

APPLE F2I Project Director

Arizona Planned Production and Logistics Expansion (APPLE)

Project Overview – Sept. 2024 – Sept. 2026 (approx. 2 years), funded by a US Dept. of Agriculture Local Food Promotions Program grant with potential to continue

Key Objectives of the Position: To increase Farm to Institution (F2I) markets in Maricopa County, the Arizona Planned Production and Logistics Expansion (APPLE) project will create an easily replicable model that can continue to be implemented post-USDA award.

The APPLE F2I Project Director will follow the successful Farm to Institution program that has been implemented in southern Arizona to expand and create new institutional (school, hospital and food bank) markets in Maricopa County, through relationship building among buyers, growers and two local food hubs, facilitated crop planning and training growers and developing buyer agreements.

Consumption of local agricultural products will be increased by 30% by the final year of the project through increased markets. Additionally, purchasing agreements with those markets will be in place, and systems to offer value-added products will be created. On-farm food waste will be reduced by 20% for the 15 farmers participating directly in APPLE, and sales for 35 small farmers will be increased by 30% from the first year.

Background: Farm to Institution is an initiative which strives to bring locally produced foods into school, hospital and other institutional cafeterias and settings. It supports expanded consumption of local foods, while supporting the viability of smaller-scale farms. In 2015 a group of partners including regional growers and institution food service professionals began to organize to facilitate local produce sales to institutions in Southern Arizona. The partners of the program organized under the name of “F2I” and included four critical groups: Arizona Growers, institutional Buyers, an Administrator, and later on, a Distributor. In 2018, Pivot Produce, a local food aggregator and distributor, based in Tucson, was invited by the Grower group to join as the Distributor for the F2I. The Buyer group consists of several types of institutions, including food banks, school districts, hospitals, an organic grocer, and a senior meals organization. The Growers group consists of 10 small scale growing businesses, all using organic production practices. The Administrative partner for the program has been the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona historically, though the role has been transitioning to be held by Distributor partner Pivot Produce as well.

The program is successful in part because of its commitment to group decision making facilitated by several annual meetings. There is an annual partner meeting, which brings all partners together to review the past season performance and set goals for the upcoming year. Also, the growers meet semi-annually as a group to agree on prices and pack sizes. Ahead of each season an elected member of the Grower group, Distributor and Admin team meet with each Buyer individually to ascertain local food needs for the coming year.

Another essential part of the success of F2I is its detailed negotiation, bidding, and forward contracting processes. These processes take place 6 months to 18 months ahead of the final delivery date.

1. The first step is for the Growers to decide upon a list of available produce items, pack sizes, and product descriptions for the upcoming season.
2. This list is then taken to each buyer individually to determine need and frequency of delivery for each institution.
3. With this information Growers are able to negotiate between themselves to determine prices.
4. Then a list with prices for their identified items is sent to Buyers for final approval.
5. Lastly agreements are signed between growers and distributors for purchases for each item.
6. The Grower group also has agreed to and are inspected by one another for minimum food safety standards.

Currently through the Southern AZ F2I, weekly deliveries are made to institutions July - May of every year. For the July 23' - 24' growers were contracted for \$194,949.19 in sales to Institutions in Southern Arizona and an additional amount to the Food Bank.

JOB OVERVIEW

Full time (1.0 FTE) position providing leadership, coordination, and strategic development of a Farm to Institution program in Maricopa County modeled after the F2I program in southern AZ.

The APPLE F2I Project Director is a motivated and inspired leader who can meet current goals while creating a strong future for the program to cement and deepen its impact

This position works closely with stakeholders, including Arizona Growers, institutional Buyers and procurement decision-makers, the program administrators, Sun Produce Co-op and Pinnacle Prevention, and the Distributors, including Sun Produce Co-op and Pivot Produce and others, to build on and further the success of the program. The Director leads a team of 2 additional paid consultants, who are leaders in Arizona's farm to institution initiatives. They report to the Sun Produce Co-op Manager.

