

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project's Farm Fresh for Health - Double SNAP Initiative

*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal
Recovery Funds*

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project

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Application Form

Question Group

Buncombe County requests proposals for projects to help the community recover from and respond to COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts.

Buncombe County has been awarded \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Recovery Funding), as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. To date, Buncombe County has awarded projects totaling \$23,093,499, leaving a balance of \$27,639,791 available to award.

Visit <http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding> for details.

This infusion of federal resources is intended to help turn the tide on the pandemic, address its economic fallout, and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery.

Buncombe County is committed to investing these funds in projects that:

- Align to county strategic plan and community priorities
- Support equitable outcomes for most impacted populations
- Leverage and align with other governmental funding sources
- Make best use of this one-time infusion of resources
- Have a lasting impact

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP and any addenda issued hereto.

[Click here for the full terms and conditions of the RFP](#)

Organization Type*

Nonprofit

Nonprofit documentation

If nonprofit, attach IRS Determination Letter or other proof of nonprofit status.

501c3 Letter_ASAP.pdf

Name of Project.*

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project's Farm Fresh for Health - Double SNAP Initiative

New/Updated Proposal*

Is this a new project proposal or an updated version of a proposal submitted during the earlier (July 2021) Recovery Funding RFP?

Updated version of previously submitted proposal

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$378,687.00

Category*

Please select one:

- Affordable Housing
- Aging/Older Adults
- Business Support/Economic Development
- Environmental/Climate
- Homelessness
- K-12 Education
- Infrastructure and/or Broadband
- Mental Health/Substance Use
- NC Pre-K Expansion
- Workforce

Business Support/Economic Development

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

The economic consequences of the pandemic caused a dramatic shift in market outlets for farmers in Buncombe County. Farms lost significant income due to restaurant and other food service closures and farmers market disruptions. ASAP is requesting funding to continue our Double SNAP initiative which successfully addresses this challenge by expanding the consumer base for local food. The program matches SNAP benefits dollar for dollar at participating farmers markets, with money going directly to farms and food businesses.

This project builds on ASAP's work over the last decade supporting Buncombe farmers markets to become sustainable market outlets for farmers. Farmers markets are incubators for small and emerging businesses, and direct sales are key for farm profitability and a resilient local food economy. With a one-time infusion of funds, ASAP will expand and extend Double SNAP to help families recover from the pandemic, and directly support small farms and food entrepreneurs.

Project Plan*

Explain how the project will be structured and implemented, including timeframe.

ASAP's Double SNAP program, initiated in 2019, has had significant impacts on farm recovery and food insecurity throughout the pandemic, but now faces a substantial reduction due to insufficient funding. ARPA funding would enable us to sustain and expand the program, allowing more time for farmers and families to get back on their feet - time that is needed for this program to reach its full potential. This potential includes strengthening relationships between local producers and consumers, improving direct market outlets, building healthy habits, and strengthening WNC's local food economy.

Double SNAP enables participants to double their SNAP benefits at participating farmers markets with a 1:1 match. For instance, if a customer redeems \$20 of their benefits, they are given \$40 to spend on local food. Due to limited funding, the program recently had to begin capping matches to \$20 and restricting the match to fruit and vegetables only, eliminating the match for other SNAP-eligible products including meat, cheese, eggs, and bread. ARPA funding would allow the five Buncombe farmers markets (including Asheville City Market, East Asheville Market, West Asheville Market, North Asheville Market, and Enka-Candler Market) implementing Double SNAP to immediately reinstate the straight match for all SNAP-eligible products. It would also expand the program to 3-5 other markets in the first year. This financially supports a larger group of farmers, food entrepreneurs, and community members as they recover from the economic challenges of the pandemic.

In addition to the Double SNAP benefit funds, ASAP will provide farmers markets with stipends for implementation and program management, outreach and marketing materials, and technical assistance to improve systems and build community relationships to attract and maintain new customers. This includes support for activities that make markets fun and engaging spaces for all community members to shop and socialize (cooking demos, music, games, etc.), and responsive programming to address challenges families have accessing markets, such as transportation limitations and language/cultural barriers.

Through building relationships with market vendors, participating in engagement activities, and learning about new foods and recipes, shoppers are motivated to return week after week, and healthy habits are formed. This keeps customers returning even after the dollar for dollar doubling is no longer an incentive and as economic conditions improve. Offering three years of secured funding supports customers and vendors through pandemic recovery. ASAP anticipates the cost of this project scaling down over time, as SNAP participation drops to pre-pandemic levels. The overall impact of the program, though, will be long lasting due to an increase in motivated market shoppers and more sustainable farmers markets and farm and food businesses.

