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The Sustainable Local Agriculture Education Alliance (SLAEA)
Grant Proposal

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Executive Summary

The Sustainable Local Agriculture Education Alliance (SLAEA) is seeking to establish a farm-to-table gardening program within Richmond city elementary schools to help combat hunger and food insecurity, and promote education about sustainable local farming. The SLAEA seeks to establish after-school programs centered around on-site vegetable gardens at Richmond elementary schools, which will provide participants with access to fresh produce and sustainable farming education. The SLAEA also seeks to establish greenhouses in conjunction with Shalom Farms as an educational hub for field trips with hands on learning and teaching opportunities for local volunteers. These greenhouses would also help provide produce for pre-existing local programs dealing with childhood hunger. The establishment of the SLAEA will help give children the tools they need to lead healthy sustainable lives in urban settings and beyond, and empower those students to share that knowledge with others.

Problem Statement

Hunger and food insecurity are not new or site specific issues. There are many different sources that contribute to and perpetuate hunger and food insecurity. More generally however, it can be said that global hunger and food insecurity are the result of an increasing gap between socioeconomic groups, or, economic inequality.

Individuals that are not secure in their jobs and/or are not paid a fair living wage because of this economic inequality are less likely to have ready access to healthy, local food items that may be better for their bodies and better for our environment. This lack of access is due to a number of reasons; first, the price of fresh, local produce is usually quite high when compared with mass-marketed pre-packaged food. Second, these individuals are more likely to be pushed out of affordable neighborhoods due to gentrification, which pushes people at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder out of reasonable walking distance from their previous jobs and, many times,

grocery stores (creating what is known as “food deserts”).¹ The people who are at the greatest disadvantage because of these problems are children.

Children are typically unable to access food outside of the home on their own either due to their age, cost, or distance from a food source. Elementary aged children usually have to rely heavily on adults to supply their meals at home and at school. Because of this dependence², many children who grow up at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder do not have access to fresh or local food (or, sometimes, any food at all). This is not only an issue for the individual, as this could cause them to suffer from malnutrition and other health complications, but for the environment, as the food produced at a mass-scale is often a leading contributor to our environmental issues such as global warming.³ All of these issues are occurring here, in Richmond, Virginia.

In Richmond there are twenty-five elementary schools with 12,206 students as of Fall 2018. Many of these schools are located in neighborhoods without large grocery store access, few corner stores or easily walkable access to food options that are not fast food. This lack of access is a big problem.⁴ Through local, focused efforts it is possible to achieve long-term, beneficial change for the community regarding their food quality and accessibility.

Proposed Plan of Action

With the money awarded from this grant we would create a collaborative program focused on sustainable farming and local living education in Richmond Metro area elementary schools. This would be accomplished with the implementation of an initial three-step plan over the course of two years.

¹ "Dependency Theory: An Introduction," Vincent Ferraro regarding the breakdown of “trickle-down economics” with the uneven distribution of wealth

² Ibid. regarding underdevelopment and misuse of resources

³ “Human Rights and Nature’s Rightness,” Erazim Kohák regarding misuse and overuse of nature and land space

⁴ “Critical Development Theory: Moving Out of the Twilight Zone,” Franz J Schuurman; see methods of absolute surplus appropriation pg. 847

In our first phase of implementation, the SLAEA would partner with Shalom Farms, a preexisting entity in the Richmond area, to create a new branch of their organization, on new land, focused specifically on education. Shalom Farms is a regional food access and community development project started in 2008 by United Methodist Urban Ministries of Richmond. Their mission, as stated on their website, is “to work with communities to ensure access to healthy food and the support to live healthy lives.” Shalom Farms already has a large partner base, own a 12 acre sustainable farm in the Midlothian area, and welcome all volunteers and those who wish to learn about their mission. Shalom Farms does not, however, have a branch specifically focused on education. Through this grant, the SLAEA would completely fund the creation of a branch with this focus for Shalom Farms. We would purchase a small amount of land to accommodate the physical growth that would go along with a new education program, as well as four large greenhouses to be installed on this land. The existing volunteer and customer base at Shalom Farms would lessen the burden of start-up for this organization and provide the volunteers necessary to populate the greenhouses with willing workers at little to no cost. We would purchase all materials necessary to start a large vegetable and fruit garden of varying species in each greenhouse. This space would then serve as an on-site educational experience for all ages.

The second phase of implementation would take the partnership between SLAEA and Shalom Farms one step further; we would bring on Feed More as another partner. Feed More, another Richmond based organization, has many well-established food-related programs in the Richmond community. “Feed More collects, prepares, and distributes food to neighbors in need. With a service area that stretches across 34 cities and counties, our comprehensive programs and Agency Network are dedicated to providing neighbors who face hunger with one of the most basic necessities: nourishment.” The partnership between SLAEA, Shalom Farms, and Feed More would bring a new and important aspect to Feed More-- locally sourced, sustainable food. The crop yield

from the educational branch of Shalom Farms would go directly to providing fresh fruits and vegetables to Feed More's Kids Cafe and Weekend Backpack programs. Though Shalom Farms may not be able to supply all of the food for these programs, the donations would be relatively consistent (varying with seasons), local, and fresh. In turn, Feed More would provide the students receiving these meals with information about the program below, contributing to our ongoing goal of local food education.

