

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2019 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

Project Title:

ENRTF ID: 263-G

Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education

Category: G. Land Acquisition for Habitat and Recreation

Sub-Category:

Total Project Budget: \$ 1,500,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: June 30, 2021 (2 yrs)

Summary:

The Food Group requests funding to purchase 316 acres of farmland and diverse habitat in the Wilder Forest in Washington County to demonstrate sustainable farming, and undertake ecological management.

Name: Anita Berg

Sponsoring Organization: The Food Group

Title: Director, Programs

Department: _____

Address: 8501 54th Ave N

New Hope MN 55428-3710

Telephone Number: (763) 450-3864

Email aberg@thefoodgroupmn.org

Web Address www.thefoodgroupmn.org

Location

Region: Metro

County Name: Washington

City / Township:

Alternate Text for Visual:

316 contiguous acres of farmland, prairie and forest land situated in Wilder Forest in Washington County.

_____ Funding Priorities	_____ Multiple Benefits	_____ Outcomes	_____ Knowledge Base
_____ Extent of Impact	_____ Innovation	_____ Scientific/Tech Basis	_____ Urgency
_____ Capacity	_____ Readiness	_____ Leverage	_____ TOTAL _____%
_____ If under \$200,000, waive presentation?			



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)

2019 Main Proposal Template

PROJECT TITLE: Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

The Food Group seeks funding to purchase 316 acres of organic/traditional farmland and diverse natural habitat situated in the Wilder Forest complex in May Township, Washington County. The Amherst Wilder Foundation currently owns the property and is willing to sell. The Food Group is part of a coalition of interested parties who are coming together to purchase the entire available Wilder Forest parcel. The Food Group's goal is to acquire the property in order to demonstrate sustainable farming, undertake ecological management and provide benefits to the people of Minnesota and the surrounding region. Washington County has expressed interest in securing a conservation easement on the property, funded through its Land and Water Legacy program.

Minnesota Food Association, a program of The Food Group, operates the farm and food hub through a lease from the Wilder Foundation in order to educate beginning farmers of diverse backgrounds in starting organic farm businesses. These 150 acres of land currently under lease (80 tillable acres) are proposed for acquisition, along with another 166 (106 tillable) acres; these additional acres will enable the Food Group to expand and secure the future of our existing sustainable agricultural programming along with forestry and ecological management. This opportunity in the face of uncertainty surrounding the long-term disposition of the Wilder property compels us to act. We anticipate in the first three years following acquisition working with 120 farmers and 1,500 K-12 students.

The property we seek to purchase is a portion of one of the most significant tracts of land held in single ownership in the Twin Cities Metro Area. This property includes ~400 acres of high-quality, undisturbed forest and wetland communities that provide habitat for up to 70 Species in Greatest Conservation Need, and 3.7 miles of shore land along Mays, Clear, East Boot and Square Lakes, some of the most pristine in the State of Minnesota. Also included on the property is 186 acres of prime agricultural land, 80 acres of which is now certified organic. The property lies adjacent to the 802-acre Warner Nature Center and its significant ecological resources. Together with Warner, three separate organizations occupying these properties offer programming to Metro residents, including Warner Nature Center, River Grove Charter School and The Food Group.

Protection of this parcel will provide multiple conservation benefits to the public identified as priorities by ENRTF including preservation of critical wildlife habitat and agricultural lands, protection of nearby water sources through organic or sustainable agriculture practices, and pollinator-friendly land practices. This unique and diverse habitat located at the intersection of Carnelian Creek and Tanglewood Conservation Corridors, includes land listed within one of Washington County's top-10 priorities for conservation and is also home to a portion of The Gateway State Trail. This acquisition ensures protection of this unique property.

Securing the long-term protection of the entire Wilder property in its entirety is contingent upon securing the resources necessary to make that vision a reality. All the pieces must come together. To date, coalition partners have identified the long-term fee owners of the properties and have secured commitments totaling over \$8M through the Outdoor Heritage Fund and other sources. Funding through the ENRTF will enable the project to clear one of the few remaining hurdles.