This is a position requiring skills in relationship building, 'on-your-feet' thinking, innovative problem solving, and an adaptive management style. The ideal candidate will have the communications, coordination and facilitation skills, as well as the qualities, ambition, and passion to spend the next 2.5 years taking this program to the next level.

Responsibilities involve:

- Project Management and Development
- Relationship Building
- Training, Consultation and Technical Assistance
- Development of Communications Materials

Tasks include:

1. Expanding and creating connections to existing and new institutional markets including hospitals, schools, and food banks, and implement purchasing commitments.
2. Facilitating connections and relationships among the Growers, Buyers and Distributors
3. Meeting with Co-op growers to decide upon a list of available produce items, pack sizes, and product descriptions for each of the upcoming school year of the project– July through May.
4. Meeting with growers to determine prices of identified items.
5. Producing a list of items with prices for their identified items to Buyers for final approval.
6. Ensuring that agreements are signed between growers and distributors for purchases for each item.
7. Setting up and implementing peer to peer farm inspections to ensure minimum food safety standards.
8. Coordinating with Sun Produce Co-op logistics staff to ensure transportation of produce from farms to markets.
9. Scheduling and implementing twice-annual gatherings for growers in the project to get to know each other, discuss successes and challenges, and for APPLE staff to share information on crop planning, food safety, value-added products, and bidding on institutional markets, discuss any adjustments in project delivery that may need to occur.
10. Developing marketing strategies and materials for producers as part of APPLE to promote local food to potential markets and/or institutional buyers, and the general public
11. Working with Pinnacle Prevention to carry out project evaluation.
12. Supporting federal reporting requirements

Objectives:

- a) Expand the Co-op's existing three institutional markets and add seven additional markets by year three, including three school districts, two hospitals, and two food bank distribution sites
- b) Increase sales and sustainability for 35 small farmers (including the 15 in APPLE) in six counties in Arizona (Cochise, Santa Cruz, Pima, Pinal, Maricopa, and Yavapai) and availability of locally grown produce and/or agricultural products, through weekly pickups and distribution utilizing Sun Produce refrigerated vehicles, an increase of 30% in sales overall.
- c) APPLE will support the processing, aggregation, distribution, and storage of local food, and market it locally, through two food hubs, Sun Produce Co-op and partner Pivot Produce
- d) Encourage and facilitate the development of value-added agricultural products to increase marketability of produce by collaborating with markets to discuss value-added products, connect with a processor in Maricopa County, and create a system to add value-added products to agricultural products available to institutional markets.

EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS

- Bachelor's degree or advanced training in food and nutrition or environmental or agriculture education and at least two years' experience and demonstrated success in project management working with farmers and/or institutional food services.
- Experience working in or studying food systems, agriculture, public health, education, community organizing, or public service
- Effective communicator and relationship-builder, comfortable with public speaking and public relations, and able to establish and maintain effective, positive, and cooperative relationships with a variety of stakeholders
- Familiarity with local community resources, agricultural advocacy groups, and regional agricultural programs.
- Experience in development of outreach strategies and marketing tools to reach a variety of audiences.
- Strong written and verbal communication skills.
- Proficiency in computer skills in a networked environment.
- Ability to work independently.
- Experience in writing and managing grants and reports.
- Perseverance in the face of challenges and creativity in finding solutions
- Respect for diversity of opinion, experience, and background
- Passion for building a healthier future for Arizona farms and communities.

SALARY

- \$52,000 annually

TRAVEL

Travel throughout central Arizona is required. An individual in this position must provide his or her own means for traveling and reimbursement will be provided according to the budget outlined in the grant award.

WORK LOCATION

Work will be performed in a hybrid of home office, farm and institution visits and meetings.

NON-DISCRIMINATION PLEDGE

Sun Produce Cooperative will not deny anyone the opportunity for training or employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender or gender identity, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, sexual orientation, age, family care leave status, or veteran status.

Please submit a resume and separate letter of interest to Sun Produce Cooperative, sunproducecoop@gmail.com. The job will be open until filled, with the position starting in September 2024.