



MEALS on WHEELS

MERCER COUNTY

March 8, 2023

Friends Foundation for Aging
Susan W. Hoskins, Executive Director
Sent Via Email: shoskins@friendsfoundationaging.org

Dear Ms. Hoskins,

Since 1973, Meals on Wheels of Mercer County has steadfastly focused on our mission: to be a premier, comprehensive nutrition program committed to providing nutritious meals and related services designed to promote the independence, dignity, health, and well-being of our homebound seniors, regardless of their ability to pay for a meal. We have actively advocated for Mercer County seniors for 50 years and we are keenly aware of the needs of this community. Our participants are primarily 60 years of age and older (43% over the age of 80), homebound and are limited in the ability to prepare their own meals. They are frail and often invisible to society (57% of our participants live alone) and what Meals on Wheels of Mercer County is able to provide is a warm, healthy meal that meets their dietary needs, the important wellness and safety check, and a warm smile and conversation-crucial to ease their social isolation.

We are asking the Friends Foundation for Aging for \$25,000 to support the cost of providing local, fresh, fruits and vegetables provided by Asparacolas Acres to homebound Mercer County seniors for our Farm Fresh Produce Program. The challenge of low-income seniors not having access to fresh produce has not changed. Over 84% of our participants fall below the federal poverty level and are in need of a subsidy for their daily meals. They not only have low quantities of food available to them, most living in a food desert, but also low quality, since they are limited to what they can cook, and what may be available at small mom and pop establishments that provide limited healthy options, if any. Many of these elders often are forced to eat nutritionally poor snack foods, high in sodium and sugar that negatively impact their ability to maintain or improve their health.

The goal of Meals on Wheels of Mercer County is to make sure that no senior goes hungry, and we accomplish this through our home delivered meals as well as by supplementing what food they do have on hand with monthly nonperishable groceries along with Blizzard Bags (shelf stable meals in advance to inclement weather). Receiving funding to provide fresh fruits and veggies to supplement our meals and these non perishable groceries will ensure they eat more than one meal a day.

**ASSISTING PARTICIPANTS IN MAINTAINING INDEPENDENCE, DIGNITY, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
BY PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE NUTRITION SERVICES AND HELPING EASE SOCIAL ISOLATION.**

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Our seniors' limited income increases their risk for poverty, malnutrition, hunger, illness and even death. Receiving regular, nutritious home-delivered meals tailored to their dietary needs, as well as proper nutrition education and counseling, alleviates their need to choose between food or medications, or paying the rent or mortgage or utilities. This helps prevent malnutrition, hunger, and illness and allows the homebound elderly to remain at home, living independently and with dignity. This also relieves their families, communities and other tax-payers of the burden of long-term care in a facility.

This year, for the Farm Fresh Produce Program, Meals on Wheels of Mercer County is partnering with Asparacolas Acres out of Millstone, New Jersey who will provide the sorted and prepared bags of produce and deliver them to Rider University where our daily meals are prepared and disbursed to our volunteers to deliver to our seniors. While we were grateful that last year, Snipes Farm stepped up on short notice to partner with us on this pilot project, they were unable to provide the variety we were looking for as they are a working farm and only grow limited items. This made participants unable to prepare simple dishes with the fresh produce provided, only salads. Participants often requested more fruit that was not readily available - mangoes, berries, bananas, avocados, grapes.

Asparacolas Acres has partnered with us for 5 years to provide fresh produce for our Senior Summer Farmers Market voucher program. So we already know they can deliver the bags as we deliver the food for the Farm Fresh Produce Program. Partnering with Asparacolas Acres will allow us to provide these bags nearly year round and not just within the growing season. We will also be saving money as Asparacolas charges \$10 per bag and Snipes was at \$15.

