

JOHN A. HILLENBRAND FOUNDATION, INC.

WILLIAM A. HILLENBRAND II  
PRESIDENT  
300 WINDING WAY, SUITE 200  
BATESVILLE, IN 47006

APPLICANT INFORMATION

ORGANIZATION Food and Growers Association

PROJECT To leverage the base established by the FGA's creation of Hoosier Harvest Market- Southeast to stimulate the development of robust distribution channels for local and regional farm products, increase the number of farms capable of serving local wholesale markets, and improve community resilience and health through increased consumption of fresh, local food. The driver of this project will be the distribution of Harvest Boxes delivered weekly for 12 weeks to a total of 60 participants over two years. Participants who are both food secure and have special dietary needs related to health conditions will be identified by dieticians at Margaret Mary Health. The program will develop economic multipliers that will support local businesses and help farmers and ranchers operate at increased scale.

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TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET (Harvest Box and Local Food Development Project) \$25,030

REQUESTED AMOUNT (\$20,000) \$10,000 each year for two years

\$10,000 will pay for 30 participants and supporting activities each year.

HAVE YOU RECEIVED PREVIOUS JOHN A. HILLENBRAND FOUNDATION GRANTS? No

If yes please give date and amount \_\_\_\_\_

Project's Mission and Purpose - Briefly describe your organization and/or project.

The Food and Growers Association is an established, award-winning 501c3 organization that has been serving southeast Indiana farmers and consumers since 2003 through educational seminars and programs, monthly community gatherings, and a vibrant website. ([www.foodandgrowers.com](http://www.foodandgrowers.com)). Much of the success of the FGA has come from a dedicated team of volunteers combined with financial support from Margaret Mary Health, Purdue Extension and Interact for Health in Cincinnati.

In 2019, the FGA was selected as one of 4 organizations in Indiana to receive funding from a three-year United States Department of Agriculture Local Food Promotion Program grant to hire a Value Chain Coordinator (VCC). This paid position is focused on expanding access to local and regional wholesale markets (restaurants, grocery stores, schools, and healthcare organizations) for farmers in Southeast Indiana.

Due to the pandemic and the resulting disruption in most institutional food service operations, the USDA allowed flexibility in use of this funding and staffing for organizations to respond most appropriately. The FGA has long recognized the need for food distribution channels that provide producers with better access to local and regional markets, but did not have the manpower and resources to take on such a large project singlehandedly. However, in the spring of 2020 the FGA pivoted the efforts of our VCC and seized the opportunity to tackle challenges facing regional and national food systems by collaborating with Hoosier Harvest Market, a long-standing farmer-owned local food distributor from Greenfield Indiana to create "HHM- Southeast" and finally provide southeast Indiana with access to a year-round "food hub." Think of this as an online farmers market. Retail and wholesale customers can go online to see what products are available from all of the farmer-members, place an order, and either pick up their food at a convenient location or have it delivered. Producers harvest to order and drop their products off at an aggregation site in Batesville, currently a space rented from Dottie's Bulk Food.

In its first four months of operation, HHM-Southeast has generated \$9,000 in increased revenue for participating farmers in our region as well as another \$5,000 for producers who were already members. Due to limited resources and rapid implementation, the hub has operated in a lean manner at a relatively small scale. In order to get the food hub on firm financial footing, we plan to continue to work with local organizations offering grant funding for our projects while building distribution channels and a network of wholesale-ready farmers to profitably serve restaurants, institutions, and other wholesale markets in southeast Indiana and surrounding regions. In its relatively short life so far, the food hub has implemented several successful programs in partnership with local organizations and has established a solid foundation for a food distribution system oriented towards local producers and consumers. Often the biggest challenge facing food hubs and other small to mid-scale food distributors is the low margins associated with this industry. To be mindful of this challenge HHM-Southeast has strived to maximize the use of existing resources within respective organizations, but it will still likely take somewhat longer

than the average business to operate profitably. Two part-time staff members were recently hired to work in coordination with our VCC to promote the food hub, improve operational efficiencies, and increase capacity.

