

USDA Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grant Opportunity

The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO) for the USDA Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP) grant details **evaluation criteria (in bold)**. Below are *Prairie Food Co-op's* draft responses (in italics) to those criteria requirements for review by the Village of Lombard Economic and Community Development Committee.

Applicants meeting the following four criteria will be given higher consideration:

- 1. Experience in the area of:**
 - a. agriculture and/or innovative production for three years or more; and**
 - b. serving communities in urban areas, suburbs, or urban clusters where access to fresh foods are limited or unavailable, such as listed in the USDA ERS - Food Access Research Atlas**

Prairie Food Co-op (PFC) was founded in 2012 and formally incorporated in February of 2013. For the past eight years, PFC has worked to expand access to local foods in suburban DuPage County through community education, local farm family and business outreach/promotion, and partnerships with community organizations like Faith in Place Markets, The French Market, Chambers of Commerce, Food Pantries, Libraries, The GardenWorks Project, Farm Bureau, and more.

Since the beginnings of the Covid -19 global pandemic, Prairie Food Cooperative Grocery store has connected 30 rural and suburban food producers to suburban communities through its Virtual Farmers Market, creating a portal for suburban families to support and benefit from nearby rural food producers while directly funding farmers and small scale value added food producers operations through community supported agriculture.

The PFC storefront will be located in the heart of downtown Lombard, which is designated as a Low Food Access area by the USDA ERS - Food Access Research Atlas, with no grocer within one mile. Within that mile, approximately 28% are low-to-moderate income and 12% seniors. The store will be steps from the train station, bus stop, and bike trail. This area has not had a grocery store in 40 years, despite frequent resident requests and being featured as an economic generator in the Village of Lombard's Comprehensive Economic Development Plan.

- 2. Demonstrate competency to implement a project, provide fiscal accountability, collect data, and prepare reports and other necessary documentation;**

Prairie Food Co-op will partner with the Village of Lombard and their staff to collect, analyze, and report on any required documentation. When awarded, Prairie Food Co-op will hire a Grant Project Manager to manage the grant timeline, data collection, and reporting as required.

Our competency has been demonstrated through eight years of highly organized and sustained momentum in building our ownership base to nearly 1500 Owners, a history of monthly and annual reporting, and recognition by industry leaders.

Our Board of Directors meets monthly to review committee progress and financial reports. Our Board Treasurer is highly qualified and regularly updates fiscal information for board approval. On an annual basis, PFC transparently reports financial and project information to all Owners at an in-person open meeting that is recorded and posted online.

Our Board has been recognized and awarded for our organizational strength, skilled leadership, and positive impact by the Food Co-op Initiative, a leading organization in the cooperative grocery industry, on multiple occasions.

- *2015 - \$10,000 Seed Grant*
- *2017 - Citizenship Award for being a resource mentor to other co-ops*
- *2020 - Innovation Award for creating an Owner Management System that can be used by other co-ops on any platform*
- *2021 - \$2,000 Bill Gessner Grant for exemplary application of the FCI Development Model*

3. Demonstrate a willingness to share information with researchers, evaluators, practitioners, and other interested parties, including a plan for dissemination of results;

Prairie Food Co-op demonstrates a willingness to share information with interested parties by openly sharing progress and financial reports at our yearly Owners meeting. The Annual Owners Meeting is open to all of our Owners, funders, collaborating organizations, and other stakeholders. All Owners are invited to attend our monthly board meetings.

Additionally, Prairie Food Co-op is a participating member of the National Co-op Grocers Association, a business services cooperative for retail food co-ops located throughout the United States. The National Food Co-op represents 147 retail food co-ops operating over 200 different stores in 38 states. National Co-op grocers began collecting data in 2012 measuring the social, environmental and economic impacts of food co-ops out of commitment to the cooperative business model which Prairie Food Co-op embodies.

4. Collaborate with one or more partner organizations working in the project target area(s).

The Village of Lombard will be partnering with Prairie Food Co-op, which is sufficient to fulfill the requirements of the UIAP Grant. We will also request a letter of support from Holladay Properties to show our strong partnership with our leaseholder.

In addition, Prairie Food Co-op has connections with over 300 local farmers and food producers that supply their goods to the two existing co-ops in Cook County. We are also proud to have over 65 local business owners as Prairie Food Co-op Owners, which we list on our website.

Merit/Technical Criteria

The weights and evaluation criteria below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this NFO:

1. Consistency with the UAIP's purpose and priorities presented herein (20%);

The purpose of IP is to accelerate existing and emerging models of urban, indoor, and other agricultural practices that serve multiple farmers or gardeners. IPs should improve access to local food in the target area(s). No single IP award will exceed \$100,000 in any single year or \$300,000 over three years.

Prairie Food Co-op will ensure access to healthy and nutritious food in our suburban community by creating a new year round brick and mortar location, creating streams of income for over 300 local urban, suburban and adjacent rural farmers and producers.

The trade area to be served by the Prairie Food Co-op would extend north to North Avenue/State Route 64, east to Robert Kingery Highway/State Route 83, and south to the I-88 corridor in suburban Chicago located in Lombard Illinois. In addition, the trade area extends westward (just across I-355) to include eastern Glen Ellyn.

Given the patterns of accessibility that exist within the market area, it is estimated that about 77.5% of the proposed co-op's sales will emanate from this trade area. The remaining 22.5% of the proposed co-op's volume will come from beyond the trade area, as well as from travelers, tourists, and visitors to the market from nearby Villa Park, Elmhurst, Addison and Wheaton, Illinois. Within the trade area, there reside an estimated 75,700 persons. This trade area population is projected to remain relatively stable throughout the forecast period, and doesn't include additional destination shoppers who will be arriving from all over DuPage County.

