

# CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Date 03/15/2025

**Contact Information**

Organization Name: Trellis for Tomorrow  
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Year Incorporated: 2003  
FEIN: 27-0268541

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**Organization Information:**

**Field/s of Interest:**

Arts, Culture & Humanities                       Environment/Animal Welfare                       Education  
 Health     Human Services     Religion

**Mission:** We empower individuals and communities by providing life skills through experiential programs that promote food security and sustainability. We believe that engaging people to address food system sustainability in their own community is the most viable pathway to creating equitable access to healthy food for the long term. Originating in 2003, Trellis grew out of a commitment to youth development and a deep-seated belief in the power of experiential learning. Our three signature programs deliver consistent results in youth workforce readiness, food justice, and organic agriculture and include - SEED Skills (SEED), GROW Careers (GROW), and Food for All (FFA).

**Geographic Area Served** (*If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served*): Trellis is headquartered in Phoenixville. Youth programs are centered in Phoenixville, Spring City and Pottstown. Our Food for All program has partner garden sites throughout Chester County as well as Delaware, Montgomery, Philadelphia, and Berks Counties.

**Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:** Trellis' programs serve under-resourced and under-served youth in addition to food-insecure individuals and households. Annually, Trellis serves over 5,000 people from the Greater Philadelphia Region.

<b>Annual Budget</b> \$ 1,257,251 _____	_____ 12 _____ # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
_____ 84% _____ of budget for program expenses	_____ 12 _____ # of Board Volunteers
_____ 8% _____ of budget for administrative expenses	_____ 2,001 _____ # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
_____ 8% _____ of budget for fundraising expenses	_____ 20,500 _____ # of Volunteer Hours
100% total	

**Top 3-5 funding sources:** Chester County Dept. of Workforce Development, MontcoWorks, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, Quest for the Best, Bader Philanthropies

**Is this grant proposal for:** Capacity Building  or General Operating ?

**Grant Amount Requested:** \$7,500

**Proposal Summary:** A grant to Trellis for Tomorrow will support the Agricultural Learning Center at Chester County based Lundale Farm. This farm is both an educational and grow space that includes a 4,000 square foot greenhouse, small farm space, dwarf orchard, aquaculture systems, and educational exhibits. The ALC provides inspiration and learning opportunities related to urban agriculture for youth and adults, with the intent of encouraging area residents and organizations to grow locally at their homes or in community spaces. The ALC not only teaches both youth and adults about sustainable gardening, composting, hydroponics, and aquaponics, it also provides space to grow the nearly 100,000 seedlings that supply the 34 gardens that comprise the Food for All and SEED Skills programs. These programs generate close to 50,000 lbs. of produce for food insecure individuals and families a year, translating to nearly 200,000 servings of fruits and vegetables.

**CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**  
**GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**  
**TRELLIS FOR TOMORROW 2025**

**1. Nonprofit's history, goals, key achievements & distinctiveness**

Trellis for Tomorrow (Trellis) positively impacts over 5,000 people in the Greater Philadelphia Region each year through its three key programs. The organization, an offshoot of the former Triskeles Foundation in Exton, has grown to encompass a unique model that simultaneously focuses on food security and youth development. Since its inception, Trellis programs have grown, harvested, and donated over a quarter of a million pounds of food to regional households, impacting over a million meals. Additionally, youth development programs focus on the region's future by educating and empowering young people (approximately 80 per year) with the skills and resources they need to become successful, food-secure individuals who have the potential to be the changemakers of tomorrow.

**Food for All (FFA)**

In the FFA program, Trellis partners with municipal, corporate, faith-based, educational, and community organizations in the Philadelphia area to establish and maintain organic gardens on site. Trellis provides garden design and installation support, garden inputs (seedlings, soil, amendments, etc.), and delivers education on organic gardening, food insecurity, and food system sustainability. The partner organization provides land, an engaged garden team, and a commitment to donate at least 50% of all produce to area food banks or pantries. FFA estimates reaching about 5,000 people annually with nutritious food. In a typical year, FFA donates over 40,000 pounds of organic produce for area food banks and pantries, impacting approximately 140,000 meals. The FFA program also offers educational presentations and workshops for gardeners to learn about systemic issues in our food system like the negative effects of industrial agriculture and a lack of equity and access to good foods.