The third phase of implementation would reach even deeper into the community. The SLAEA would establish a separate program focused completely on food education in elementary schools. We would establish after-school programs in Richmond elementary schools that would incorporate planting and caring for vegetables in gardens installed by the SLAEA with the remaining grant money. These gardens would be run by SLAEA volunteers in an after-school setting, and any yield from the gardens would go directly to the students involved in cultivating the crops.

Success Criterion

Student retention, student participation, volunteer participation, field trip numbers, and need for program expansion will be key signals of program success. In our elementary school program, the SLAEA would be looking for to see the retention of students as well as an increase in participants within the first two years. Our goal is to have the children continue to be active in the program throughout their years in school so that they can constantly have access to fresh produce and food education. Consistent student and volunteer participation would be crucial to keep the program running, and a steady increase in volunteer base over the first two years would be ideal as we grow our program. Continuous growth in numbers would mean that the program is healthy and relevant to the needs of the community. Educational success for our program will be evident in the need for more field trips for hands-on learning at the greenhouses as well as a demand for expansion within the schools themselves. A need for more raised gardens will be an indicator for the health of

the program as well. If student participation numbers are high enough that some of the schools need additional raised gardens to increase meaningful yield, then we know the program is working as we hope. The indicators outlined above will be the parameters with which the SLAEA will measure the program's success within the community.

Anticipated Steps

Anticipating the successful completion of the four phases of implementation listed above in a two year time span, the SLAEA has outlined some long term, additional goals. The beautiful thing about sustainable agriculture is that it is just that-- sustainable and self-replenishing. The partnership between Shalom Farms and Feed More could theoretically go on endlessly without any additional capital investment, provided that at least some of the initial crop yield was successful. Therefore, our clearest long-term goal in a five-year time span would be to expand the educational outreach programs in Richmond Metro Area schools. Our initial implementation of the programs would take place in elementary schools-- so, along with increasing the number of vegetable gardens at these elementary schools, five years down the line we would like to see these programs growing with the students who helped build them; spreading to middle and high schools. Furthermore, as need persists, perhaps ten years ahead, we would look into physical expansion of our program with Shalom Farms-- perhaps expanding the food types donated to Feed More to include some of the livestock and field crops raised on their main farm.

Appendix 1: Budget

Year One	
Project Director	\$60,000
Assistant Project Director	\$40,000
Land: 0.5 acres in Henrico County	\$17,500 ⁵
Educational Greenhouse (x4)	\$17,100 (x4) \$68,400 ⁶
Plumbing and Electricity (heating and cooling)	\$8,750 (x4) \$35,000 ⁷ TOTAL
Shipping and Handling (x4)	\$1,000 (x4) \$4,000 ⁸ TOTAL
Seeds, Nutrients, and Miscellaneous Costs	\$3,600 (x4) \$14,400 ⁹ TOTAL
TOTAL Year One	\$239,300
Year Two	
Project Director	\$60,000
Assistant Project Director	\$40,000
Volunteer Coordinator	\$40,000
Plumbing and Electricity	\$8,750 (x4) \$35,000 TOTAL
Raised Garden Bed (x75)	\$20 each \$1,500 ¹⁰ TOTAL
Garden Bed Supplies (x75)	\$20 each \$1,500 TOTAL

⁵ *LandAndFarm*

⁶ “Greenhouse Series.” *Rimol Greenhouse Systems*

⁷ “Greenhouse Business: Start-Up Costs, Profit, and Labor.” *ZipGrow*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ “How to Build Cheap and Productive Raised Garden Beds.” *The Farmer’s Almanac*

Gardening Tools (x75)	\$20 each \$1,500 TOTAL
Educational Materials	\$500
TOTAL Year Two	\$179,500
TOTAL Both Years	\$418,800

Appendix 2: Budget Justification

The categories above assume a two-person staff for the initial acquisition of land and installation of greenhouses. This organization would not necessarily be a full-time endeavor. Once the land has been acquired and the greenhouses installed, the staff increases to three people, including a volunteer coordinator to organize logistics of taking care of the facilities. Many of these volunteers, however, would come from Shalom Farms’ and Feed More’s existing volunteer bases, so salary may have to adjust with perceived need.

The greenhouse costs are taken from a combination of Rimol Greenhouses current prices and the approximate numbers referenced on ZipGrow. The supplies for the raised vegetable garden were based off of approximate costs of average lumber and supplies at Lowe’s.

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