

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2020 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

Project Title:

ENRTF ID: 278-G

Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education

Category: G. Land Acquisition for Habitat and Recreation

Sub-Category:

Total Project Budget: \$ 1,500,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: June 30, 2022 (2 yrs)

Summary:

The Food Group seeks to purchase 316 acres of farmland in Washington County to preserve it from development and sustain and expand our organic farmer education program.

Name: Amber Stenson

Sponsoring Organization: The Food Group

Job Title: Associate Director

Department: _____

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Location:

Region: Metro

County Name: Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington

City / Township: May Township, St Paul, Minneapolis, Stillwater

Alternate Text for Visual:

The map shows the 316 acres of property proposed for purchase by The Food Group as well as the additional property owned by the Wilder Foundation. The Wilder property touches Mays Lake, Clear Lake, E Boot Lake, and Square Lake

_____ Funding Priorities	_____ Multiple Benefits	_____ Outcomes	_____ Knowledge Base
_____ Extent of Impact	_____ Innovation	_____ Scientific/Tech Basis	_____ Urgency
_____ Capacity Readiness	_____ Leverage	_____ TOTAL	_____ %



PROJECT TITLE: Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

The Food Group seeks funding to acquire 316 acres of farmland and diverse natural habitat in the Wilder Forest in May Township, Washington County. We wish to purchase this land to preserve it from development and sustain and expand our organic farmer education program and incubator farm, which serves farmers who are immigrants, refugees, and people of color. The acquisition of this land would have significant conservation benefits to wildlife, people, and water quality through protecting this land from development and expanding organic agriculture and conservation practices. This site serves a sustainable agriculture education center, so the benefit of the conservation practices implemented on this farm will be replicated throughout Minnesota.

The Food Group is part of a group of interested parties who are coming together to purchase the entire Wilder Forest property – approximately 600 acres. This property is one of the most significant tracts of land held in single ownership in the Twin Cities Metro Area. It includes ~400 acres of high-quality, undisturbed forest and wetland that provide habitat for up to 70 Species in Greatest Conservation Need, and 3.7 miles of shore land along Mays, Clear, East Boot, and Square Lakes, some of the most pristine in Minnesota. The property also includes 186 acres of prime agricultural land, 80 acres of which is certified organic. The property lies adjacent to the 802-acre Warner Nature Center and its significant ecological resources. Three organizations occupying these properties offer programming to Metro residents: Warner Nature Center, River Grove Charter School, and The Food Group.

The Amherst Wilder Foundation has recently expressed interest in divesting of this property. They wish to sell the entire property as a package. The uncertainty surrounding the long-term disposition of the Wilder property, precipitated the formation of the group of parties seeking to purchase this land to protect it from development, which includes Washington County, The Food Group, and The Minnesota Land Trust.

Protection of this land will provide multiple conservation benefits to the public including preservation of critical wildlife habitat and farmland, protection of nearby water sources through organic agriculture, and pollinator-friendly land management practices. This unique and diverse habitat is located at the intersection of Carnelian Creek and Tanglewood Conservation Corridors, and includes land listed within one of Washington County's top-10 priorities for conservation. This acquisition ensures protection of this unique property.

As part of this coalition, Food Group wishes to purchase and manage 316 acres of the Wilder Forest property. This include 150 acres (~80 tillable) currently leased from the Wilder Foundation on which we operate Big River Farms –a certified organic educational and incubator farm for beginning farmers from diverse backgrounds. We also plan to purchase an additional 166 (106 tillable) acres, currently farmed conventionally in row crops, to expand our sustainable agricultural programming. We would transition this additional acreage into organic production providing benefits to pollinators and wildlife. We anticipate in the first three years following acquisition working with 150 farmers, 1,500 K-12 students and bringing in 1,000 community members through two annual farm events, field days focused on organic farming and conservation practices, and plentiful volunteer opportunities.

