

Gov. Pritzker Announces \$28.8 Million In USDA Grants To Provide Free Local Food To Communities

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PEORIA - Governor JB Pritzker announced \$28.8 million in grant funding to provide free locally-produced food to vulnerable communities. The grants are being awarded to organizations in Illinois in partnership with the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS).

The Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) will allow the State of Illinois to purchase food directly from socially disadvantaged farmers at fair market value. Food will then be distributed by providers, including food banks, farming collaboratives, and other non-profits, to communities in need at no cost. This includes schools, churches, and non-profit organizations. The funds originated through two cooperative agreements with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

“Food access is fundamental to healthy and prosperous communities,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Thanks to the cooperation and support of the United States Department of Agriculture, the Illinois Eats Program is dispersing nearly \$29 million in grant funding to fifteen food organizations serving families across our state. Illinois Eats is lifting up both ends of Illinois’ food supply chain — from our farmers to our most food-insecure residents.”

In crafting its local rollout of the federally-funded program, Illinois committed to sourcing 100% of products from historically underserved farmers and ranchers.

"Communities cannot thrive when our neighbors are hungry. The economy cannot thrive when our farmers feel undervalued. The Illinois Eats Program allows us to both address food insecurity and uplift the hard work of our agriculture professionals," said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. "Connecting people with the resources they need the most is exactly what I mean when I say 'Ag Connects Us All.'"

In total, 20 grants were awarded to 15 providers, some covering multiple areas. Following is the list of grant recipients.

Northwest IL	Northern Illinois Food Bank
Northwest IL	Jo Daviess Local Foods LLC
Northwest IL	Angelic Organics Learning Center, Inc.
Northeast IL	DeKalb County Community Gardens
Northeast IL	Northern Illinois Food Bank
Northeast IL	Think Regeneration NFP (Run A Way Buckers Club Inc.)
Cook County	Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Renewable Living
Cook County	Top Box Foods
Cook County	Greater Chicago Food Depository
West Central IL	Think Regeneration NFP
West Central IL	Midwest Food Bank
West Central IL	Central IL Foodbank, Inc.
West Central IL	St Louis Area Food Bank
East Central IL	Eastern Illinois Foodbank
East Central IL	Midwest Food Bank Bloomington
East Central IL	Northeast Community Fund
Metro East St. Louis	St. Louis Area Food Bank
Metro East St. Louis	Operation Food Search
Southern IL	Tri State Food Bank
Southern IL	St Louis Area Food Bank

“By purchasing from underserved farmers at fair market value, this grant supports a community of growers who have historically struggled to establish themselves,” said Jerry Costello, IDOA Director. “We are creating new markets for their products while strengthening the food supply chain in Illinois.”

“Families across Illinois shouldn’t have to worry about where their next meal will come from or have to make difficult decisions in order to meet their basic needs,” said Dulce M. Quintero, IDHS Secretary Designate. “With this partnership, we make our vision a

reality, to ensure every single family has access to nutritious, fresh food, all locally grown by under-utilized farmers and growers. This builds on our work to create more equitable access to services in our communities.”

IDOA and IDHS partnered with the University of Illinois Extension to convene an advisory committee to develop the Notice of Funding Opportunity for IL-EATS and execute these agreements. In preparation, the University of Illinois held more than 30 listening sessions to identify key challenges and local needs.

The main gap identified was formal distribution sites with the capacity to aggregate, package, store, process, and transport food products to disinvested communities. In response, grant dollars are being issued to lead agencies to serve as community partners, bridging the gap between farmers and those in need.

Lead agencies include food banks, non-profits, and farming collectives responsible for connecting with historically socially disadvantaged growers and producers to purchase food at fair market value that will be provided at no cost to underserved communities. The program prioritizes ensuring culturally responsive fresh foods are available to food insecure communities.

“The Village of Morton is proud to be home to a division of Midwest Food Bank, and we are excited for the opportunity to support local farmers and positively impact surrounding communities through the IL-EATS Program,” said Jeff Kaufman, Mayor of Morton.

“This is a meaningful step toward ensuring equitable access to nutritious food, while supporting our local producers,” said State Senator Dave Koehler (D-Peoria). “Investments like these help develop our local food systems, and support producers and consumers throughout Illinois.”

“This funding will help to bring quality food to communities that are too often overlooked,” said Representative Jehan Gordon-Booth (D-Peoria). “We need to continue to take steps forward to eliminate food deserts, increase access to nutritious meals and support diverse growers across our state.”

Producers and non-profits interested in participating in the program can learn more at <https://extension.illinois.edu/food/illinois-equitable-access-towards-sustainable-systems-il-eats-funded-lfpa>. Eligible products include fruits, vegetables, meat proteins, eggs, dairy products, grains, and other minimally processed items. A complete list is available at https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/lfpa_allowable_foods_list.pdf.