Statement of Need*

Describe the need that this project will address. Include data to demonstrate the need, and cite the source of the data.

In 2021, ASAP's Double SNAP program expanded in popularity and need. SNAP sales at participating markets tripled, and the program doubled nearly \$225K across five markets in Buncombe County. In a survey of participating market managers, all reported increases to their customer base and sales. One shared, "We have seen a huge uptick in sales for some vendors with the program, and it has given the market the ability to retain vendors and strengthen our market in numbers and visual presence."

Farmers surveyed expressed multiple economic benefits of the program. One shared, "Our SNAP sales went from \$10 per market prior to ASAP's Double SNAP program to \$250 or more each market in 2021 with ASAP's program. This increase in income has enabled us to pay our staff a livable wage for the first time in 14 years...The program has also given our work more meaning by diversifying our market attendees and generally providing us with more ability to sell the produce we work so hard to create...It has impacted

farmers in a direct way...It has introduced the farmers markets to thousands of people who would have never attended otherwise.”

Maintaining this diversity of local food shoppers is critical for markets and the local food economy. With a relatively low barrier of entry for start-up businesses, farmers markets serve as launch pads and incubators for entrepreneurial efforts. Vibrant farmers markets are anchors in communities, building rural-urban connections and bringing people into town to the benefit of other businesses.

Since our initial ARPA application, the Double SNAP program is now restricted to a fruit and vegetable match capped at \$20. We anticipate this will decrease SNAP sales by 75%. This will reduce profitability for all vendors, but will be especially impactful for vendors selling products that no longer qualify (bread, meat, eggs, dairy). For shoppers, the change offers less flexibility and choice. This funding would reinstate the former Double SNAP parameters.

Link to COVID-19*

Identify a health or economic harm resulting from or exacerbated by the public health emergency, describe the nature and extent of that harm, and explain how the use of this funding would address such harm.

This project addresses the economic impact COVID-19 had on Buncombe County farmers, food businesses, and residents. In an annual farmer survey, nearly half reported selling to new or different outlets in 2021 as a result of the pandemic. They also reported an overall increase in costs including materials, labor, investments in new online technology, and greater advertising needs. These heightened costs persist with ongoing supply chain and labor shortages.

At the same time, many Buncombe residents continue to struggle with increased food and housing costs, making economic recovery difficult with limited household budgets. Double SNAP offers a win-win, addressing dual pandemic-related challenges and increasing resident’s ability to afford healthy food. According to MANNA, the number of people needing food assistance grew by more than 60 percent since the pandemic began. Households eligible for SNAP have experienced a disproportionate burden during the pandemic, and the Double SNAP program made a tremendous difference. A SNAP shopper told us, “It has been an enormous help! I am a senior and like most, I only get \$19 a month in food stamps. Doubling this has been a Godsend. I try hard to eat well and prefer shopping at the tailgate market, getting fresh food, and supporting my local growers. I hope this program continues.”

Throughout the pandemic, farmers markets have remained one of the most profitable market outlets for farmers. In the annual farmer survey, one farmer shared “Restaurant sales were lower than previous years, but this was off-set by increased sales and customers at the Farmers Markets I sell at.” Sustainable farmers markets with diverse, regular, and committed customers offer farmers opportunities to rebound from the economic impacts of the pandemic and maintain viable businesses in Buncombe County. Double SNAP provides residents an opportunity to leverage limited food dollars and directly support local small businesses, infusing the local economy.

Population Served*

Define the population to be served by this project, including volume and demographic characteristics of those served.

This program benefits local farms and small food businesses selling at farmers markets that have faced financial uncertainty due to pandemic-related disruptions. In 2021, the program was offered at five markets in Buncombe County. Over 850 unique families and 75 farmers and small food businesses participated each month. We anticipate increases with the expansion into new farmers markets. This expansion may include markets in Weaverville, Black Mountain, the YWCA in Asheville, the River Arts District, and the Southside

Community Farm. As new markets add Double SNAP, ASAP will support them with promotional and outreach efforts.