Washington County has expressed interest in securing a conservation easement on the property we seek to purchase, funded through its Land and Water Legacy program. This easement would cover both tillable acres, where we would practice only organic and sustainable agriculture practices, and non-tillable acres. The non-tillable acres are primarily undisturbed prairie and forest, which would be maintained for wildlife habitat.

II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Activity 1: Acquisition and protection of 316 acres of agriculture and forest land.



**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)
2020 Main Proposal Template**

Secure fee acquisition of target property from Wilder Foundation coupled with permanent protection of the property through a conservation easement with Washington County. The easement will ensure permanent protection of the property in line with the terms of the easement. Responsibilities for long-term monitoring and enforcement will be held by Washington County.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Long-term protection of property through fee title acquisition by The Food Group	December 2020
2. Acquisition of conservation easement by Washington County	September 2020
3. Expanded programming in organic agriculture education and production for and by people of color and immigrant populations.	May 2021

ENRTF BUDGET: \$1,500,000

Washington County is interested in providing \$1,230,000 toward the purchase of a conservation easement using funds from its Land and Water Legacy Program. The remaining fee value of the property after the placement of a conservation easement is estimated at \$1,500,000 the amount requested in this proposal.

III. PROJECT PARTNERS:

A. Partners receiving ENRTF funding: N/A

B. Partners NOT receiving ENRTF funding

Name	Title	Affiliation	Role
June Mathiowetz	Senior Planner	Washington County	Facilitating funding request of approximately \$1,230,000 for conservation easements from Washington County

IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:

The Food Group will provide the human resources and expertise necessary to manage the 316 acres of farmland and forest for maximum conservation benefit. This will include the current Big River Farms program staff, 4 full-time employees and 3 part-time employees, who have significant expertise organic agriculture and sustainable land management practices. Additional staff/consultants with expertise in forestry and land management will be hired as needed. Staff will remove invasive species to protect biological diversity on forested land and implement sustainable farming practices on tillable acreage including: organic vegetable production, cover crops, and installation of pollinator habitat. The Food Group will cover the ongoing costs of land management through its steady and diverse mix of income sources including: 55%-Earned income; 14%-Corporate and foundation support; 13%-Individual donors; 13%- Government contracts and grants; 3%- Annual Hunger Bash event; 2%- United Way.

V. TIME LINE REQUIREMENTS:

The Food Group has requested financial and technical support from Washington County. Upon completion of an appraisal, The Food Group will be part of a team to negotiate a purchase agreement with Wilder Foundation. Once acquisition is complete, The Food Group will lead a process to develop utilization plans for the additional acres including community members and farming/forestry experts.

VI. SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS:

- A. Proposal Budget Spreadsheet**
- B. Visual Component or Map**
- C. Parcel List**
- D. Additional Information**

- E. Board Resolution**
- F. 990/Tax Information**
- G. Project Manager and Organizational Overview**