In one program, HHM–Southeast partnered with Margaret Mary Health and their Cooking Matters program to provide a weekly food box to those participating in an online cooking class ([www.cookingmatters.org](http://www.cookingmatters.org)). ClearPoint Federal Bank & Trust was an early supporter and contributed additional funds for meal boxes to go to families in need. A total of 20 boxes were delivered each week from June through September. That funding has been fully utilized and helped all participating organizations appreciate the value of the program while also recognizing the associated challenges. This program generated over \$5,000 in additional revenue for Indiana farms and helped increase the efficiency of the HHM-Southeast food hub operations while providing relief to food insecure households.

Building on successes and learning from the challenges present by this summer’s program, the FGA would now like to partner with Margaret Mary Health in offering “Harvest Boxes” to food insecure patients who visit the dietitians in nutrition classes, individual counseling, and the oncology center and are advised to adopt special diets. Most of these patients would like to eat healthier and improve their health, but they often do not have the resources or knowledge to make the necessary changes. As educators, dietitians know from experience that simply providing information about healthy eating to an individual during one or two visits with a dietitian is not enough. Harvest Boxes provide an opportunity to take this advice a step further through sharing food, cooking, educating and developing a relationship via a weekly pickup site, all activities that can help make lasting and substantive differences in these patients’ quality of life and health outcomes. By incorporating these supporting activities and facilitating a positive patient experience, the Harvest Box program will simultaneously provide immediate relief and set patients on a long-term path toward success.

These Harvest Boxes will include \$20 worth of seasonally available, locally produced foods (produce, meat, milk, eggs), healthy recipes featuring these items, gardening tips, and even garden plants during the summer months. All products included will be oriented towards providing individuals with the tools they need to be successful in making challenging but significant changes in their diets. This \$20 box will provide benefits beyond its market value because it will provide immediate relief equal to its dollar value as well as an economic multiplier impact in terms of returns to local producers (\$16/box), returns to the HHM-Southeast food hub (\$4/box), and any portion of those returns that are further invested in the local economy. By providing a consistent demand, this will help farmers develop the knowledge and systems necessary to consistently supply wholesale markets, in turn contributing to the profitability of the HHM-Southeast.

The value Harvest Boxes will provide to our community extends far beyond the important work of helping the individual participants improve their diets. It will increase revenues for our local farmers who participate in HHM-Southeast, facilitating increased scale and efficiency of operations. We feel strongly at the FGA that one of the best ways

to support local farmers is to purchase their products and put money in their pockets, allowing them to re-invest that revenue in the way that will most benefit their operation while stewarding their land. By simultaneously increasing our farmers' ability to access local or regional markets and generating revenue to help fund improvements, this program may be able to substantially improve farm profitability, expand consumer access to local food, and develop a more resilient regional food system.

This program will also increase opportunities for other local businesses and organizations. Dottie's Bulk Food will have increased sales opportunities as customers and farmers come to pick up and drop off orders and convenient access to products from local producers. Batesville's new shared-use commercial kitchen, The Galley, offers an ideal setting for the FGA and HHM- Southeast to conduct community cooking classes to support the Harvest Box program as well as a venue to work with farmers and entrepreneurs to develop value-added products made with locally-sourced ingredients. Restaurants, grocery stores, schools, hospitals, and other businesses serving food will have more convenient and consistent access to high-quality farm products available in our region.

What issues does your organization address? Of what importance are these issues to the community?

Strengthening our local food system through a hospital-administered Harvest Box program will help lay the groundwork for addressing numerous important issues facing our community. By sourcing ingredients for these boxes from local producers through HHM-Southeast, this program ensures that funding goes directly into our regional economy, the quality and freshness of the ingredients is extremely high, and the development of market channels for local food is accelerated. The result is healthy food in the hands of those who need it, dollars in local farmers' pockets, and greater access to local food throughout our community. The issues addressed range widely and include: public health, economic vitality, rural livelihoods, community resilience, food insecurity, and environmental sustainability.