**SEED Skills (SEED) *\*eligible for the EITC tax credit program***

SEED is a youth development program for adolescents aged 12-18 living in historically disenfranchised communities. Youth are engaged in garden-based activities designed to build life and work skills and foster leadership and personal agency while improving food security and access in their own neighborhoods. SEED is an "earn while you learn" program that currently works in Phoenixville, Pottstown, and Spring City. Youth participants build workplace readiness skills while working together to manage organic gardens and distribute their produce through equitable, community-building business models. Since the program's inception, more than 24,000 pounds of organic produce has been distributed to hundreds of households by SEED youth participants.

**GROW Careers (GROW)**

GROW is a Trellis initiative dedicated to empowering under-served youth/young adults aged 18-26 by providing hands-on, paid work experiences that focus on food system sustainability and improving food access in their communities. The program is a natural next step for SEED Skills graduates but also welcomes new participants. Youth receive valuable training through active and ongoing mentorship, 1x1 and group coaching, workshops, a unique career assessment tool, and goal setting activities. Participants not only receive valuable skills but also gain workforce experience that fosters a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the food system. By connecting youth with local farms, NGOs, and food policy organizations, the program not only enhances their employability but also inspires them to become leaders in creating equitable and sustainable food systems.

**2. Funding request**

The **Agricultural Learning Center (ALC)** is a new entity developed by Trellis in partnership with Lundale Farm in Pottstown, PA (Chester County). Trellis is developing the ALC with the goal of educating, inspiring, resourcing, and feeding community members across the Philadelphia region. The ALC will provide an opportunity for local individuals and organizations to learn about innovative, sustainable, urban agricultural systems and methods that

they can employ in their own communities, along with basic techniques for managing those systems and methods.

Additionally, the space also provides an agricultural hub for Trellis's network of gardens. At full capacity, the greenhouse space will generate 100,000+ seedlings which will be planted in 30+ Food for All, SEED Skills, and school gardens, as well as hydroponic systems and citizen gardens across the Philadelphia region. Through FFA and SEED Skills, Trellis grows, harvests, and donates close to 50,000 pounds of organic, locally grown produce to food-insecure community members annually.

In 2022 discussions between Trellis and Lundale Farm began about a potential partnership and vision for supplying much needed regional agricultural educational programming. Lundale then agreed to rent the agricultural site to Trellis for \$1 per year. In 2023, Trellis began working to build the facility and programming on 20,000 sq. ft. that includes a 4,500 square foot greenhouse (that houses a large hydroponic and aquaponic system), a 7,500 square foot garden, and a produce cooler.

The ALC provides individuals with a place to come and see innovative growing practices being demonstrated. Community members learn how to install and maintain these systems and are inspired to implement these systems as part of a broader plan to create a localized system of distributed growing in and around Pottstown.

Currently the space includes:

- Propagation space that at full capacity will generate 100,000+ seedlings.
- Education space that will provide opportunities for area residents, youth and adults, to engage with hydroponics, aquaponics, and other innovations in agriculture to teach the next generation skills for a sustainable food system.
- Farming space in which we work with visitors of all ages to grow culturally appropriate crops for distribution in and around Pottstown. It will also be a training space for young farmers and engaged gardeners. This space has already generated produce that has been sold in our mobile produce market pilot operating 4 days a week in Pottstown.
- A 30'x45' canopy that provides a gathering space for groups to meet, eat, learn, and work in a historically significant farm space committed to supporting the farms of tomorrow
- A shipping container that is being converted to a produce cooler for excess produce, gleanings, and other goods from area farms and Lundale partners for redistribution into the Pottstown community.
- Composting toilets that advance the way we think about waste and fertilization
- A composting operation that will engage Pottstown residents, businesses, and institutions to redirect food waste away from landfills and toward the creation of soil-enriching compost

Future visions for the ALC could include vertical farms, shipping container classroom space, an agricultural apprenticeship program, and additional spaces for permaculture, agroforestry and showcasing/training on other innovative agricultural methods.