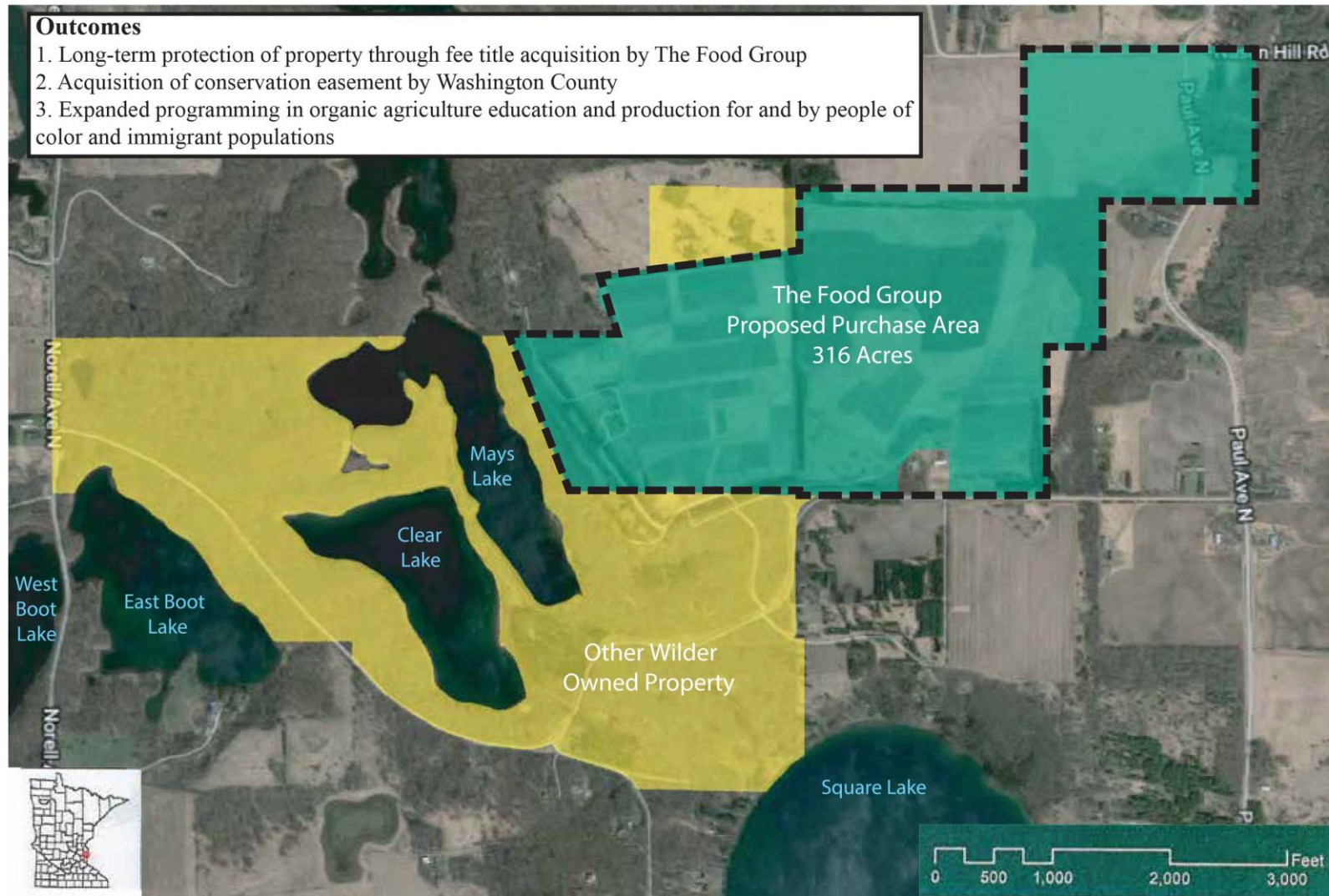
Attachment A: Project Budget Spreadsheet
 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
 M.L. 2020 Budget Spreadsheet



Legal Citation:
 Project Manager: Amber Stenson
 Project Title: Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education
 Organization: The Food Group
 Project Budget: 1,500,000
 Project Length and Completion Date: 2 years. June 30, 2022.
 Today's Date: 4/15/19

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET		Budget	Amount Spent	Balance
BUDGET ITEM				
Personnel (Wages and Benefits)		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Equipment/Tools/Supplies		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Capital Expenditures Over \$5,000		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Fee Title Acquisition: Landowner payment for 316 acres with The Food Group holding underlying fee title.		\$ 1,500,000	\$ -	\$ 1,500,000
Easement Acquisition		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Professional Services for Acquisition		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Printing		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Travel expenses in Minnesota		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
COLUMN TOTAL		\$ 1,500,000	\$ -	\$ 1,500,000
SOURCE AND USE OF OTHER FUNDS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROJECT				
	Status (secured or pending)	Budget	Spent	Balance
Non-State: Washington County has shown interest in providing funding of \$1,230,000 for the purchase of a conservation easement using money from its Land and Water Legacy Program.		\$ 1,230,000	\$ -	\$ 1,230,000
State:		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
In kind:		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other ENRTF APPROPRIATIONS AWARDED IN THE LAST SIX YEARS				
	Amount legally obligated but not yet spent	Budget	Spent	Balance
		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

The Food Group: Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2019 Proposed Acquisition/Restoration List

Attachment C.

