

# Fresco y Sano: Reducing Food Insecurity in Lawrence, MA

A Proposal Seeking \$131,000 from the FSIG to Establish a Plant-Based Mobile Food Pantry in Lawrence, MA



Submitted by Abby Wing on behalf of Fresco y Sano

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Dear Ms. Theoharides,

Fresco y Sano is pleased to present this proposal to the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs for your consideration. This proposal asks for \$131,000 from the FSIG (Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program) over a three month period to fund the creation of a plant-based mobile food pantry in Lawrence, MA.

The purpose of this proposal is to discuss the benefits of funding a plant-based mobile food pantry. Currently, in Lawrence, MA, many residents live in food deserts, and consequently lack access to healthy foods. According to a growing body of research, plant-based diets confer many health benefits, from improved cardiovascular health to a reduced risk of all-cause mortality. Therefore, Fresco y Sano seeks to reduce food insecurity in Lawrence by providing clients with healthy, plant-based foods.

Fresco y Sano shares the FSIG's mission of reducing food insecurity in the Commonwealth by providing families and individuals with access to locally grown food. To fulfill this mission, Fresco y Sano will partner with Gaining Ground, a local organic farm, to deliver produce to clients living in food deserts. Fresco y Sano recognizes the relationship between food insecurity and racial health disparities, and is committed to providing healthy, plant-based foods to Lawrence's Hispanic or Latino community.

With funding from the FSIG, Fresco y Sano will establish the infrastructure necessary to become self-sustaining. Fresco y Sano welcomes the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs to take part in this exciting opportunity.

If you have any further questions about the proposed program, do not hesitate to contact the mailing address or email below.

Thank you for your time and attention,

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# **1. Statement of Need**

## **i. Food Deserts**

According to a study done by the Massachusetts Public Health Association in 2017, nearly 40% of Massachusetts residents live in *food deserts*, or low-income areas without access to healthy foods (“40 Percent of State is a Food Desert, Says New Report”). Some of the communities in Massachusetts with the highest density of food deserts include Chelsea, Springfield, Taunton, Everett, Revere, and Lawrence. Another study on the link between food deserts and cardiovascular disease reported that those living in food deserts have “a higher prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors, inflammation, OS and arterial stiffness” (Kim et al.). Furthermore, Black and Hispanic or Latino communities tend to contain “more fast-food restaurants, fewer supermarkets, fewer healthy options, lower levels of social cohesion and worse walking environments” (Kelli et al.). Without access to healthy foods, Black and Hispanic or Latino communities have a higher incidence of ailments such as cardiovascular disease when compared to their white counterparts. Increasing the availability of healthy foods in Black and Hispanic or Latino communities would help minimize racial health disparities.

## **ii. Plant-Based Diets**

On the other hand, there are many health benefits associated with following a *plant-based* diet. According to Katherine D. McManus, “plant-based or plant-forward eating patterns focus on foods primarily from plants. This includes not only fruits and vegetables, but also nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes, and beans” (McManus). A study published by the American Heart Association found that middle-aged adults who ate a mostly plant-based diet possessed a “lower risk of cardiovascular disease, cardiovascular disease mortality, and all-cause mortality” (Kim et al.). Those following plant-based diets also have lower rates of obesity and diabetes in comparison to those following diets that contains meat. Plant-based diets would improve Black

and Hispanic or Latino communities' health by reducing their risk for diet-related health conditions.

### **iii. Food Insecurity**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, *food insecurity* is at an all-time high. The USDA defines food insecurity as “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food” (“Definitions of Food Insecurity”). Research indicates that Black and Hispanic or Latino households face higher rates of food insecurity than white households, “An analysis examining trends in food insecurity from 2001 to 2016 found that food insecurity rates for both non-Hispanic black and Hispanic households were at least twice that of non-Hispanic white households” (Odoms-Young). Food insecurity is particularly pronounced among Lawrence’s Hispanic or Latino population, which composes 80.6% of Lawrence’s overall population. Due to limited transportation options and supermarkets, many Hispanic or Latino residents of Lawrence shop at *bodegas*, or corner stores, which sell a limited selection of healthy foods (Hensel).

