead applicant and fiscally responsible entity, with other coalition members participating as formal partners in the proposed project.

Collaboration among multiple entities is highly encouraged. Projects intending to benefit communities disproportionately impacted by food insecurity should engage and involve community members in the planning process when developing projects and applications. Applications will be evaluated in part on the extent to which the project delivers demonstrable community benefit, advances equitable access to services or

resources, and contributes to long-term systems or infrastructure beyond the applicant organization.

In the event that two or more groups independently submit applications addressing the same community and focus area, OFSA may request they collaborate on a joint project.

Eligibility Restrictions

The following entities are ineligible for funding:

- Emergency Feeding Organizations (EFOs) already receiving funding through the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) Food and Hunger Grant Program
    - Funding to support local food purchase is made available yearly to funded EFOs through the NJDA's Food and Hunger Grant Program. Entities interested in connecting with one of these EFOs should reach out directly.
- Organizations who serve a closed group, or otherwise limited constituencies, are not eligible for funding under this program.

Allowable Expenses

Budgets can include direct costs related to personnel, contractors, food, equipment, meeting expenses, travel, trainings specific to the operationalization of the grant, and partner regrants. Direct costs are costs specific to the grant itself and do not include costs associated with operating the business. All applicants will be limited to no more than 10 percent allowed indirect costs. Additional Information on allowable expenses is outlined below:

- Equipment (i.e., items of personal property having a useful life of more than one year and a cost of $5,000 or more) that are purchased using FSEP funds must be used during the grant period for the sole purpose of accomplishing the stated project objectives. The project must reflect appropriate equipment depreciation or request depreciation flexibility. If purchased equipment are not fully dedicated to the grant project, including extension beyond the grant period end date, the applicant must determine what percentage of the equipment's time or space will be dedicated to project activities when developing a budget.
- At any time, during or after the Grant Period, if OFSA determines any equipment purchased using these grant funds are no longer being used in alignment with the purposes of this program, or have been sold, OFSA may demand that the property or funds be returned. All property associated with this grant program are purchased using funds from OFSA and are therefore property of OFSA.
- Up to 10 percent of funds can be used for New Jersey food product* costs from a New Jersey producer, cooperative, or aggregator (farmer, dairy, rancher, fishery).

- *Eligible food products include:
    - Fresh produce (fruits, vegetables, etc.)
    - Grains, such as cereals, oats, etc.
    - Meat/Poultry
    - Dairy
    - Eggs
    - Seafood
    - Minimally Processed food (with at least 51% of New Jersey ingredients)
- Travel costs should be limited to mileage and paid at the prevailing IRS rate. Any travel costs beyond mileage must have a justification.
- Funds may only be expended during the grant's period of performance. Any unspent funds at grant period end must be returned to OFSA within fifteen (15) business days of grant end date.
- Partner regrants must be spent down by the end of the grant period.
- OFSA can provide a list of NJ producers, cooperatives, or aggregators if requested.

Budgets may not include:

- Supplies (e.g., office supplies for general use, although these may be covered under the 10 percent allowable indirect costs)
- Travel expenses not related to project activities
- Full purchase of a vehicle
- Reimbursement for pre-award costs
- Lobbying or advocacy
- Competitive sub-grant process

Grantee Requirements

Project Monitoring and Reporting

Grantees will submit a brief mid-point project report and one final project report at the conclusion of the funding period. Grantees will meet with OFSA at least quarterly to provide additional updates, express concerns, or request technical assistance outside of scheduled reporting requirements. Grantees will also submit any materials (e.g., educational, promotional, interview guides, data collection) developed as a part of this project with their final reports. OFSA will provide templates for all reports.

Financial Reporting

FSEP will be administered by the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) with support from the NJDA fiscal team. Grantees will be required to track monthly expenses and retain receipts and should be able to provide that documentation upon request. Grantees will be required to submit quarterly financial reports.

Documentation should be retained for three years from the date of submission of the final financial report.