#### Public Health:

- Patients at risk for heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers benefit from diets including more fresh foods (Goddu et al., 2015; Lindsay et al., 2013).
- Community access to fresh, local foods is correlated with more positive overall health outcomes (Berning, 2012).
- Lower incomes and food insecurity are correlated with insufficient intake of fresh fruits and vegetables. Recent studies indicate that this may have more to do with education and culture rather than the presence of grocery stores (Allcott et al. 2019), suggesting that exposing low-income families to these products in conjunction with education may help address this problem. There

is evidence that children who are exposed to fresh fruits and vegetables are more likely to continue to consume them later in life (Marco et al., 2014).

- The most recent MMH Community Health Needs Assessment for Franklin and Ripley counties identified poor nutrition, cancer, and heart disease as key areas of opportunity for improving community health. Heart disease and cancer are both leading causes of death, while the need to increase fresh produce consumption and tackle obesity were specifically mentioned (PRC Inc, 2019). Harvest Boxes have the potential to help patients who are experiencing or at risk for these conditions.

#### Economic Vitality:

- Dollars spent at “food hubs” have been shown to often have multiplier effects on local economies ranging as farmers and food hubs often spend revenue generated within the local economy (Jablonski & Schmit, 2016).
- Because Hoosier Harvest Market is a producer-owned cooperative, margins are kept as low as possible to maximize returns to the farmer. Farmers retain between 75 and 80% of sales revenue generated through the hub.

#### Rural livelihoods

- As the average age of the Indiana farmer goes up and commodity prices are increasingly uncertain, a diversity of enterprises and income streams will be increasingly important to the livelihoods of our rural communities. A stronger local distribution network and increased access to markets will help farmers stay ahead of the curve by testing new enterprises, increasing their portion of the consumer food dollar, and maximizing their resource-base (Bauman et al., 2018; Dumont et al., 2017).

#### Community Resilience:

- As demonstrated by food shortages during the pandemic, the national food system is highly dependent on relatively few national and international processors, distributors, and other intermediaries. Communities with more developed local and regional food systems were often less impacted by these shortages (Bene, 2020).
- The experience of these food shortages in our area showed that we have a number of key pieces of community food resilience in place in terms of producers, food service professionals, and charitable food networks, but that we could be highly resilient with better access to regionally scale-appropriate processing, storage, and distribution of fresh produce, staple foods, and livestock. The continued success of HHM-Southeast will help fill some of these gaps.

#### Food Insecurity:

- Harvest Boxes will provide a dignified way for patients struggling with food insecurity to address their health through dietary changes. Assigning these

boxes in a clinical setting helps families avoid having to make difficult choices between personal health and avoiding hunger.

- A more vibrant local food system can help combat food insecurity by increasing the number of outlets to purchase healthy food and generating competitive market prices for quality, seasonal products.
- As community members with lower incomes continue to be affected by the pandemic their ability to access and afford healthy and fresh foods has been negatively impacted (Bene, 2020).

#### Environmental Sustainability:

- Locally and regionally oriented food systems have the potential to have positive environmental impacts by reducing the distance food travels, minimizing waste with fresher products, facilitating more efficient waste management and nutrient cycles, and allowing consumer demand to more directly impact farm practices through increased transparency.

Please briefly describe your strategy and plan of action for accomplishing this project.

MMH dietitians will use a simple intake question that is already included in their process to identify food insecure/low income patients who would benefit from adopting a healthier lifestyle through access to wholesome food, continued education, and connections with educators. Patients will sign up for a 12 week program which will include one Harvest Box (valued at \$20) per week and two on-site or virtual cooking classes (valued at \$20 each). Total cost of the program per person will be \$290.

Participants will be asked to contribute \$1 - \$5 per week for the Harvest Box depending on how much they can afford each week. MMH dietitian's role will be to track the participants, help develop educational materials for each week's box, and communicate with HHM- Southeast staff regarding the number of boxes needed per week. The role of HHM-Southeast will be to determine the contents of box each week and coordinate with producers for aggregation of the food.