The farmers served by this project are younger and more diverse than farmers nationwide. ASAP works with nearly 140 farms in Buncombe County, ranging in size from 0.25 acres to over 1,000. Approximately 45% are women, 38% are limited resource farmers, 35% have farmed for 10 years or less, and they have an average age of 48. Supporting and expanding Double SNAP to 8-10 Buncombe County farmers markets will benefit approximately 100 farmers and entrepreneurs selling SNAP-eligible products.

The program also serves food insecure families using SNAP in our county. The most recent data on Buncombe County SNAP participants is pre-pandemic in 2019. At that time, nearly 9% of households received SNAP. This population has grown dramatically with the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent rise in unemployment. These households reported a median income of \$19,700, compared to a \$52,200 median income for all of Buncombe County. SNAP participants include a greater percentage of BIPOC families than the county as a whole, including 14.6% Black, 7.4% Hispanic, 2.5% multiple races, 0.7% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 0.8% other race. 74.5% of SNAP households are white alone, compared to 87.3% of white households in Buncombe generally. We anticipate over 1000 families benefiting from an expanded Double SNAP program.

Results*

Describe the proposed impact of the project. List at least 3 performance measures that will be tracked and reported. If possible, include baselines and goals for each performance measure.

The Double SNAP program will generate benefits throughout the local food system in Buncombe County. From an economic development perspective, every SNAP dollar spent at farmers markets goes directly to farmers and food entrepreneurs, having an immediate positive impact on those small businesses. Knowing that economic recovery for farms, small businesses, and communities will take time, as the ripple effect of the pandemic continues to evolve, a multi-year project will offer the opportunity for adaptive and ongoing support. ASAP will meet the current and emerging needs of farmers markets to support Double SNAP and expand the program to benefit more farms and small food businesses and reach a broader segment of the community.

The goals of this project include improving the viability of small farms and food business, increasing farmers market capacity and long-term sustainability, and supporting residents in leveraging limited food budgets. To track progress on these goals, ASAP will look to specific performance measures:

The # of farmers markets who participate in the Double SNAP program

Baseline: 5 Goal: 8-10

The # of market managers that receive program assistance and support

Baseline: 5 Goal: 8-10

The # farmers and food businesses that are supported through SNAP sales

Baseline: 75 Goal: 100

The # of SNAP participants served at Buncombe County farmers markets

Baseline: 850 Goal: over 1,000

Along with these quantitative goals, we also aim to increase the volume and reach of promotional materials distributed and leverage our community partners to support market activities, customer outreach, and engagement. This project will ultimately lead to an overall increase in SNAP dollars spent and matched at markets to support the local food economy.

Evaluation*

Describe the data collection, analysis, and quality assurance measures you will use to assure ongoing, effective tracking of contract requirements and outcomes.

Project evaluation will be achieved through existing data collection and analysis systems. All participating farmers markets will provide ASAP with monthly transaction reports, allowing ASAP to track the number of unique SNAP participants served, the number of SNAP transactions, and the value of each transaction. In addition, ASAP will survey farmers market managers, vendors, and shoppers annually to understand their experience with the Double SNAP program and its impact. Market managers will report on increases to their customer bases and promotional activities used, vendors will report on increased sales, and SNAP participants will report on their experience with the program and any changes to their shopping habits and increased understanding of local food (i.e. better relationship with farmers, knowledge of local food seasonality and where to buy it, increased cooking knowledge, etc.). Quantitative and qualitative data collected during surveying will be analyzed and shared through reporting.

Project effectiveness will be tracked through a project timeline that will allow staff to monitor activities, outputs, and expected outcomes on an ongoing basis. Spreadsheets will be used to track outreach efforts and the participation rates over the course of the grant.

Equity Impact*

How will this effort help build toward a just, equitable, and sustainable COVID-19 recovery? How are the root causes and/or disproportionate impacts of inequities addressed?

Inequities in the food system affect farmers, workers, and consumers. Farmers face barriers to land access, global competition, isolation, and limited market access and control. These barriers can be particularly acute for BIPOC and limited resource farmers. Double SNAP begins to address inequities by building the capacity of Buncombe farmers markets to increase their ability to accept SNAP, broaden the customer base, and offer increased sales to individual market vendors.