### **iv. Plant-Based Food Pantries**

One way of addressing food insecurity in Lawrence is to establish a plant-based food pantry. In comparison to traditional food pantries, plant-based food pantries provide healthier options to clients. According to Community Solidarity, a plant-based food bank that serves multiple food pantries in New York, traditional food banks often distribute cheap, processed foods, “Food banks collect cheap foods with long shelf lives and meat they can keep in their freezers. Compared to perishables like fresh produce, the shelf stable foods found at food banks have higher quantities of sugar, cholesterol and saturated fats...In comparison, 48-70% of the foods distributed by Community Solidarity is organic produce” (“America's Largest Vegetarian Hunger Relief Program”). A plant-based food pantry would significantly expand clients’ access

to healthy foods, which would improve the health of clients who suffer from diet-related conditions such as obesity.

#### **v. Mobile Food Pantries**

On the other hand, mobile food pantries minimize accessibility issues by bringing food directly to clients. According to Feeding Westchester, an organization that distributes food and other resources across Westchester county, mobile food pantries provide more fresh produce than traditional food pantries, “Mobile pantries are often able to carry more perishable food than a traditional food pantry because of the fast turnaround time between when the pantry acquires the food items and when those items are provided to individuals” (“How the Mobile Food Pantry Is Changing the World”). Furthermore, mobile food pantries reduce stigmas surrounding getting help from hunger-relief organizations by allowing clients more choice over which items they select. Mobile food pantries also minimize food waste by supplying perishable food to clients that would get thrown out otherwise. A plant-based mobile food pantry would not only eliminate clients’ barriers to receiving aid, but also improve the quality of the food they receive.



Figure 1. Image of a Community Solidarity Food Share. Retrieved from <https://communitysolidarity.org/>.

## **2. Statement of Request**

This project asks for \$131,000 from the FSIG for Fresco y Sano, a non-profit dedicated to eliminating food insecurity, to establish a plant-based mobile food pantry in Lawrence, MA. The mission of this project is to reduce food insecurity in Lawrence by providing Hispanic or Latino residents with access to fresh produce. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of July 2019, Lawrence's poverty rate was 21.4%, which is more than twice as high as the national average for that year ("U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Lawrence City, Massachusetts"). In addition, Hispanic or Latino residents compose 80.6% of Lawrence's population and make up 23.2% of residents living below the poverty line ("Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months"). Many of Lawrence's Hispanic or Latino residents shop at bodegas, where access to fresh produce is sporadic. A plant-based food pantry would make fresh produce more accessible to Lawrence's Hispanic or Latino residents.

The FSIG's funding would go toward Fresco y Sano's costs during its first three months of operation, including infrastructure and staff wages. After this time, Fresco y Sano will apply to become a partner agency of the Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB), which will provide additional resources. Fresco y Sano will also use donations through its website to become self-sustaining. Funding from the FSIG would help Fresco y Sano accomplish its goal of reducing food insecurity in Lawrence.

### **3. Description of Proposed Work**

#### **i. Objectives**

Using funding provided by the FSIG, Fresco Y Sano seeks to:

- Provide plant-based foods to low-income residents
- Reduce food insecurity
- Become self-sustaining

In order to measure Fresco Y Sano's success, after three months, the pantry will need to demonstrate that it was able to provide plant-based foods to low-income residents, thereby reducing food insecurity. Furthermore, Fresco Y Sano will need to sustain itself via monetary donations as well as food from a local farm. If Fresco Y Sano achieves these objectives, it will apply to become a member agency of the Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB). As a member agency, Fresco Y Sano would benefit from the Greater Boston Food Bank's resources.

#### **ii. Frequency of Service**

Due to Lawrence's high poverty rate, many residents face food insecurity. Particularly, the USDA's Food Access Research Atlas identifies three tracks in Lawrence that contain a high number of households without vehicles that are over a half mile away from the nearest supermarket ("Go to the Atlas"). In response to these challenges, Fresco Y Sano seeks to reduce food insecurity by delivering food directly to residents every Sunday, as area food pantries are typically closed on the weekend.