FGA Value Chain Coordinator will work in conjunction with HHM- Southeast staff to coordinate farmer participation, develop wholesale readiness in terms of production practices and food safety, coordinate crop planning, and promote the program.

What are the benchmarks of your success?

1. The first benchmark will be level of participation in the program. Our goal is for 75% or more of the participants to complete the full 12 week program. One of the keys to successful behavior change is frequency of contact with a health professional. The availability of a community program that includes food and cooking classes has been demonstrated to increase the number of contacts. When people are participating frequently it indicates they are learning and engaged.
2. Revenue generated by local farmers and ranchers through participation in the program. Producers should receive the level of revenue outlined in the budget.
3. Patient testimonials of new foods and recipes that their families are using. We aim to get input from at least 25% of patients regarding how they utilized the food and/or recipes.
4. Producer Testimonials regarding impact(s) on their operation and profitability. Our goal is to receive input from at least 75% of participating producers.

List your current fund raising efforts.

We have been limited this year in our ability to conduct our traditional fundraising events due to the pandemic. Typically we would have raised funds during our 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, our first farm to table harvest dinner, and our first Great Race event. We have shifted focus for this year toward growing our membership and pursuing grants that are relevant to our work promoting local food while educating producers and consumers. Some of the grants and volunteer commitments we have received this year include:

Rising Sun Regional Foundation Grant to develop HHM-Southeast food hub by helping fund walk-in refrigeration in The Galley shared used kitchen- \$5,000

ClearPoint funding to provide meal boxes to food insecure families- \$1,400

MMH Cooking Matters funds to provide meal boxes for participants and food insecure families and individuals- \$4,049.60

Global Atlantic in-kind volunteers and supply funding-\$500 plus 50 volunteer hours

Please list all of your officers and directors.

Officers:

Pam Rieke - president  
Kris Reynolds - Vice President  
Olivia Fledderman - secretary  
Deanna Hookway - treasurer

Board Members:

Missy Watkins  
Jerilyn Lowery  
Cindy Weisenbach

HHM - SE steering team and staff:

Staff:

Oak Hawk - Value chain Coordinator  
Pam Rieke - Aggregation Site Coordinator  
Libby Werner - Assistant Value Chain Coordinator

Steering team (volunteers)

Kathy Cooley  
Jayme Beneker  
Patty Lang- Fisher  
Kris Reynolds  
Missy Watkins  
Deanna Hookway



Please include a copy of your most recent budget.

Harvest Box Program Budget	<b>\$25,030</b>
Portion requested from grant	<b>\$20,000</b>
Harvest Boxes- 30 participants for 12 weeks at \$290/person	<b>\$17,400</b>
720 boxes	<b>\$14,400</b>

\$20/box

Of each box:

\$16 returns to producers (cost of product)

**\$11, 520 total producer revenue**

If 4 producers participate- each will earn \$2880 in revenue.

If 3 producers participate- each will earn \$3840 in revenue.

If 2 producers participate- each will earn \$5760 in revenue.

\$4 goes to HHM (cost of distribution)

**\$2,880 food hub revenue**

\$20 value of food goes into community, potentially leaving more money available for other spending

-Two \$25 cooking classes per participant **\$3000**

Kitchen Space Rental (The Galley or other local business)- \$1400

Food, supplies, and staff to conduct class- \$1600

Additional funding for administration, overhead, farmer supplies (wholesale packaging, transportation), training, crop planning, product development. **\$2,600**

Possible revenue (optional contribution):

**\$720-\$3600**

Portion provide by FGA:

125 hours of VCC work (\$22/hr) to support, train, and recruit farmers, coordinate between HHM-Southeast and MMH, contact buyers, promote harvest box program, develop and implement strategy, and coordinate logistics. **\$2,750**

Portion from FLFC Farm to School Grant-

120 hours for farmer technical assistance regarding food safety and wholesale readiness (\$19/hr) **\$2,280**