



**The GardenWorks Project**  
**2100 Manchester Road, #970**  
**Wheaton, IL 60187**  
**EIN: 46-3697674**

## **DuPage County CS Funding Request 2023**

### **Description of Need**

Based on IMPACT DuPage's County Health Assessment, 1 in 8 individuals do not have reliable access to affordable, nutritious food. While emergency food assistance can increase access to these items, their choices are limited and many of the fresher items are near the end of their shelf life. With access to land, community engagement, and regional advocacy towards food sovereignty, GardenWorks' community-based food growing model has met a critical gap that traditional food pantries have not addressed. Our work advocating for food growing and local agriculture has increased access to fresh produce in under-resourced communities and introduced valuable educational resources that directly improve health equity. With the goal of improving the supply, access, and equity of fresh produce throughout the county's emergency food assistance agencies, The GardenWorks Project is well positioned as a forward-thinking organization that is leading change towards long-term sustainability through collaboration, partnership, and resource development.

The recent pandemic revealed an inequitable and unsustainable food supply chain as the charitable food assistance network faced sourcing challenges as retailers and partners had less to donate. As a result of the many pandemic-related challenges, as well as the expected near-term challenges to come due to SNAP benefit decreases in March 2023, GardenWorks surveyed its partners and clients to identify the unique challenges of the region, and determine solutions within our programmatic scope of work. First, the survey discovered that lack of fixed assets, such as refrigerated vehicles and the challenges of volunteer burnout post-pandemic created more disadvantages of receiving nutrient dense food donations. In addition, inflation rates have impacted the cost of food, and several sites indicated that their costs for produce to supplement their donations have increased due to these short-term economic burdens. Finally, the survey also indicated that culturally palatable foods were often unavailable from donations.



## Organization Description

The mission of The GardenWorks Project is to promote organic suburban agriculture to improve the well-being of our community, the environment, and those facing food insecurity. We empower, educate, and support all food growers in their efforts to nourish their families and neighbors in need.

In 2012, our founder began our Home Gardening Program through a partnership with the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry to support families reliant on food pantry assistance. That year, four families facing food insecurity received home vegetable gardens for the purposes of providing a nutritional supplement for themselves during the growing months. After a positive response from the community, the organization was designated a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in July 2014. In our 12th year, The GardenWorks Project continues to utilize a volunteer-based model to educate the entire community about the importance of healthy eating and sustainability, as well as a partnership-based focus to collaborate and work in tandem with our 50+ food pantries and social service agencies to promote health and wellness and fight hunger. Since 2012, we have provided gardens to over 2600 individuals in western Chicagoland. In addition, GardenWorks has supported the establishment of 26 community gardens within the western Chicagoland region, dedicated to nourishing those facing food insecurity.

The GardenWorks Project values making sustainable and significant change by participating in groups such as The DuPage Community Hunger Network, COD's Horticulture Advisory Committee, and Giving DuPage, along with landowners, farmers and food growers, and local food system vendors to encourage the supply and accessibility of fresh produce to all DuPage County residents. We also encourage partnerships between community health leaders and local community groups to engage further in this work of nourishing our neighbors in need. We continue to respond to the needs of the community and clients to provide a more holistic approach to promoting nutrition and healthy eating. Most recently, GardenWorks began a partnership with DuPage County Fair and Event Center to begin growing a demonstration garden space to promote food growing and organic suburban agriculture as a sustainable and viable solution towards food security within the region. In addition, GardenWorks' recent licensing agreement (since February 2022) with Fresh Food Connect ([freshfoodconnect.org](http://freshfoodconnect.org)), provides a mobile app to communicate with growers, donors, and couriers within the region to connect more fresh produce with pantries that need it.



most. The most recent partnerships aim to expand its reach by supporting all home growers as active participants in the local food economy, and the organization hopes to empower every neighbor to support each other through the simple act of sharing harvests together.

### **Purpose of funding**

The GardenWorks Project requests \$14,000 in calendar 2023 to support the following objectives: 1) identify food deserts and under-resourced emergency food assistance sites within DuPage County; 2) determine potential garden sites through surveys, committee/taskforce development, and agency-based collaboration; 3) build new partnerships within targeted communities to provide technical assistance and build collaborative process to increase the availability, access, and supply of fresh food grown for emergency food assistance locations. All targeted planning, community surveying, and programmatic marketing will be completed in calendar 2023, and any future requests will support the Community Gardening Support Program initiative, which will fund the installation, technical assistance, and management of large food growing community gardens within identified food deserts to increase the total supply of nutrient dense, culturally relevant foods to emergency food assistance agency sites.

### **Program Objectives**

The GardenWorks Project Produce for Pantries Program (“PFP Program”) will build on the current assets available within the GardenWorks network and the greater community to 1) improve food resilience within the western Chicagoland region through the future installation of community gardens that will serve as educational sites, as well as a source of food production and processing; and 2) improve food access and equity through a stream-lined communications tools and resources that will more effectively connect food growers and divert food waste towards emergency food assistance agencies.

During the calendar year, the following objectives will be considered:

1. Determine under-resourced communities facing food insecurity. This may include geographic municipalities, food desert/food swamp neighborhoods, concentrated under-resourced populations served, etc.
2. Build a comprehensive taskforce of agencies to survey, determine resource allocations, and build consensus on targeted communities;



3. Determine next steps for food growing gardens within targeted communities, including securing land, MOU's, and any other necessary leasing agreements;
4. Promote Fresh Food Connect and determine operational processes to divert food waste and connect local home growers with food donation efforts.

