

Historic and Current Need Statement

MARS Community Development Corporation is advancing a South Jersey Food Hub initiative to strengthen food access, expand producer opportunity, and support long-term community stability in underserved communities. MARS CDC's mission is rooted in housing redevelopment, workforce pathways, food-system development, and practical community-based solutions that help families and neighborhoods achieve stability, growth, and opportunity.

Historic Need

For many years, underserved communities have faced overlapping barriers that affect health, economic stability, and community resilience. These barriers include limited access to fresh and affordable food, weak local food distribution infrastructure, underinvestment in marginalized communities, and limited market access for small, local, and socially disadvantaged producers.

Historically, food access challenges have not existed separately from housing, employment, transportation, and economic opportunity. Families living in distressed or underserved communities often experience multiple hardships at the same time: unstable housing, limited job pathways, higher costs for basic needs, and reduced access to healthy food. MARS CDC's broader community development model responds to these connected challenges by linking food-system growth with housing revitalization, workforce opportunity, and partnership development.

The need for a Food Hub also reflects a long-standing gap for small and mid-sized producers. Many local and regional farmers and agribusinesses need support with aggregation, distribution, food safety readiness, buyer relationships, and access to institutional or wholesale markets. USDA describes food hubs as organizations that actively manage aggregation, distribution, and marketing of local and regional food products to help producers meet wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.

Current Need

The current need is urgent. New Jersey continues to face significant food insecurity and food-access challenges. NJEDA's Food Desert Relief Program states that New Jersey is investing in food security needs by supporting new approaches to alleviate food deserts and increase access to nutritious foods. Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap research has also shown that food insecurity remains a major issue in New Jersey, with nearly one million residents estimated to be food insecure in recent reporting.

MARS CDC's proposed South Jersey Food Hub is designed to respond directly to this need. The initiative is connected to Royal Dynastic Organics in Millville, New Jersey and is intended to support a stronger regional food system through aggregation, distribution, technical assistance, producer training, and expanded market access for local and regional farmers, producers, and agribusinesses.

The proposed model uses a hub-and-spoke approach that connects producers, stakeholders, institutions, and buyers through coordinated logistics, training, and support services. MARS

CDC's planning materials identify target or pilot counties including Mercer, Burlington, Somerset, Cumberland, and Essex Counties, while grounding the initiative in Millville, New Jersey.

Why MARS CDC Is Positioned to Respond

MARS CDC is positioned to support this work because its mission already connects food access, housing stability, workforce development, and community revitalization. The organization's Food Hub initiative includes strategic collaboration with Manatee Smith and Producers1 Ag Group and Sustainable Solutions, whose role supports producer engagement, stakeholder coordination, network development, distribution planning, and relationship-building across New Jersey.

Through this initiative, MARS CDC seeks to:

- Improve access to fresh, nutritious food in underserved communities.
- Support local and regional producers with aggregation and distribution pathways.
- Expand market access for underserved and socially marginalized producers.
- Strengthen buyer, institution, and community partner relationships.
- Provide technical assistance, producer education, and food safety training.
- Build a practical food-system infrastructure model that supports long-term community resilience.

Community Impact

The South Jersey Food Hub is more than a food distribution project. It is a community development strategy. By improving food access, supporting producers, creating training pathways, and building partnerships, MARS CDC can help address historic disinvestment while creating a stronger and more coordinated food system for today's needs.

MARS CDC is seeking partners, funders, producers, buyers, institutions, and community stakeholders to help build the next phase of this Food Hub initiative.