



Commissioner Rodney Ellis

Harris County Precinct One

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NEWS RELEASE

Harris County Announces \$550K in Grants to Combat Food Insecurity, Food Deserts

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative Will Award 6 Grants in its First Round

Healthy, fresh food should be affordable and accessible to everyone. Unfortunately, that is not the case for many Harris County residents. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 738,140 people in Harris County were considered food insecure, and at least 286,000 live in a food desert. As of January 2021, there are 360,000 children in Harris County experiencing food insecurity.

"Hundreds of thousands of people in Harris County, many of them children, do not have access to fresh and nutritious food, either because they cannot afford it or they live in one of our county's many food deserts," said **Harris County Precinct One Commissioner Rodney Ellis**. "Particularly at a time when many residents are experiencing hardship, it is a privilege to invest in our residents health and wellbeing, and expand access to healthy food to more communities. Through the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, the County is supporting the work of local organizations helping to meet residents' basic needs."

Commissioner Ellis first proposed the Harris County Healthy Food Financing Initiative to increase the availability of fresh and nutritious food in underserved communities by funding innovative solutions through community partners. The first round of the Healthy Food Financing Initiative will provide \$550,000 in grants to the HOPE Clinic, Houston Food Bank, Little Red Box, Small Places, Common Market Texas, and Urban Harvest.

- The grantee organizations will:
 - **HOPE Clinic:** Teach restaurateurs to prepare healthy food for their menus
 - **Houston Food Bank:** Increase food pantry capacity and SNAP enrollment
 - **Little Red Box:** Make healthy food available for pick-up in the Second Ward
 - **Finca Tres Robles:** Host interactive classes and create an outlet for fresh produce with a store and kitchen in the East End
 - **Common Market Texas:** Provide healthy food at a 25% discount to food retailers

- **Urban Harvest:** Support operations of its mobile market and coordinate healthy food access efforts among community organizations

“Under its healthy community initiative, HOPE Clinic established the Bite of HOPE – a teaching kitchen and culinary program whose objective is to change the food environment in Houston, specifically in the neighborhoods that lack adequate healthy food access. As a Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) awardee, the program will help small food businesses and restaurants create healthier menu and product options by having the healthy culinary coach review the food elaboration process, connecting them to local farms and sourcing outlets, lowering costs, and promoting them within the community,” said **Joseph Brozovich, Culinary Program Coordinator & Lead Instructor of a Bite of HOPE.**

“On behalf of Houston Food Bank, we are so grateful and excited to start working with our partners on HFB’s new Targeted Enhanced Partner Capacity Project,” said **Kristen House, Houston Food Bank Partner Capacity Manager.** “The project will address the limited access to healthy food and increase nutrition education resources in underserved communities in Precinct 1.”

“This would not be possible without the passage of the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, and thank you Commissioner Rodney Ellis for spearheading this effort and all of the Harris County Commissioner’s Court for their support,” said **Melanie Pang, Houston Food Bank Director of Advocacy.**

Samuel Newman, Founder of the Little Red Box Grocery, said “In Texas, and across the United States, rapidly densifying and gentrifying cities are pushing lower-income residents away from basic resources, making it harder for families to access essential necessities including fresh, healthy food. Little Red Box Grocery (LRB) is a socially-conscious private venture that is building a market based and scalable solution to eradicate food deserts. LRB’s mission is to Democratize Access to Good Food.

“We are extremely excited and proud to be a part of Harris County’s first Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI),” said **Thomas Garcia-Prats, Founder and General Manager of Finca Tres Robles.** “Small Places has worked the last seven years through our urban farm, Finca Tres Robles, to grow and provide access to the freshest organic produce to our community with the pandemic only revealing an even greater need. We are extremely grateful to Harris County and their HFFI grant for providing the resources necessary to implement our vision for a healthier community in the Second Ward and East End. The new retail space at the farm will allow us to make our own produce more accessible and create a consistent outlet for other local producers to provide for and connect with our neighborhood, impacting them for years to come. Thank you to Harris County for supporting our farm in serving our community.”

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