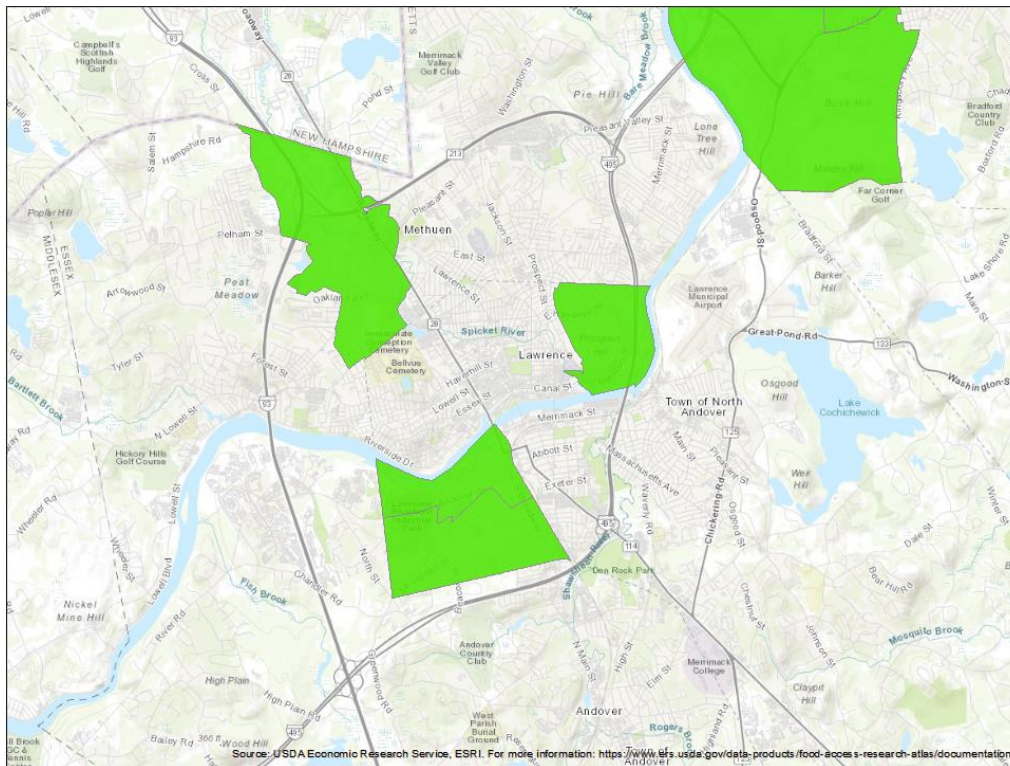


Figure two. Image of food desert locations in Lawrence, MA. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>.

### iii. Requirements for Support

Fresco Y Sano seeks to reduce food insecurity by minimizing clients' barriers to using its services. Therefore, any member in need of assistance can request food through the pantry's website.

### iv. Level of Client Choice

According to a traditional food pantry model, clients receive a box of pre-selected box of items. While the traditional food pantry model promotes fairness by giving every client the same food, the traditional food pantry model ignores clients' dietary/religious preferences, ultimately leading to food waste. In contrast, in the client choice pantry model, clients choose which items they want, which provides them with a more dignified shopping experience. Thus, Fresco y Sano will follow a client choice model. Through Fresco y Sano's website, clients can submit a request based on available inventory each week, prior to Sunday, so that volunteers can assemble food

boxes for distribution. The head of inventory management will update the website on a daily basis to reflect inventory changes.

**v. Client Intake Procedures**

In order to use Fresco y Sano's services, first-time clients must fill out an intake form on the pantry's website. The intake form asks clients to provide their name, race/ethnicity, address, phone number, email address, and number in household. After filling out the intake form, clients must sign up for an account on the website. Fresco y Sano requires clients to fill out an intake form to improve its outreach initiatives. Clients who lack internet access can use the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MRTA) to take a bus to the Lawrence Public Library to sign up for an account.

**vi. Client Outreach**

The director of outreach will manage Fresco y Sano's social media pages and make weekly posts promoting the organization. Additionally, the director of outreach will contact the heads of social service agencies in Lawrence such as Lawrence Community Works, Greater Lawrence Community Action Inc., and Catholic Charities to promote Fresco y Sano to their members. The director of outreach will also recruit volunteers to distribute agency materials throughout the city of Lawrence advertising its monthly food drive.



Figure 3. Image of Fresco y Sano branding.

### **vii. Donation Sources**

Fresco Y Sano will receive produce donations from Gaining Ground, a non-profit organic farm in Concord, MA. According to its website, Gaining Ground grows food for “food pantries, meal programs and shelters in Greater Boston and Eastern Massachusetts” (“Our Story”). Gaining Ground’s mission is to provide fresh, organic produce to those experiencing food insecurity. Fresco Y Sano will pick up food from Gaining Ground every Saturday at 10 am. Additionally, Fresco Y Sano will host a food drive on the first Saturday of every month at the Lawrence Public Library from 10 am to 2 pm. Food drive participants are encouraged to donate non-perishable food items such as peanut butter, dried beans and lentils, canned items, nuts and seeds, dried fruit, brown rice, and quinoa. In addition, the pantry’s website will include a page for monetary donations.