Participation in Overarching Evaluation

All grantees will be required to participate in an overarching evaluation of the grant program led by OFSA. The evaluation is designed to be streamlined, supportive, and minimally burdensome for grantees, and is intended to inform continuous improvement and statewide learning rather than assess individual grantee performance.

OFSA will conduct the majority of evaluation activities using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data. Evaluation activities will focus on both process and outcome metrics and will primarily include brief surveys and facilitated focus group or interview discussions.

Grantee participation may include:

- Completing short surveys related to program implementation and outcomes;
- Participating in interviews or focus groups conducted by OFSA or its evaluation partners;
- Assisting, as feasible, with recruitment of participants from impacted populations for interviews or focus groups; and
- Providing relevant administrative or programmatic data when available and applicable.

OFSA will provide clear guidance, standardized tools, and reasonable timelines for all evaluation activities. Evaluation expectations will be proportionate to grant size and scope, and grantees will not be responsible for designing or conducting independent evaluations. Findings will be used to strengthen future investments, elevate effective practices, and support shared learning across the field.

Application Submission Information

All interested applicants should submit a completed FSEP application using this linked Proposal Template, including an itemized budget, budget narrative (Budget Template download), and Risk Assessment form (Risk Assessment form download) by **January 8, 2027 at 5pm ET**. Submit the completed application in a single (combined) PDF file to ofsa@ag.nj.gov. Use the email subject line, “FSEP Proposal” when submitting the application. Incomplete or late applications will not be accepted. Multiple organizations collaborating on a project only need to submit one application.

For questions about this funding opportunity, please contact OFSA at ofsa@ag.nj.gov. In accordance with state policies, all questions received by December 21, 2026 will be

answered by December 30, 2026 and available to all interested applicants via a link on OFSA's Funding Opportunities page.

Application Content Requirements

The following information is required for a complete application and is outlined in the FSEP Proposal Template.

Section 1. Applicant Information

- Applicant Organization Information and Description
- Primary Contact
- Budget Manager Contact

Section 2. Project Summary

- A summary overview of the project purpose, goals, and high-level activities.
- Project title
- Project duration
- The lead applicant entity and any partner entities on the project
- The strategy for which this project is aligned
- Priority population and geographic scope of the project
- The total amount of funding requested for the project

Section 3. Project Need & Community Assets

- Specific need this project will address
- Community resources or assets that inform the project
- How the project advances equity for communities disproportionately impacted by food insecurity

Section 4. Project Design

- Alignment with the New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan Focus Area 2
- Specific tactic and objectives
- Planned activities, roles, and timeline
- Project team members
- Community engagement in the planning and implementation of the project
- Sustainability and transferability of the project post grant period

Section 5. Project Learnings

- Plans for understanding progress toward identified goals and objectives
- Acknowledgement of compliance with grantee requirements

Section 6. Budget (download the Budget template here)

- Itemized budget
- Budget narrative

Section 7. Risk Assessment Form (download the Risk Assessment form here)

- Organization funding and accounting information

Selection Process

- Following an initial screening process for confirmation of the applicant organization's eligibility, OFSA will review and determine the technical merits of each application.
- Each grant will be assigned one primary reviewer and at least one other reviewer.
- Reviewers will independently score each application based on the criteria outlined in the Scoring Rubric section of this RFP.
- Reviewer scores will be averaged and discussed among the reviewing team. This process will generate a list of fundable, competitive applications for consideration.
- OFSA will require all reviewers to sign a conflict of interest and confidentiality form to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may affect the application review and evaluation process.
- Names of applicants applying will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of the reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.
- Award notifications will be delivered to applicants via email up to four weeks after the RFP due date.
    - OFSA reserves the right to partially fund a grant application based on number of qualifying submissions, available funds, and application score.