In order to determine program effectiveness Meals on Wheels of Mercer County include both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data is obtained from consistent unsolicited participant and caregiver comments and concerns, as well as a semi-annual participant survey. This semi-annual survey asks for detailed information regarding meal temperatures at delivery, appearance and palatability of the meals, likes and dislikes regarding specific foods provided, and suggestions for program improvement. We also ask questions regarding the overall impact of MOW on participants' quality of life. The survey also asks for feedback regarding delivery, the volunteers, and office staff. These surveys are what helped us determine the real need for the delivery of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Quantitative methods include analysis of program service data, such as the number of meals provided monthly and quarterly, trends in reasons participants begin services or leave the program, demographic information of participants (to ascertain any under- or over-served populations). Trends over the past few years indicate a continued increase in the number of participants aged 80 and above, and a slight increase in the number of Asian participants served. Data collected shapes program activities in terms of outreach to the community, planning menu changes, and policy and procedural changes when necessary.

We know that our efforts have made a difference in the lives of our seniors as demonstrated in the ratings from a survey we conducted after the farming season ceased, and from their many positive comments. When asked if she had a reliable way of getting groceries, Evelyn B. let us know that the only way she can get to the store is with use of TRADE, a local senior/disabled transportation service where arrangements must be weeks in advance with long wait times for pick up. She said that she used to be able to manage getting on/off the van and use a walker in the store. Now, she can longer do this. She called regularly to thank us for the fresh produce. Other comments were; "I appreciate when the "extras" come- a real bonus." "I would never be able to keep fresh produce like this on hand." - Joanne O. "I have been trying to eat whole foods for a long time. Now, I can." - Martha M. "I always have to ask someone to get fruits & vegetables for me. They can't always do it. Now, I don't have to ask." - Lawrence participant. "Have no way to get to stores. Wheelchair." - Patricia C. "My daughter used to cook for me. Soups,

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salads, lots of things." James F. "I have weakness in my hands." "I ate fresh. No cooking" - Carolyn F. "I put the carrots that I got and cut them up in small pieces into my salad. And the cucumbers, I also sliced up and ate it too. I loved them all." - Delores S. "My friend cooked them for me." - E. Windsor participant

For the Farm Fresh Produce Program, we included these following questions in the regular fall survey:

How would you rate the quality of produce?

[27] Excellent [19] Very Good [15] Good [] Needs Improvement

How would you rate the variety of produce?

[20] Excellent [21] Very Good [19] Good [1] Needs Improvement

(The needs improvement rating came with a comment stating that she cannot eat tomatoes, onions or peppers)

Meals on Wheels of Mercer County has a 50-year history of providing the crucial service of home delivered nutrition to the elderly, homebound population in Mercer County. For continuity in funding for the Farm Fresh Produce Program, the organization has already applied for additional funding to supplement this request. We also continue to actively seek and diversify a base of donors and sources of revenue, including individual donors through our direct mail campaign, congregations, organizations, corporations, foundations, local government, and special events. We have a proven track record of providing quality home delivered nutrition services for a significant period of time and are strongly committed to continuing this vital service despite any economic and financial challenges. Meals on Wheels of Mercer County recognizes that the need for services will continue to be great, and as history has proven, is prepared to meet this demand.

The Farm Fresh Produce bags are \$10 each with a 15% administrative fee and will be delivered to approximately 300 homebound seniors twice per month taking attrition into consideration.

FFA Grant Funding - \$25,000 + \$6,225 (leftover from 2022)

\$31,225 / \$11.50 per bag (with 15% admin) = 2,715 bags

2,715 bags / 600 bags per month = 4.5 months of bags

Potential grant funding at \$7,500 for 2 consecutive years

\$7,500 / \$11.50 per bag (with 15% admin) = 660 bags

660 bags / 600 bags per month = 1.2 month of bags

Senior hunger does not take time off, and it also does not have an end date. We are pleased to continue to flex and respond to our community's food insecurity; to continue to supply essential meals and interaction to all those who need it in our community. We are very grateful for the opportunity to submit this proposal for \$25,000 for our Farm Fresh Produce Program in partnership with Asparacolas Acres. Should you have any questions, please let me know, 609-698-3483.

Sincerely yours,



Sasa Olessi Montañó
Chief Executive Officer

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