The program will commence in 2024 with the installation of food growing gardens, plants, and seeds within targeted communities within the region. The community gardens will be supported with resources for a total of two years. All community gardens beyond the first two years will be connected to the educational resources available through The GardenWorks Project as well as access to trainings available through Fresh Food Connect.

### **Population Served**

The GardenWorks Project has identified four target municipalities within the county: Addison, Glendale Heights, Hanover Park, and Willowbrook. However, the re-establishment of a Food Security Council within DuPage County will provide more context for stakeholders to dialogue and identify under-represented regions/neighborhoods/populations. A taskforce of experts, community members and clients will gather for a minimum of four meetings to determine a prioritization of locations under-represented and in need of supplemental nutrition resources.

### **Project Timeline and Budget (attached)**

#### **2023**

7/2023-12/2023	Program staff support
9/2023-11/2023	Program marketing support
6/2023-7/2023	Identify task force members and prepare event schedule
8/2023-11/2023	Monthly task force meetings, surveying, and research
11/2023-12/2023	Identify sites #1-#4



2024

2/2024	Sites #1 and #2 - Community Gardens Identified
5/2024	Full Installation of Community Gardens (Sites #1 and #2)
8/2024	Fall garden installation of community gardens (Sites #1 and #2)
Quarterly	Task force meetings within identified community locations
Monthly	Marketing for PFP “Grow a Row” program, recruitment of home gardeners within region
Bi-monthly	Training, surveying, resource development and technical support
11/2024	Identify sites #3-#4

Based on the task force findings, two of the four locations will be identified as recipients of the 2024 Produce for Pantries Program. In the first year, the two locations will be partnered with a community garden project, installed and managed by The GardenWorks Project, to support the production of food resources for food pantry distribution. This community garden will aim to be self-sufficient by year 3, through leadership and volunteer development as well as technical assistance to move towards sustainability. In addition, the garden site will be an educational site with various events throughout the year to empower home gardeners to “grow a row” to increase available supply of fresh produce for distribution. These home gardeners will receive additional resources and free technical assistance when connected to the Fresh Food Connect app. All impact numbers will be monitored and managed through the app, as well as participation numbers throughout the growing season at the community garden site.



2025

1/2025	Impact Evaluations received by participating communities
2/2025	Sites #3 and #4 - Community Gardens Identified
5/2025	Garden Refresh of Community Gardens Sites #1 and #2
5/2025	Full installation provided to Sites #3 and #4
8/2025	Fall garden installation of community gardens (Sites #1, #2, #3, and #4)
Quarterly	Task force meetings within identified community locations
Bi-monthly	Training, surveying, resource development and technical support
Ongoing	Marketing for PFP "Grow a Row" program, recruitment of home gardeners within region
Ongoing	Program support for Year 1 and Year 2 community gardens

In the second year of installation, two additional sites will be identified, and Year 1 programming will commence for location #3 and #4. Site #1 and #2 will begin its second year of operations, and capacity building will be a key component to its program development. Impact numbers will look at the increase of harvest, production, and distribution as compared to year 1, as well as working more closely with emergency food assistance agencies and food insecure clients to determine culturally relevant foods. In this calendar year, locations #1 and #2 will receive additional technical and resource support to move towards self-sufficiency, and a leadership team of community growers will be established to build on improving best practices, operational efficiencies, and communication between collaborative agencies. Support for all four sites will be managed by The GardenWorks Project staff and volunteers.





2026

1/2026	Impact Evaluations received by participating communities
5/2026	Garden refreshes provided to Sites #1, #2, #3, and #4
8/2026	Fall garden installation of community gardens (Sites #1, #2, #3, and #4)
Quarterly	Task force meetings within identified community locations
Ongoing	Program support for Year 1 and Year 2 community gardens
Ongoing	Marketing for PFP “Grow a Row” program, recruitment of home gardeners within region
Bi-monthly	Training, surveying, resource development and technical support

In its third year, sites #1 and #2 will begin its long-term sustainability plan to maintain current capacity while reaching self-sufficiency. Support for these efforts will include grant opportunity identification, technical support, and ongoing resource development for key agencies involved within the community. Site #3 and #4 will begin its second year of operations, and capacity building will be a key component to its program development. Impact numbers will look at the increase of harvest, production, and distribution as compared to year 1, as well as working more closely with emergency food assistance agencies and food insecure clients to determine culturally relevant foods. Support for all four sites will be managed by The GardenWorks Project staff and volunteers.



2027

1/2027	Impact Evaluations received by participating communities
5/2027	Garden refreshes provided to Sites #3 and #4
8/2027	Fall garden installation of community gardens (Sites #3 and #4)
Quarterly	Task force meetings within identified community locations
Ongoing	Program support for Year 1 and Year 2 community gardens
Ongoing	Marketing for PFP “Grow a Row” program, recruitment of home gardeners within region
Bi-monthly	Training, surveying, resource development and technical support, particularly for long-term sustainability and leadership development

In its third year, sites #3 and #4 will begin its long-term sustainability plan to maintain current capacity while reaching self-sufficiency. Support for these efforts will include grant opportunity identification, technical support, and ongoing resource development for key agencies involved within the community. Ongoing support will be provided to the communities of site #1 and #2 as long-term volunteers are empowered to grow produce and support ongoing production within home gardens, as well as developing technical expertise on-site for the installation of future gardens within the region to help support growing efforts within current capacity. Volunteers will utilize networks and ongoing training for new volunteers and new sites will be available by GardenWorks program staff.