For consumers, the current food system creates inequalities that have been heightened during the pandemic, and which disproportionately and negatively impacts the health and economic well-being of people of color and low-income communities. Double SNAP reduces barriers to accessing fresh, local food for food and nutrition insecure families. ASAP is working to make farmers market spaces accessible, diverse, and inclusive. We have intentionally located our market in a location that is on bus lines, has free parking, and is highly visible. We created bus maps that show market locations and indicate which accept SNAP and we are working on translating more of our resources and promotions into Spanish. Additionally, the planned expansion of this program to the Southside Community Garden and the emerging YWCA market - both situated in neighborhoods with higher BIPOC populations and run by organizations with deep roots in those communities - will increase Double SNAP visibility and access.

Double SNAP programming also offers opportunities to engage with communities of color through partnerships with other social service organizations who support food security, as well as collaboration with urban community garden programs who can sell goods, table, or engage in other ways at farmers markets. Thriving local farmers markets support the community in engaging in the local food system and these collaborations can improve community connectivity as we work towards an equitable COVID-19 recovery.

Project Partners*

Identify any subcontractors you intend to use for the proposed scope of work. For each subcontractor listed, indicate:

1.) What products and/or services are to be supplied by that subcontractor and;

2.) What percentage of the overall scope of work that subcontractor will perform.

Also, list non-funded key partners critical to project.

ASAP manages the Asheville City Market and we partner with a network of other farmers markets (managed independently) across the county to share best-practices and meet shared goals through county-wide promotions. Our work to increase the capacity of farmers markets is directly tied to improving the economic viability of farms and food access in the county.

The Asheville City Market is an economic development partner with the City of Asheville, making it possible to close North Market Street on Saturdays and host a large market downtown. This prominent location has increased the visibility of the market and local agriculture, along with the number of customers and sales. ASAP also partners with the city through a workplace wellness program and community engagement initiatives such as partnership with the YWCA to host a CSA fair and help them launch a new farmers market in 2022.

Buncombe County Health and Human Services was instrumental in helping raise awareness of the Double SNAP program available at the Asheville City Market, and ART (Asheville Rides Transit) worked with ASAP to develop a bus map showcasing farmers markets across the county.

ASAP also partners with community based organizations who table at the Asheville City Market and offer engagement opportunities that create positive and helpful experiences for customers. These partners connect residents with other resources, provide awareness and education, and make the market a fun experience through games and activities. An example of a community partner is MANNA Foodbank who tables at the market monthly to assist customers with SNAP screening and sign ups, and connects shoppers with other resources for accessing food in our community. Each market in the county similarly offers community engagement opportunities. Partnerships like these expand outreach and engagement across the county and make local fresh foods more accessible to all members of our community.

Capacity*

Describe the background, experience, and capabilities of your organization or department as it relates to capacity for delivering the proposed project and managing federal funds.

ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. With over two decades of experience, expertise, and accomplishment, ASAP is the backbone organization for food and farm centered activity in the region. ASAP is on the leading edge of building resilient local food systems, guiding and serving as a model and resource for others to reconnect with food through local food campaigns. ASAP works with over 100 farmers markets and nearly 900 area farms in the Southern Appalachians to build capacity, increase consumer demand and access, and provide connections and opportunities for engaging in place-based activities. ASAP led the region through a major change from an agricultural economy dependent on and known for tobacco to a nationally-recognized food destination, fueled by farms and entrepreneurs producing a wide diversity of food and farm products. That change has brought tremendous economic and health benefits and continues to provide opportunities for new farmers, all while supporting a healthy community and preserving scenic farmland.

This project will be led by ASAP's Executive Director, Molly Nicholie. Her responsibilities include guiding the marketing efforts of ASAP's local food campaign, supporting farmers markets, and providing farmers with training, resources and technical assistance around market planning and promotions. She has worked at ASAP for over 17 years connecting farmers to market opportunities, from wholesale distributors that supply county wide school systems to independent restaurants and direct markets. ASAP has extensive experience managing multi-year and federally funded projects. Through current and past projects, ASAP has a demonstrated track record of achieving project deliverables and outcomes.

Budget*

Provide a detailed project budget including all proposed project revenues and expenditures, including explanations and methodology. For all revenue sources, list the funder and denote whether funds are confirmed or pending. For project expenses, denote all capital vs. operating costs, and reflect which specific expenses are proposed to be funded with one-time Buncombe County Recovery Funds.

Download a copy of the budget form [HERE](#). Complete the form, and upload it using the button below.

ASAP Double SNAP Initiative Budget.pdf

Special Considerations*

Provide any other information that might assist the County in its selection.

