

May 6, 2020

To Whom This May Concern:

In this time of global crisis, we have been reminded of the importance of reliable infrastructure and consistent access to basic needs. Food security is a concern that many people struggle with, particularly in urban areas where the availability of nutritious food can be limited and opportunities for growing food don't exist. Recognizing this reality and wanting to support change consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,<sup>1</sup> this project represents an opportunity to support all efforts to bring food sovereignty to communities in need in Cuenca, Ecuador.

The Environmental School at Universidad Del Azuay (UDA) is applying for available grant support to develop a pilot project to help low-income and at-risk families struggling with the fallout from COVID-19. The project, which would be funded through a one-year grant from the U.S. Embassy in Ecuador [<https://ec.usembassy.gov/notice-of-funding-opportunity-5/>], intends to create urban gardening and hydroponic opportunities for vulnerable families in the city, focusing specifically on socio-economic sectors struggling most significantly under the current conditions. Through a combination of community garden plots and home-based hydroponic systems, families in Cuenca will gain access to grown food as well as opportunities to create markets for garden surplus. Gardening efforts will be supported locally and (per requirement of the grant) internationally.

Local support will be via Universidad Del Azuay, local municipalities, and community sustainability stewards. International support will include the exchange of technical expertise with organizations in the U.S. with a similar mission of food security. Overall, this project intends to help vulnerable communities in Cuenca move towards food sovereignty; support the local economy during recovery from COVID-19; and support the development of local sustainability initiatives and skills exchange. Following the development of the pilot project, strategies and skills will be expanded to include other neighborhoods in Cuenca, with community garden members serving in educational roles.

To qualify for the U.S. Embassy grant, groups or individual(s) in Ecuador are required to demonstrate support and collaboration with organizations in the United States. Although international travel is not currently viable, U.S. partners can share experiences and knowledge regarding community urban garden development and operation. Maine has many inspiring and successful programs to help new Mainers develop sustainable community gardening initiatives and markets, and collaboration with the development of project such as this one in Cuenca affords opportunities for skills development and exchange in both directions. This project would represent one of the first food sovereignty programs in the city of Cuenca and in the country of Ecuador.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>; project supports SDGs 1, 2, 11, 12, 13 and 17

We are reaching out to you to ask whether you would be interested in supporting this project through a willingness to share expertise and technical skills. If you are interested in participating in this capacity and could provide us with a statement to that effect, we will attach your letter to the grant proposal. Our intention with these letters of support is to demonstrate to the funding agency that our goal of developing international partnerships between the Environmental School at Universidad Del Azuay, community members in Cuenca, Ecuador and Maine-based gardening and farming organizations is a viable one.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our project goals.

Best regards,

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