Operating Food Co-operatives are scarce in the Chicagoland region, with just two existing co-ops in Cook County. However, Prairie Food Co-op is among a cohort of five cooperatives on schedule to open in the next one to three years. We will be the first and only cooperative in DuPage County.

2. **Quality of the plan presented to effectively support the development of urban agriculture and innovative production activities such as gardens and farms, rooftop farms, urban agroforest, food forests, orchards, outdoor vertical production, green walls, indoor farms, greenhouses, high-tech vertical technology farms, and hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic farm facilities within the targeted area(s), including a plan for ensuring fiscal accountability (20%);**

- ***Our 1450+ Owners are committed to our success**, investing \$200 in a vision for a better grocer, rooting for us since 2012, and ready to do what it takes to finally open our doors!*
- ***Our Board is recognized and awarded** with a prestigious \$10K grant in 2015 for our organizational strength, skilled leadership, and positive community impact.*
- *Our development model from the Food Co-op Initiative has an **89% success rate** (vs a 30% success rate for small businesses).*
- ***Our market study projects a solid sales forecast** for a sustainable foods cooperative that suits our community and cultural trends.*
- ***Our robust pro forma** reflects market projections, local estimates, and data from Combined Cooperative Financial Statements (CoCoFiSt), a vast historical repository of grocery cooperative financial performance.*
- ***Our location** is highly visible in the heart of downtown Lombard and is pedestrian, biker, and commuter-friendly with ample parking.*
- *With **no other grocery stores within a mile**, Prairie Food Co-op will be a vital hub for the 15k residents, 2.5k daytime workers, and 1.5k daily commuters that will shop our store.*
- *As the **first and only co-op in DuPage County**, we will draw curious values-driven shoppers from surrounding communities.*

3. **Potential for positive impact in targeted urban and suburban areas where limited access to healthy affordable food is an issue as listed in the USDA Food Access Research Atlas (20%);**

- *Expand **access to safe, healthy, and sustainable foods** that are transparently labeled, ethically sourced, and accessible to all*
- *Support **200-300+ local farmers** & food producers*
- *Encourage **sustainable practices** to reduce energy consumption, pollution, contamination and our carbon footprint*
- *Create **35-50 local jobs** that pay fair wages with benefits*
- ***Capture \$5M** that would otherwise leave our county or state*
- ***Generate \$8M** in local economic activity annually*

Once open, Prairie Food Co-op will establish comprehensive food accessibility programs and expand its education and outreach effort to offer:

- *An average of **97 Educational Workshops each year** about local foods, nutrition, food preparation, meal planning, using bulk foods to keep costs low, health and wellness, lifestyle workshops, and more*
- *SNAP Benefits and other food accessibility programs*
- *Partnerships with our local food pantry to stock their shelves with healthy foods and reduce food waste*
- *"Round up at the Register" and other fundraising opportunities to support local organizations as determined by our Ownership*

4. Internal and external organizational support for execution of the project, including experience and expertise of key personnel in agriculture and innovative production (20%);

Development of Prairie Food Co-op is overseen by an elected Board of Director with several volunteer teams. The Board and planning team has, collectively, many decades of experience in the food industry. Our team includes the former front end manager of Sugar Beet Food Co-op in Oak Park, the current General Managers of the two local food co-ops, business owners, real estate professionals, marketing professionals, attorneys, accountants, IT experts, designers, and writers. Throughout the planning process, the co-op Board has utilized the vast expertise of consultants representing decades of co-op operations, marketing, management, store design, and financial forecasting experience.

5. Quality of the plan for information sharing and creating partnerships with public or private, nonprofit or for-profit entities, including links with academic institutions (including minority-serving colleges and universities), and/or other appropriate professionals, community-based organizations, and local government entities to achieve project objectives and outcomes (10%); and

Prairie Food Co-op Owners include 65 area small business owners, 15 Elected Officials in the Illinois House of Representatives, DuPage County Board, DuPage Forest Preserve, Lombard Village & Library Boards, and area school boards, members at 9 area churches, staff at local food pantries and Northern IL Food Bank, and volunteers at many nonprofits dedicated to food insecurity, environmental advocacy, health, education, and cultivating community.

6. Projects with budgets not including the purchase of special-purpose equipment, vehicles, land, and building space during the length of the grant (10%).

Cost	Description		Date
		1) Grant Project Manager Hire	Oct 2021
\$10,000	Grant Project Management	Hire part-time consultant to manage grant project timeline, data collection, and reporting during the grant period	
		2) Building Pre-Construction	Jan 2022
\$30,000	Pre-Construction	Pre-construction Design (Architecture, Electrical, Mechanicals, Plumbing, Structural)	
\$20,000	Construction Manager	Construction Manager to consult on pre-construction design process to align with costs and practice	
		3) General Manager Hire	Mar 2022
\$2,000	Training	Board training to transition from a working board to Governance. Includes ends policy development.	
\$3,000	Hiring Prep	Consulting for Hiring GM including access to GM database	
\$70,000	GM Salary	1 Year's General Manager Salary and Benefits	
\$15,000	GM Mentor	A highly qualified GM mentor for 6-month transition period and to consult on pre-construction details	
		4) Interior Construction	Jun 2022
-		Prairie Food Co-op has raised \$1,000,000 from it's Owners to cover the costs of interior construction	
		5) Startup Staffing and Promotion	Nov 2022
\$23,000		Promotion prior to store opening for Grand Opening	
\$94,000		One month of labor prior to store opening	
		6) Store Open	Jan 2023
\$267,000	Total Project Budget		