### **Specific needs & issues to be addressed:**

According to the USDA, more than 44 million people (1 in 8), including 13 million children (1 in 5), in the U.S. are food insecure, a condition that is exacerbated by systemic poverty, inflation, and unemployment. Vulnerable populations, including children, seniors, and low-income households, face significant barriers to accessing nutritious food, leading to adverse health outcomes such as obesity, diabetes, and malnutrition. Furthermore, the rising cost of living and the stagnation of wages have made it increasingly difficult for families to afford healthy food options.

The Chester County Food Bank reports that over 40,000 individuals in our county, 8.1%, remain food insecure and do not have reliable access to good quality food. Only about 4% of households receive SNAP benefits, however, and about 55% of food insecure households are ineligible for government food assistance programs. There are

thousands of people in our community who simply do not have the resources to consistently purchase good quality, healthy food.

While tackling food security as a whole may seem daunting, on a local level we can and should make a difference. As we strive to build a more equitable community, addressing food security is not only a moral imperative but also essential for the overall health, well-being, and economic stability of Chester County. Our organization is committed to bridging the gap between food access and the communities that need it, ensuring that every individual has healthy, nutritious food.

The following is a testimonial from a recipient of produce grown at one of Trellis' grow tower sites. The produce received supports the food security of their family of 9 people.

*"In this day and age with groceries and everything else in the economy skyrocketing, it is wonderful that there are caring organizations who offer this exceptional opportunity. Many of us have seen these (grow) towers for the very first time – it's just amazing. Also, I do not fear eating these vegetables knowing there will not be any contamination due to the incredible way they are grown. You hear on the news many vegetables must be thrown away due to contamination. Although I know how important their nutrition is, I have reluctantly often gone without eating various vegetables in fear of contamination. My daughter has a large family, and I also have grandchildren with me. I am sure many others are grateful and take these vegetables to their families or friends to give them a very healthy meal. Thank you is not enough. I pray you continue to serve mankind in this unbelievable way with good nutrition free from contamination."*

### **Why it is important to fund this now:**

More than ever, it is essential that food security be addressed at the local level. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, the 2023 prevalence of food insecurity was statistically significantly higher than the 12.8 percent recorded in 2022 (17.0 million households), 10.2 percent in 2021 (13.5 million households) and the 10.5 percent in 2020 (13.8 million households)." Food insecurity continues to rise because of the continued high cost of food and disruptions to food distribution. Recent cuts to food assistance programs such as Supplemental Food Nutrition Program, or SNAP, are putting additional strain on an already overburdened food bank and food pantry system. Local pantry partners are reporting that produce sources are very low.

Trellis' model builds local food system sustainability and teaches individuals of all ages the benefits of growing food, and purchasing food grown locally. One of the distinguishing factors in Trellis' service delivery is that it addresses food insecurity in two ways – by providing healthy, organic food now to those who need it, and by empowering youth to grow into self-sufficient, food-secure adults with the ability to impact their community for the greater good. The youth development programs impact youth, their families, and their communities by providing support for career readiness, post-secondary school success, educational opportunities, nutrition education, access to fresh healthy foods, and an increase in community bonds that directly and positively affect mental health. This unique combination of positive outcomes is a powerful force in participants' lives and is life-changing for all involved.

### **How impact & results will be demonstrated:**

Multiple partners and stakeholders will continue to collaborate to develop project components with the following overall objectives:

- Introduce innovative growing opportunities (hydroponics, aquaponics, and vertical farming) to encourage and expand local growing through a variety of systems
- Develop and offer agricultural/aquacultural work through job training and courses and connections to jobs for young people interested in agriculture
- Build a pipeline of future talent that can support a distributed model of growing local, organic produce through a variety of systems
- Provide more affordable, healthy food to area residents

Metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the program include:

- Number of seedlings grown
- Number of pounds of produce (from garden, orchard, and hydro)
- Number of regular volunteers engaged
- Number of students/youths attending educational programming
- Number of adults attending educational programming

Trellis staff will track the number of seedlings produced in the greenhouse and the pounds of produce grown, harvested, and donated to area food distribution agencies and/or individuals. Trellis also tracks the number of educational opportunities and engagements it offers. Results are publicized widely through annual reports, site visits, and stakeholder communications.