### **viii. Food Transportation and Storage**

Fresco y Sano will use a 2021 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 2500 Reefer/Refrigerated Van to transport and store produce from Gaining Ground. To maintain freshness, Fresco y Sano will store produce at temperatures of 40 degrees or cooler (“Fruit and Vegetable Safety”).

Additionally, Fresco y Sano will use the van to deliver food to clients. Fresco y Sano will transport all non-perishable items collected during food drives to a storage facility.



Figure 4. Image of 2021 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 2500 Reefer/Refrigerated Van. Retrieved from <https://www.commercialtrucktrader.com/listing/2021-MERCEDES-BENZ-SPRINTER+2500-5017983397>.

## **4. Description of Available Facilities**

### **i. Refrigerated Van**

Fresco y Sano will purchase a 2021 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 2500 Reefer/Refrigerated Van for \$80,067. The van possesses ample space for storage, with a 170 in wheelbase and a height of 144 in (“Sprinter 8,8 or 11,2 M3 (311 or 396 FT3) Mercedes-Benz”). In addition, the van contains a thermostat-controlled 2500 ThermoKing 320/20 Max with standby power, which allows the refrigeration system to run on electrical power when the diesel engine shuts off. The refrigerator works by taking heat and dispersing it outside the van. Fresco y Sano will also rent a 10’ x 14’ Public Storage unit in Methuen, MA. Fresco y Sano will use this climate-controlled unit to store non-perishable food items at a consistent temperature year-round. Every Sunday morning, volunteers will create food boxes from items in the storage unit and Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 2500 Reefer/Refrigerated Van to deliver food to clients.

### **ii. Lawrence Public Library**

Fresco y Sano will also host a monthly food drive at Lawrence Public Library. The Lawrence Public Library appears as the ideal place to host a food drive due to its proximity to Rte. 28, a high-traffic area. During the food drive, volunteers will set up tables with cardboard boxes of food items. In addition to food items, volunteers will take monetary donations as well. At the end of the food drive, volunteers will date items and input them into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet using the inventory manager’s personal computer. Fresco y Sano uses a first-in, first-out (FIFO) approach to ensure freshness. Following the food drive, a volunteer will transport items food items to a storage facility.



Figure 5. Image of Lawrence Public Library. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence\\_Public\\_Library\\_\(Massachusetts\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_Public_Library_(Massachusetts)).

## **5. Qualifications of Personnel**

### **i. Paid Staff**

Fresco y Sano will need a director to communicate the organization's mission to the public, oversee donor relations, and coordinate volunteer responsibilities among other duties. As such, Fresco y Sano is looking for an English/Spanish bilingual director with a bachelor's degree as well as 3-5 years of non-profit management experience. An ideal director would possess excellent oral and written communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, and experience supervising and managing people.

In addition, Fresco Y Sano will need a director of finances to manage donations, produce financial reports, and perform accounting duties. Fresco y Sano is looking for an English/Spanish bilingual director of finances with a bachelor's degree in finance or accounting in conjunction with 3-5 years of financial management experience. An ideal director of finances would possess excellent attention to detail and organizational skills, strong interpersonal skills, and proficiency in accounting software and Microsoft Office.

Fresco y Sano will need an inventory manager to coordinate food donations, plan food drives, keep track of inventory, update the website, and ensure food safety. Fresco y Sano is looking for an English/Spanish bilingual inventory manager with a bachelor's degree in business administration as well as 3-5 years of inventory management experience. An ideal inventory manager would possess excellent detail and organizational skills, strong interpersonal skills, and proficiency in Microsoft Office.

Furthermore, Fresco y Sano will need a director of outreach to provide community outreach to social service agencies, distribute agency materials, and promote the organization on social media. Fresco y Sano is looking for an English/Spanish bilingual director of outreach with a

bachelor's degree in communications or a related field, with 3-5 years of non-profit outreach experience. An ideal director of outreach would possess excellent oral and written communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, as well as proficiency in social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook.

Lastly, Fresco y Sano will need a website developer to design and maintain the organization's website. Fresco Y Sano is looking for an English/Spanish bilingual website developer with a bachelor's degree in computer science or a related field. An ideal website develop would possess proficiency in HTML, JavaScript, and CSS, with an understanding of SEO practices.