Scoring Rubric

Point Value (out of 100)	Application Template Heading and Scoring
5 Points	Section 1. Applicant Information
5 Points	Section 2. Project Summary
10 Points	Section 3. Project Need & Community Assets
55 Points	Section 4. Project Design ● 4.1 Strategic Plan Alignment - 5 Points ● 4.2 Project Tactic and Objectives - 10 Points ● 4.3 Project Activities, Roles, & Timeline - 15 Points ● 4.4 Project Team Members - 10 Points ● 4.5 Community Engagement - 10 Points ● 4.6 Project Sustainability & Transferability - 5 Points
5 Points	Section 5. Project Learnings
15 Points	Section 6. Budget ● 6.1 Itemized Budget - 5 Points

	• 6.2 Budget Narrative Justification - 10 Points
5 Points	Section 7. Risk Assessment

Appendix A. Project Strategy Descriptions

New Jersey Food Security 3-Year Strategic Plan

Focus Area 2: Expand Community-Based Food Infrastructure and Market Channel Creation for Enhanced Ongoing Food Access, Utilization, and Availability

FOCUS AREA 2 | STRATEGY 1

Food Access and Availability Infrastructure*: Increase investment in transportation, technology, and infrastructure improvements to increase availability and access to food across the food supply chain and access to food/nutrition programs.*

A key barrier to accessing adequate food is the lack of reliable, affordable, and timely transportation. This strategy focuses on improving the physical and technological infrastructure and mobility systems that bi-directionally connect communities to appropriate and preferred foods. Examples include supporting online ordering and grocery delivery, funding shuttle services from senior centers to food pantries (or co-locating a food pantry at a senior center), centralizing pricing information, supporting municipal transit stops near farmers markets or social service agencies, incentivizing grocery retailers to open in areas without an existing retailer through infrastructure tax credits, or co-locating local food with food benefit (e.g., WIC, SNAP) services. In rural areas, investments might include shared cold storage or cooperative delivery models.

FOCUS AREA 2 | STRATEGY 2

Agriculture Workforce and Land Access: *Promote community-centered approaches that support the agricultural workforce and increase access to land for nutritious food production.*

Access to land and a strong agricultural workforce are essential for promoting food security, yet both remain out of reach for many aspiring and current producers. This strategy supports policies and programs that expand secure, affordable access to land for growing food through tools like public land leasing, zoning reform, shared use land models, and municipal support for community-based production. Another avenue is through investment in agricultural workforce development through training pipelines, mentorship programs, and succession planning to help new and emerging farmers build skills, access markets, and transition into long-term food production roles. To further

support urban and small-scale growers, the strategy calls for the creation of a clear state definition for small-plot and urban-plot food production, which can guide policy development and ensure these producers are recognized and resourced appropriately.

FOCUS AREA 2 | STRATEGY 3

Market Channel Creation: Leverage federal, state, institutional, and charitable food purchasing dollars to support farmers and regional supply chains, expand local procurement opportunities, and build long-term demand for a variety of New Jersey-grown foods.

This strategy focuses on building sustained demand for locally grown food by ensuring farmers have consistent, fair-market channels. Market channels can refer to any method of selling food including direct-to-consumer models (e.g., farmers markets, mobile markets, farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture [CSA] programs, community kitchens, agritourism), wholesale markets (e.g., government and private institutions, aggregation centers or hubs). Examples include prioritizing New Jersey-grown food in state agency procurement, expanding the use of USDA programs like the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP), WIC cash-value benefit, and WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and supporting institutions to adopt "good food purchasing" policies. Emphasis should be placed on supporting small producers and producers who have historically been excluded from institutional markets.

FOCUS AREA 2 | STRATEGY 4

Food Enterprise Investment: *Invest in community-rooted food enterprises and infrastructure to strengthen appropriate and preferred food utilization and economic opportunity.*

This strategy supports the creation and expansion of local food infrastructure that is owned, operated, or co-governed by community partners. Resources can support storage units, food transportation, logistics support, aggregation facilities, community kitchens, urban agriculture, socially responsible food hubs, processing facilities, community gardens, farm-to-institution initiatives, food lockers/selfserv kiosks, job training, and incubator programs for new food businesses. These investments not only improve local distribution efficiency but also can create jobs and foster entrepreneurship in communities that may otherwise have limited economic mobility opportunities.