Project Title: Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education

Project Manager Name: Amber Stenson

Organization: The Food Group

ENRTF \$ Request: \$1,500,000

#	Acquisition or Restoration Parcel Name	PID Number	Geographic Coordinates Format: [Deg.]° [Min.]' [Sec.]" [Hemis.]		Estimated Cost	County	Ecological Significance	Activity Description	# of Acres	# of Shoreline Miles	Type of Landowner	Proposed Fee Title or Easement Holder (if applicable)
			Latitude	Longitude								
1	The Food Group	14.031.20.31.0002	45°10'16"	92°48'33"	\$ 1,500,000.00	Washington	Prairie, Forested, Farmland	Fee Title Acquisition	316	0	Non-profit	The Food Group
Totals					\$ 1,500,000.00				316	0		
NOTES:												

Attachment D. Additional Work Plan Information for Acquisition, Easements, and Restoration

Fee Title Acquisition

1. Describe the selection process for identifying and including proposed parcels on the parcel list, including explanation of the criteria and decision-making process used to rank and prioritize parcels.

The decision to acquire the 316 acres of land included on the list, was based on several factors. First, the purchase of this property is part of a larger effort to protect the 600-acre Wilder Forest from development. As mentioned in our proposal, this is a unique property that has immense conservation value. This property includes ~400 acres of high-quality, undisturbed forest and wetland that provide habitat for up to 70 Species in Greatest Conservation Need, and 3.7 miles of shore land along Mays, Clear, East Boot, and Square Lakes.

Speaking specifically to the 316 acres that The Food Group wishes to purchase, we chose 150 of these acres due to these being within our current lease with the current owner (the Amherst Wilder Foundation), which we have held since 2005. We have invested significant resources into building and conserving the soil on this property as well as building and maintaining the infrastructure necessary to operate a working organic farm on the premises. We have also gone through process of certifying 80 acres of this land as USDA organic – a process that generally takes three years.

The additional 166 acres we plan to purchase are requested to expand and secure the future of our Farmer Education program, which serves immigrants, refugees, and people of color. As our program attracts new farmers, we wish to extend land access to this population who face many barriers to achieving land access in Minnesota. These 166 acres include the other parcels of the Wilder Forest property that are farmland. This land is currently farmed conventionally in row-crops. Through purchasing this land, we would achieve increased conservation benefit on this property through transitioning this land to organic vegetable production.

2. For any parcels acquired in fee title, a restoration and management must be prepared. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for parcels acquired by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation, including how long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel will be financed into the future.

Farmland Management: Approximately 186 of the 316 acres proposed for purchase are farmland. Eighty of these acres are land we are currently farming within our program and that are certified organic. For these 80 acres we would plan to continue organic and sustainable management practices including use of summer and winter cover crops, crop rotation, and addition of organic inputs. The other 106 tillable acres we propose to purchase would be transitioned into organic vegetable production (this land is currently farmers conventionally).

Expected outcomes:

1. Continued organic certification of 80 acres of land currently under production (annual).
2. Transition of 106 acres currently farmed conventionally to organic. Goal to certify this land organic by 2024 (after completing a 3-year process).

Forest and Prairie Management: For the approximately 120 acres of land that is forest and prairie (in addition to the 186 tillable acres and ~10 acres of roads and land with farm buildings on it) we would plan to maintain these areas as wildlife habitat. We would remove invasive species to protect biodiversity and employ other sustainable management practices.