II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Activity 1: Acquisition and protection of 316 acres of agriculture and forest land.

Secure fee acquisition of target property from Wilder Foundation coupled with permanent protection of the property through a conservation easement with Washington County. The easement will ensure permanent protection of the property in line with the terms of the easement. Responsibilities for long-term monitoring and enforcement will be held by Washington County.



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)
2019 Main Proposal Template

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Long-term protection of property through fee title acquisition by The Food Group	July 2019
2. Acquisition of conservation easement by Washington County	July 2019
3. Expanded programming in sustainable agriculture education and production for and by people of color and immigrant populations.	January 2020

ENRTF BUDGET: \$1,500,000

Washington County has shown interest in providing funding of \$1,230,000 toward the purchase of a conservation easement using money from its Land and Water Legacy Program. The remaining fee value of the property after the placement of a conservation easement is estimated at \$1,500,000 the amount requested in this proposal.

III. PROJECT PARTNERS:

A. Partners receiving ENRTF funding

Name	Title	Affiliation	Role
None			

B. Partners NOT receiving ENRTF funding

Name	Title	Affiliation	Role
Wayne Ostlie	Director of Land Protection	MN Land Trust	Facilitating discussions with purchasing coalition partners.
June Mathiowetz	Senior Planner	Washington County	Facilitating purchasing coalition partner discussions; facilitating funding request of approximately \$1,230,000 for conservation easements from Washington County

IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:

The project will permanently protect a large portion of Wilder Forest acres from development, helping to achieve the long-term planning goals of May Township and Washington County. Aggregate resources will be left undisturbed. Historic forest, prairie and farmland will be managed for the benefit of flora and fauna. Invasive species will be removed to protect biological diversity and strengthen populations of rare, threatened and important birds, mammals and plant life. The rural nature and agricultural heritage of this community will be preserved and maintained for the benefit of generations to come. Our plans include sustainable land management, habitat enhancements, and monitoring to ensure ecological diversity; expanded farm education and business incubator opportunities, and expanded youth and community programming.

V. TIME LINE REQUIREMENTS:

The Food Group has requested financial and technical support from Washington County. Upon completion of an appraisal, The Food Group will be part of a team to negotiate a purchase agreement with Wilder Foundation. Once acquisition is complete, The Food Group will lead a process to develop utilization plans for the additional acres. We will include the other purchasing partners, community members, and farming/forestry experts.

VI. SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS:

A. Proposal Budget Spreadsheet

B. Visual Component or Map

C. Parcel List

D. Additional Information

E. Board Resolution

F. 990/Tax Information

G. Project Manager and Organizational Overview

2019 Proposal Budget Spreadsheet

Project Title: Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education

IV. TOTAL ENRTF REQUEST BUDGET 1 years

BUDGET ITEM (See "Guidance on Allowable Expenses")	AMOUNT
Personnel:	\$ -
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts:	\$ -
Equipment/Tools/Supplies:	\$ -
Acquisition (Fee Title or Permanent Easements): Landowner payment for 316 acres with The Food Group holding underlying fee title.	\$ 1,500,000
Travel:	\$ -
Additional Budget Items:	\$ -
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =	\$ 1,500,000