For a full description of Focus Area 2, please see the New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan.

Appendix B. Examples of Eligible Projects

Examples of eligible projects advancing strategies found within Focus Area 2 of the Strategic Plan include, ***but are not limited to***:

- Community-based food access and infrastructure
  - Residents at an affordable housing complex, a community-based food access organization, and local growers request grant funds to launch a recurring SNAP/EBT-accepting farmers market located on-site at the housing complex, including support for vendor coordination, outreach, and benefit acceptance infrastructure.
  - A senior center and nonprofit food pantry partner to co-locate food distribution services at the senior center and establish a regularly scheduled shuttle service to grocery retailers and farmers markets to reduce transportation barriers for older adults.
  - A rural coalition requests funds to establish shared cold storage and a cooperative delivery system to improve aggregation, storage, and distribution of locally grown foods to nearby communities, schools, and food pantries.
  - A regional partnership of farmers, a community-based organization, and a local government requests funding to establish or expand a community-rooted food hub that provides aggregation, cold storage, light processing, and coordinated distribution of New Jersey–grown foods to schools, healthcare facilities, early care and education sites, and charitable food providers, with an emphasis on supporting small and historically excluded producers.
- Transportation, technology, and access improvements
  - A municipality and community-based organization request funding to install transit stops, shelters, or wayfinding infrastructure near farmers markets, food pantries, or social service agencies that provide WIC, SNAP, or other nutrition assistance.
  - A nonprofit–retail partnership seeks funding to support online ordering platforms, centralized pricing information, and last-mile delivery infrastructure to improve access to appropriate and preferred foods for households with limited mobility.
  - A grocery retailer requests infrastructure support to open or expand a store in a community without an existing full-service retailer, in coordination with local government and community partners.
  - An existing food hub or cooperative requests grant funds to upgrade technology and logistics infrastructure, such as inventory management systems, online ordering platforms, and shared delivery routes, to improve operational efficiency, increase participation in institutional and community-based procurement

programs, and expand access to appropriate and preferred foods across urban and rural communities.

- Agricultural workforce development and land access
  - A city government and community-based organization request funds to convert city-owned vacant lots into sites for urban food production, paired with education, workforce training, and paid apprenticeship programs in urban agriculture.
  - An agricultural cooperative or land trust requests funding to help new and aspiring farmers access farmland through lease-to-own models, shared-use agreements, or public land leasing, coupled with technical assistance and business planning support.
  - A regional partnership requests resources to develop mentorship, succession planning, and training pipelines that connect experienced producers with beginning farmers and farmworkers seeking long-term food production opportunities.
- Market channel creation and local procurement
  - A group of small and mid-sized farmers requests grant funding to create a shared food hub that aggregates, minimally processes, and distributes locally grown products to schools, hospitals, child care settings, and charitable food organizations.
  - A state agency, school district, or healthcare institution requests support to implement or expand local procurement practices that prioritize New Jersey–grown foods, including adoption of “good food purchasing” policies.
  - A community organization partners with the applicable State agency and farmers to expand participation in the WIC cash-value benefit, WIC and Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, or other USDA programs that increase purchasing power for local foods.
- Community-rooted food enterprises and utilization
  - A nonprofit and neighborhood association request funds to establish a shared-use community kitchen that supports small food businesses, value-added processing, culturally relevant food preparation, and workforce training.
  - A community development organization requests investment to pilot food lockers or self-service kiosks that enable 24/7 access to food in areas with limited retail options.
  - A cooperative or social enterprise requests funding to expand mobile markets, farm stands, or CSA distribution sites that are co-designed with community members and aligned with local food preferences.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of fundable activities. For additional guidance and examples, explore the New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan Implementation Planning Toolkit.

References

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