## **ii. Volunteer Staff**

In addition to paid staff, Fresco y Sano will require a staff of 10-15 volunteers. Volunteers will pick up produce, assemble food boxes, assist the director of outreach with distributing agency materials, deliver food to clients, and more. During food drives, volunteers will assist the inventory manager with logging food and transporting food to the storage unit. The director of outreach will reach out to the Lawrence High School as well as the Council on Aging & Senior Center to recruit volunteers.



## 6. Budget

### i. General Infrastructure

Expense	Quantity	Cost
2021 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 2500 Reefer	1 van	\$80,067
10' x 14' Public Storage unit	3 months	$\$239 \times 3 = \$717$
Gas	147 gallons	$\$3.60 \times 147 = \$529.20$
6' Foldable Tables	6 tables	$\$66.10 \times 6 = \$396.60$
Cardboard boxes	600 boxes	$\$1.46 \times 600 = \$876$
Hand sanitizer	6 bottles	$\$2.66 \times 6 = \$15.94$
Disposable mask boxes	3 boxes	$\$9.99 \times 3 = \$29.97$
Incidentals	N/A	\$500
		<b>Total: \$83,131.71</b>

Figure 6. A table of infrastructure expenses. Gas cost estimates come from <https://gasprices.aaa.com/>. Table, cardboard box, hand sanitizer, and disposable mask costs come from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Fresco y Sano requests funding to support general infrastructure projects during its first three months of operation. This funding will go toward purchasing a 2021 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 2500 Reefer for \$80,067. Funding will also go toward a 10' x 14' Public Storage unit that costs \$239 per month for a period of three months, which amounts to amounts to \$717. In addition, Fresco y Sano will need funding for materials used for distributing and collecting food, such as gas, foldable tables, cardboard boxes, hand sanitizer, and disposable mask boxes, as well as other incidentals.

## ii. Staff Wages

Expense	Wage/hr	Hours/week	Weeks worked	Cost
Director	\$29	30	12	$\$29 \times 360 = \$10,440$
Director of finances	\$44	30	12	$\$44 \times 360 = \$15,840$
Inventory manager	\$22	30	12	$\$22 \times 360 = \$7,920$
Director of outreach	\$19	30	12	$\$19 \times 360 = \$6,840$
Website developer	\$6,790 flat rate	N/A	N/A	\$6,790
				<b>Total: \$47,830</b>

Figure 7. A table of staff wage expenses. Wage estimates come from Glassdoor salary averages.

In conjunction with general infrastructure funding, Fresco y Sano asks for \$47,830 to pay staff wages for its first three months of operation. Furthermore, Fresco y Sano requests \$6,790 to pay a website developer to design and maintain the organization's website. This amount reflects WebsiteBuilderExpert's estimates regarding the average cost for a web designer to set up, design and build, and maintain a website, among other factors (Whitfield).

## iii. Total Expenses

Expense	Cost
General infrastructure	\$83,131.71
Staff wages	\$47,830
	<b>Total: \$131,000</b> (rounded up from \$130,961.71)

Figure 8. A table of total expenses, rounded up to the nearest thousand.

Fresco y Sano requires a total of \$131,000 to fund costs during its first three months of operation. These costs include general infrastructure as staff wages. After this, Fresco y Sano will sustain itself on donations.

## 7. Summary

According to Zoe Matthews of the Eagle-Tribune, in 2018, 82% of Lawrence residents lived in food deserts, or areas that lack access to healthy foods (Matthews). In addition, census data indicates that 80.6% of Lawrence's population is Hispanic or Latino, which is significant because a large portion of this population relies on food pantries for assistance ("U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Lawrence City, Massachusetts"). Furthermore, research shows the benefits of a plant-based diet, such as a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality. Due to the health benefits associated with plant-based diets, it is imperative that food pantries address existing inequities by providing plant-based foods to clients.

Fresco y Sano seeks to reduce food insecurity in Lawrence by providing its clients with plant-based foods via a plant-based mobile food pantry. To accomplish this goal, Fresco y Sano is seeking \$131,000 from the FSIG. Fresco y Sano shares the FSIG's goals of ensuring that individuals and families within the Commonwealth have access to locally grown food. If the FSIG chooses to fund Fresco y Sano, it would be taking a step toward reducing food insecurity in Lawrence.



Figure 9. Image of a man holding a box of vegetables. Retrieved from Microsoft's stock image library.

## 8. End Matter

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## **ii. Front Cover Credits**

The cover image comes from Microsoft’s stock image library.