Expected outcomes:

1. Maintain 120 acres of forest and prairie as undisturbed wildlife habitat
2. Removal and management of invasive species such as buckthorn to protect biodiversity

Human resources: The Food Group currently has a team of 4 full-time employees and 3 part-time employees dedicated to the Big River Farms Program. This includes an Associate Director, Farm Director, Program Manager, Food Hub Manager, Farmer Mentor, Events and Administrative Coordinator, and Caretaker. This team has significant expertise and experience in organic farming and sustainable land management practices. Additional staff/consultants with expertise in forestry and land management will be hired as needed.

Funding for long term maintenance and management: The Food Group will cover the ongoing costs of land management through its steady and diverse mix of income sources including: ‘

- 55%-Earned income through sales to our food shelf partners, Fare For All Sales, and CSA sales, which makes these programs very sustainable
- 14%-Corporate and foundation support
- 13%-Individual donors; many of whom have been giving to TFG loyally for 30+ years
- 13%- Government contracts and grants
- 3%- Annual Hunger Bash event
- 2%- United Way

Attachment G: The Food Group Organization Overview and Project Manager Qualifications

Organization Overview

Mission: Fighting hunger. Nourishing our community.

Founded in 1976, The Food Group (formerly Emergency Foodshelf Network) was formed when 15 food shelves in Hennepin County collaborated to pool resources and advocate for their needs. We've strategically grown to serve partners across 41 counties in the Twin Cities, greater Minnesota, and western Wisconsin. In 2014, we changed our name to The Food Group, which better represents both our values and innovative programming. In 2017, we acquired the programs of Minnesota Food Association (MFA) including operation of Big River Farms (BRF) in Marine on St. Croix, Washington County, MN. We remain focused on breaking down barriers for local hunger relief partners and community members seeking more equitable access to free and affordable nutritious food, year-round fresh produce, culturally specific foods, sustainable agriculture education, nutrition education and outreach services. Core values guiding our work:

- Food is a basic right for all individuals.
- Everyone deserves access to healthy food, where they live, that they can get to.
- Everyone deserves access to foods that are familiar to them and fit their cultural and dietary needs.
- Working collaboratively with other community organizations drives our mutual success.
- Operating in a way that supports equity, sustainability and fairness to all builds stronger communities.

Overview of Big River Farms Program

Big River Farms offers education in organic agriculture for farmers that have historically been underrepresented in farm ownership, including immigrants, people of color, and refugees. We provide beginning farmers in the program mentorship and guidance in managing their own 1/8 to 6-acre plots of certified organic land at Big River Farms, our 150-acre incubator farm near Marine on St. Croix, MN. Farmers have a guaranteed market for their produce via the Big River Farms Food Hub, which consists of wholesale contracts, a 165+ member CSA, and farmers markets. These markets are used as educational opportunities while farmers hone their skills to sell to additional markets. Big River Farms also provides educational programming on sustainable agriculture to 350+ youth and community members per year and hosts the annual Emerging Farmers Conference with 250+ attendees. Big River Farms strengthens our community by building a more sustainable and just food system.

Project Manager: Amber Stenson, The Food Group Associate Director

Ms. Stenson joined The Food Group as Associate Director, Programs in August 2017. She has 14 years of experience in non-profit program planning, budgeting, and program management. At the Food Group, Ms. Stenson oversees the staff that run Big River Farms and The Food Group's Produce Programs. Before joining The Food Group, she worked at a non-profit international development organization, Water For People for eight years.

Her role in this project will be to:

- Facilitate partnership and program development to ensure goal alignment.
- Lead Big River Farms' staff team to develop and implement program and operational plans that ensure sustainable land management and prioritize support to beginning farmers who are immigrants, refugees, and people of color.
- Coordinate activities of all funding, programs, and community partners to deliver desired outcomes.