

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONTACT:** Lori Harlan

(217) 558-1546

AGR.PIO@illinois.gov

## **RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS AVAILABLE**

*Applications Accepted Beginning Jan. 22*

**SPRINGFIELD, IL** – The Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) announces \$6.4 million in competitive grant funds will be available for projects designed to help strengthen the state's food supply chain. The program, Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure program (RFSI), is a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Applications will be accepted beginning Jan. 22, 2024, from food and farm business and other eligible entities including nonprofits, local government entities, universities, schools and hospitals.

"The Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure program provides federal funds to build upon Illinois' investments in local food," **said Governor JB Pritzker**. "When we help small and mid-sized producers grow, we expand access to fresh, local food products, fortify local economies and strengthen the food supply chain."

"The Resilient Food System Infrastructure program uplifts our state's number one industry and puts us on a path to ending food insecurity. Every community in Illinois deserves access to fresh, nutrient-dense food, and these grants will bring historically disinvested areas closer to that reality," **said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton**. "This program proves that Ag Connects Us All, and I strongly encourage our local BIPOC, women-owned, and veteran farmers to apply."

The purpose of the program is to assist in building resilience in the middle of the food supply chain, supporting those activities that happen after harvest and prior to retail sale. Examples include processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, and distributing locally and regionally produced food. RFSI funds support food system crops and products meant for human consumption, excluding meat and poultry products which are funded through other USDA programs.

"An investment of this size offers a tremendous opportunity to support small and underserved farmers and business owners in Illinois," **said Jerry Costello II, Director of the Illinois**

**Department of Agriculture.** “We appreciate the opportunity to partner with the USDA to fund infrastructure and food supply chain improvements that will benefit our state as well as the nation.”

Grants are divided into two categories, Infrastructure, which seeks to expand capacity and infrastructure, and Equipment Only, which funds the cost of equipment.

“RFSI grants will strengthen the middle of the food supply chain which, in turn, strengthens the future of farming,” said **Illinois Farm Bureau President Brian Duncan**. “Given additional resources, Illinois farmers can grow their operations, launch new products and improve distribution.”

The state’s priorities are informed by stakeholder engagement and outreach to underserved producers. In 2023, the University of Illinois Extension, in collaboration with IDOA, conducted statewide listening sessions in rural and urban areas to gain an in-depth understanding of experiences, barriers and opportunities within the Illinois food system. More than 300 growers, producers, distributors, nonprofit staff and other stakeholders shared their ideas for building a better food system.

The University of Illinois Extension also conducted a needs assessment with new and beginning farmers in Illinois, the findings of which were consistent with the listening sessions.

“Infrastructure and equipment were the greatest needs voiced during the listening sessions. These funds are an opportunity to enhance the local supply chain and fill gaps in the Illinois food system,” said **Shelly Nickols-Richardson, Associate Dean and Director of University of Illinois Extension**. “We look forward to connecting producers and business owners to the RFSI program.”

Those interested should apply online at [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program \(illinois.gov\)](https://illinois.gov/resilient-food-systems-infrastructure-program) by March 15, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. Applications from smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and underserved communities are encouraged.

For more information, visit the USDA [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure webpage](https://www.usda.gov/resilient-food-systems-infrastructure-program).

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