V. OTHER FUNDS *(This entire section must be filled out. Do not delete rows. Indicate "N/A" if row is not applicable.)*

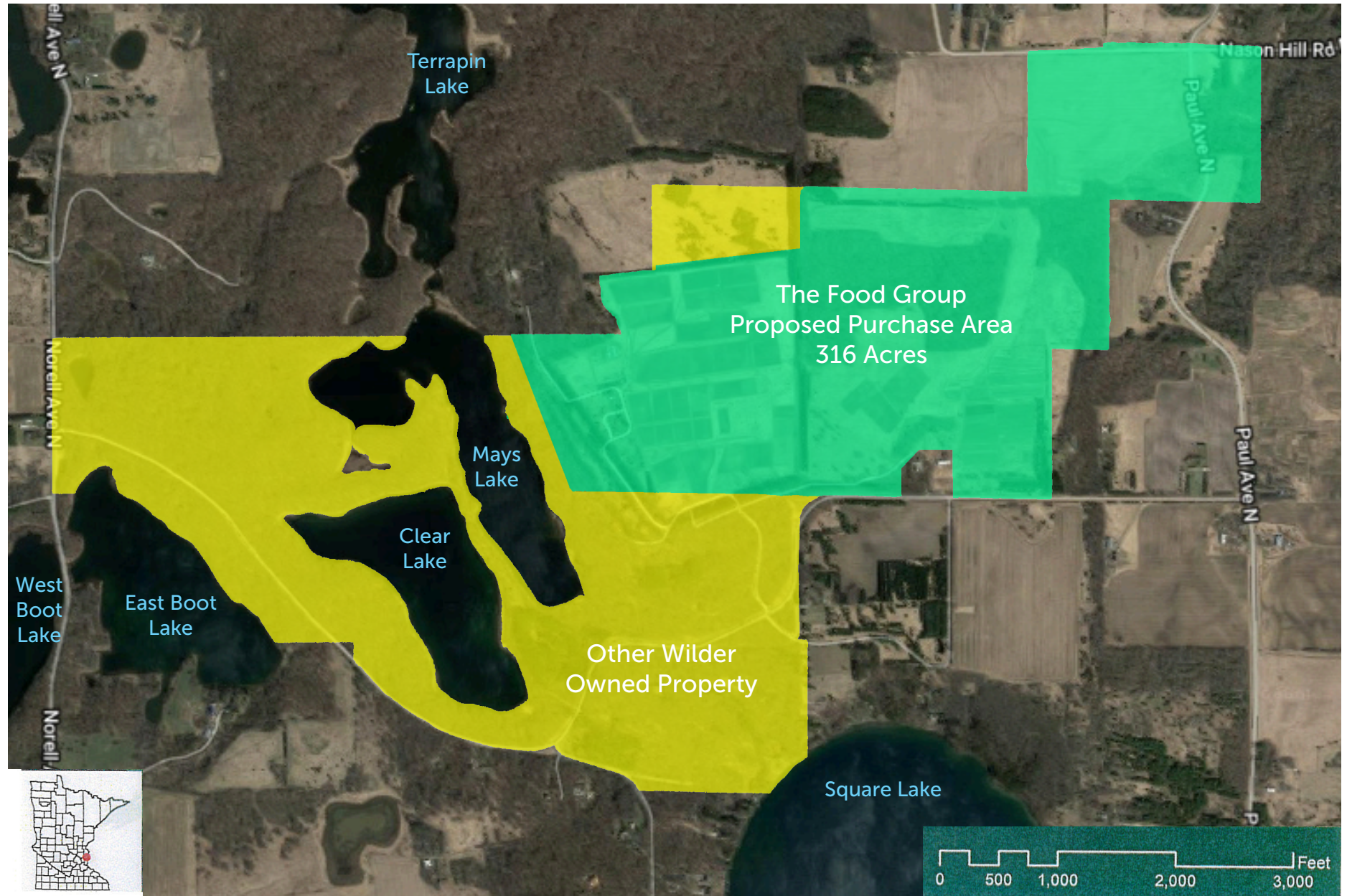
SOURCE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT	Status
Other Non-State \$ To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: Washington County has shown interest in providing funding of \$1,230,000 for the purchase of a conservation easement using money from its Land and Water Legacy Program.	\$ 1,230,000	Pending
Other State \$ To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: N/A	\$ -	
In-kind Services To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: N/A	\$ -	
Past and Current ENRTF Appropriation: N/A	\$ -	
Other Funding History: N/A	\$ -	

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund**2019 Proposed Acquisition/Restoration List****Attachment C.****Project Title:** Purchasing 316 acres for Conservation and Agriculture Education**Project Manager Name:** Anita Berg**Organization:** The Food Group**ENRTF \$ Request:** \$1,500,000

