



For Immediate Release

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(Not for publication)

+BOX Program Launches Pilot Program for App that Expands Access to Healthy Food

***Local North County Food Assistance program*

provides weekly boxes of nutrient-rich foods for students and their families;

*+BOX Connect will launch at Bella Monte Montessori Academy in Vista for local low-income families ***

Encinitas, Calif. (Sept. 14, 2023) – [+BOX \(PlusBox\)](#) – a nonprofit program that partners with local farms, food rescue organizations and neighborhood schools to provide food insecure children and their families with fresh healthy food – launches pilot program for new app, called +BOX Connect, which received support from the [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) late last year. The app will increase food insecure families' access to, and availability of, locally grown produce in low-income/low-access communities.

The pilot program will take place at [Bella Monte Montessori Academy](#), a free TK-8th grade public charter school in Vista, this September.

+BOX CONNECT is a mobile-friendly web application that empowers food insecure families to privately opt-in to nutrition support programs with no questions asked. Automated data capture streamlines need assessment, program enrollment, and impact reporting, reducing the administrative burden on educators and their non-profit partners who simply want to provide reliable access to healthy food for vulnerable students and families.

“The +BOX Connect model to opt-in instead of seek-out food resources will revolutionize accessibility for food insecure families,” 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.

This fall +BOX is pilot testing +BOX Connect 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.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one in five people in San Diego County were food insecure. Now, one in four San Diegans experience food insecurity, which means they are unable to provide three nutritious meals per day for themselves or their families. Almost 200,000 children in San Diego are food insecure. “Food security is a basic need, which +BOX is meeting for our families,” said Erin Feeley, executive director of Bella Monte Montessori Academy. “Without their basic needs met, we could not help our students be so successful.”

Awarded a total of more than \$137,000, the USDA funding was used to develop and pilot +BOX Connect, which 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.

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.

To learn more or schedule a +BOX Connect demonstration, contact Wesley Burt at wesley@equationcollaborative.org or call (213) 952-2071.

+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. For more information, visit 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.