



RICARDO SAMANIEGO
El Paso County Judge

December 12, 2022

Beth Racine, Dr, PH, RD, Director
Texas A&M AgriLife Research Center
1380 A&M Circle Drive
El Paso, Texas 79927

Dear Dr. Racine:

El Paso County is proud to offer our support for Texas A&M AgriLife in your proposal submission for the 2022 USDA Regional Food Business Centers grant opportunity to develop a Southwest Regional Food Business Center (SFRBC). El Paso County shares Texas A&M AgriLife's desire to empower small and mid-sized farm and food producers in our region through the provision of technical assistance training, coordination, and capacity building. Our Economic Development Department, Heritage Tourism Division works closely with entrepreneurs and producers to support increase in production and distribution to address public health issues related to food insecurity, showcasing the culturally rich, nutritious foods and landscapes available in our unique Chihuahuan Desert. In 2018 the County adopted the Healthy Food Financing Initiative to offer grants and loans to businesses and non-profit organizations with the goal of supporting the rehabilitation and expansion of food retail infrastructure in El Paso County to provide more healthy food options for underserved residents. This economic development tool supports small, locally owned businesses.

The County will strive to support the SRFBC by sharing space for workforce development and training as well as connecting you with local businesses that can benefit from Business Builder awards. The County is set to expand upon several demonstration rain-garden sites used as both outdoor recreational and educational sites for area youth and entrepreneurs engaged in beautification, water conservation, and food production. These sites allow the City of San Elizario and County Parks and Public Works staff to engage the community in backyard growing techniques and public art, conservation projects. They also provide space for workforce development and training, processing, and food safety education.

This funding would enable partners engaged in food system work to access scarce resources to replicate successful models, while providing technical assistance and business development. Further, this opportunity would enable small businesses and growers access to the equipment and infrastructure needed to successfully produce and distribute their products, thereby strengthening the regional, binational food system. Please feel free to contact us if there is any additional information or clarification we can provide.

Sincerely,

Ricardo Samaniego
El Paso County Judge