



## For Immediate Release

Media Contact:

Sara Wacker, APR

Bloom Public Relations

[Sara@BloomPRSanDiego.com](mailto:Sara@BloomPRSanDiego.com)

(858) 945-1104

*(Not for publication)*

### **North County Food Assistance Program Receives Funding from U.S. Department of Agriculture**

*\*\*+BOX provides weekly boxes of nutrient-rich foods for students and their families;  
funding will help create an app to reach more local low-income families \*\**

Encinitas, Calif. (Nov. 9, 2022) – [+BOX \(PlusBox\)](#) – a nonprofit program that delivers solutions to food insecurity that improve nutrition, expand access, and support sustainability – receives funding from the [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#). The grant will increase food insecure families’ access to and availability of locally grown produce in low-income/low-access communities.

Awarded a total of more than \$137,000, the funding will be used to develop and pilot +BOX Connect, an app-based technology that will piggyback existing technology systems in partner school districts to increase program participation among low-income families and connect them to nutrition resources, including increased access to local produce.

“+BOX is reimagining the way parents access assistance by developing technology that simplifies an overly burdensome process and expands access to support. The funding will allow +BOX to pilot test an innovative solution for expanding access to locally grown healthy food,” said Wesley Burt, executive director, and founder of [Equation Collaborative](#), the 501(c)3 nonprofit that manages and operates +BOX, and one of the program’s original creators.

Most American farmers struggle to generate enough revenue to turn a profit, let alone make a living. Meanwhile, more than 1 million people in San Diego County are nutrition insecure and don’t have enough food to meet their basic needs. Almost 250,000 of them are children. To address these challenges, Equation Collaborative will assess the feasibility of strengthening secondary market opportunities for local farmers by integrating local produce into the existing nutrition security program – through the +BOX program – in a way that creates value for all, including local farmers, nutrition insecure families, and school district distribution partners.

Moreover, nutrition security programs distribute more than 36 million pounds of food every year, but only about 30 percent are typically fresh produce. There is still a gap of more than 13 million meals per month to ensure San Diegans basic nutritional needs are met.

This grant will partner with the Community Health Improvement Partners’ Farm to Institution Center to develop a network of local farmers to participate in a feasibility study by providing expertise and feedback on proposed market opportunities. This grant will then enable +BOX to assess the feasibility of expanding the market opportunity for local farmers by expanding the +BOX program to additional households through +BOX Connect, a mobile software application that empowers families to access services and support with no questions asked.

During the project, +BOX will pilot test +BOX Connect with Bella Mente Academy, a K-8 charter school, to understand the potential for +BOX Connect to increase participation in nutrition security programs, like +BOX,

among low-income households, while simultaneously creating a vibrant market for local farmers that increases revenue and the opportunity to reach profitability.

The USDA awarded \$64 million via 185 grant projects to expand and strengthen local and regional food systems and increase the availability of locally grown agricultural products. The funding will be distributed through the Local Agriculture Market Program's (LAMP) [Farmers Market](#) and [Local Food Promotion](#) Programs (FMLFPP) and the [Regional Food System Partnerships](#) (RFSP) grant program.

"These grant programs provide crucial funding for projects, including farm to institution efforts, that will improve community access to fresh, locally sourced food and strengthen market opportunities for local and regional food producers," said USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt. "USDA is committed to supporting states and territories as they administer these programs across the nation."

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one in five people in San Diego County were food insecure. Now, one in three San Diegans experience food insecurity, which means they are unable to provide three nutritious meals per day for themselves or their families. Almost 40% of children in San Diego are food insecure.

+BOX's warehouse and distribution center is in Carlsbad. They are always looking for volunteers to participate in their Pack Outs – Monday through Thursday at 4:00 p.m. – where they assemble and pack-up boxes with healthy and nutritious ingredients for food insecure students and their families. For details, visit [www.plus-box.org/volunteer](http://www.plus-box.org/volunteer).

+BOX is a 501c3 nonprofit that relies on the generosity of its supporters. Donors are welcome to make a tax-deductible donation via [www.plus-box.org/give-a-box](http://www.plus-box.org/give-a-box). For more information, visit [www.plus-box.org](http://www.plus-box.org).

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#### About +BOX

*Launched in April 2020, +BOX (PlusBox) delivers solutions to food insecurity that improve nutrition, expand access, and support sustainability. Our nutrition program delivers fresh, healthy, nutrient rich foods to children and families on a weekly basis by partnering with local growers, food rescuers, and neighborhood schools. For more information, visit [www.plus-box.org](http://www.plus-box.org).*