#	Acquisition or Restoration Parcel Name	PID Number	Geographic Coordinates Format: [Deg.]° [Min.]' [Sec.]" [Hemis.]		Estimated Cost	County	Ecological Significance	Activity Description	# of Acres	# of Shoreline Miles	Type of Landowner	Proposed Fee Title or Easement Holder (if applicable)
			Latitude	Longitude								
1	The Food Group	14.031.20.31.0002	45°10'16"	92°48'33"	\$ 1,500,000.00	Washington	Prairie, Forested, Cropland	Fee Title Acquisition	316	0	Non-profit	The Food Group
Totals					\$ 1,500,000.00				316	0		

NOTES:

Attachment B



Attachment D – Additional information

Operational Plan

The Food Group currently occupies nearly half of the proposed purchase area through a lease with the current owner. This includes organic and sustainable agriculture fields, existing infrastructure such as water, electricity, and various buildings. We also operate a greenhouse and high tunnel, and have a partnership with the Stillwater Bee Club to provide space for 8 beehives. We currently have a caretaker, a farm director, and several staff members operating out of the property and will continue to commit human resources to maintain and improve the infrastructure.

With the additional acreage obtained with this purchase, we will undertake a thoughtful planning process to determine the most appropriate use of the agriculture spaces for additional programming and land access for our farmers. This will include planning for additional organically certified acres, and sustainably farmed acres. Additionally we will assess the prairie and forest areas and create a plan for management of invasive species and for maximizing the conservation potential for flora and fauna habitat, and fostering the best possible environment for pollinators.

Easement Monitoring

A monitoring plan will be created post-purchase and will include documented annual inspections. With the intended use of a good portion of the land for agricultural production, and with the Gateway State Trail traversing part of the property, there will be regular activity and observance by The Food Group staff and farm program participants that will assist in ongoing monitoring of the easement. We will develop a training module for our program participants to educate them on the intent of the easement, what is allowable use, and what to watch for in the areas in which they are farming.

Attachment G: The Food Group Organization Overview and Project Manager Qualifications

Organization Overview

Mission: Fighting hunger. Nourishing our community.

Founded in 1976, The Food Group (formerly Emergency Foodshelf Network) was formed when 15 food shelves in Hennepin County collaborated to pool resources and advocate for their needs. We've strategically grown to serve partners across 41 counties in the Twin Cities, greater Minnesota, and western Wisconsin. In 2014, we changed our name to The Food Group, which better represents both our values and innovative programming. In 2017, we acquired the programs of Minnesota Food Association (MFA) including operation of Big River Farms in Marine on St. Croix, Washington County, MN. We remain focused on breaking down barriers for local hunger relief partners and community members seeking more equitable access to free and affordable nutritious food, year-round fresh produce, culturally specific foods, sustainable agriculture education, nutrition education and outreach services. Core values guiding our work:

- Food is a basic right for all individuals.
- Everyone deserves access to healthy food, where they live, that they can get to.
- Everyone deserves access to foods that are familiar to them and fit their cultural and dietary needs.
- Working collaboratively with other community organizations drives our mutual success.
- Operating in a way that supports equity, sustainability and fairness to all builds stronger communities.

Overview of MFA Program

MFA operates Big River Farms – a certified organic educational incubator farm - in Marine on St. Croix, MN. This program features a multi-faceted Farmer Education Program that provides education in organic and sustainable farming practices to farmers from historically underrepresented communities (i.e. immigrants, people of color, women, and veterans). We also create market opportunities for farmer participants to sell their produce through our Food Hub (via a CSA, farmer's markets, and wholesale markets), provide educational programming on sustainable agriculture to children and community members via our Youth & Family Education Program, and host an annual Emerging Farmers Conference. MFA allows us to work on both ends of the food system, complements our mission, and deepens our work on nutrition, equity, and food access.

Project Manager: Anita Berg, The Food Group Director of Programs

Ms. Berg has worked as the Director of Programs at TFG since March 2011. With over 25 years of experience in non-profit leadership she has proven skills in program development, strategic communication and financial results. She holds an M.B.A. from the University of Saint Thomas, and a B.S. in Management from Metropolitan State University. Her role in this project will be to:

- Coordinate with the other purchasing partners
- Facilitate partnership and program development to ensure goal alignment
- Coordinate activities of all funding, programs and community partners to deliver desired outcomes