There are two considerations we want to articulate:

1. There is a federal program called Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) that offers funding for SNAP incentives to support the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. ASAP will be applying for this federal support to help with the continuation of our Double SNAP initiative. Even if we apply and receive funding through this program there is a cap for individuals matching SNAP dollars at \$20 each week and it restricts the match to only fruits and vegetables, diminishing the overall economic and social impact of the program. Funding from Buncombe County would allow ASAP, with or without this federal source of funds, to continue the Double SNAP program without a match cap and without restricting the types of foods SNAP customers can purchase.

2. While this project is framed as an economic development initiative, there are added benefits to funding this project. ASAP's Double SNAP program is part of a larger Farm Fresh for Health initiative to holistically improve the health and wellbeing of Western North Carolinians. Our goal is for Farm Fresh for Health to have a reverberating impact on community health. Research conducted by ASAP's Local Food Research Center shows that local food and farm centered experiences influence and support healthy eating behaviors. These experiences introduce people to new fruits and vegetables; provide skills in food preparation and cooking; and influence participants to eat differently (eating more and/or a wider variety of fruits and vegetables); share their experiences and influence the way others shop and eat; and learn more about food and healthy diets. Moreover, these experiences strengthen participants' sense of community and inspire them to act in ways they feel support the people and businesses where they live. These COVID Recovery Funds will be leveraged to shift the county towards a healthier and more equitable food system as we recover from the pandemic.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- 501c3 Letter_ASAP.pdf
- ASAP Double SNAP Initiative Budget.pdf

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
P. O. BOX 2508
CINCINNATI, OH 45201

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Date: FEB 21 2007

APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
PROJECT
729 HAYWOOD RD STE 3
ASHEVILLE, NC 28806

Employer Identification Number:
06-1642769
DLN:
17053027734037
Contact Person:
THOMAS C KOESTER ID# 31116
Contact Telephone Number:
(877) 829-5500
Public Charity Status:
170(b)(1)(A)(vi)

Dear Applicant:

Our letter dated DECEMBER 2002, stated you would be exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and you would be treated as a public charity, rather than as a private foundation, during an advance ruling period.

Based on the information you submitted, you are classified as a public charity under the Code section listed in the heading of this letter. Since your exempt status was not under consideration, you continue to be classified as an organization exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

Publication 557, Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization, provides detailed information about your rights and responsibilities as an exempt organization. You may request a copy by calling the toll-free number for forms, (800) 829-3676. Information is also available on our Internet Web Site at www.irs.gov.

If you have general questions about exempt organizations, please call our toll-free number shown in the heading.

Please keep this letter in your permanent records.

Sincerely yours,



Lois G. Lerner
Director, Exempt Organizations
Rulings and Agreements

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Proposed Project Budget

Organization Name:	Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)
Project Name:	Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project's - Double SNAP Initiative
Amount Requested:	\$378,687

Proposed Project Revenue Funder	Amount	Confirmed or Pending?	Notes
Proposed Buncombe COVID Recovery Funds	\$ 378,687	Pending	
Double SNAP benefits dollars spent	\$ 325,500	Pending	
Appalachian Grown Farmer Relief Fund	\$ 100,000	Confirmed	
USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program	\$ 87,920	Confirmed	
Walnut Cove Members Association	\$ 20,000	Confirmed	
Bank of America	\$ 7,500	Pending	
Total	\$ 919,607		

Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed	Other Funds	Total	Capital or Operating	Notes
Personnel	\$ 76,379	\$ 76,500	\$ 152,879	Operating	Salaries and related expenses for staff time to execute project implementation and milestones
Fringe	\$ 7,638	\$ 600	\$ 8,238	Operating	
Double SNAP Match Funding	\$ 220,000	\$ 105,500	\$ 325,500	Operating	Direct support matching SNAP benefits dollar for dollar
Double SNAP Benefits		\$ 325,500	\$ 325,500	Operating	SNAP benefits dollars spent
Program Supplies	\$ 12,000	\$ -	\$ 12,000	Operating	Printed and program supplies including tokens, informational signage, handouts, translated materials, market access support
Promotions	\$ 12,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 22,000	Operating	Outreach and Marketing materials including brochures, promotional signage, supplies for market activities
Farmers Market Support	\$ 13,500	\$ 9,500	\$ 23,000	Operating	Stipends for Farmers Markets for program implementation and management
Indirect	\$ 37,170	\$ 13,320	\$ 50,490	Operating	Expenses including rent, utilities, support staff and related indirect costs to support the project
Total			\$ 919,607		