

# Grow Jackson

Growing Food, Feeding Jackson

Grow Jackson is requesting a \$1 million one-time capital investment to construct five commercial kitchens at the River & Rail Food Hub in Jackson, Michigan. This project includes four dedicated entrepreneurship kitchens for small food businesses and one larger education and workforce training kitchen. Together, these spaces address a critical and persistent gap in Michigan's food economy: the lack of affordable, licensed production space that allows entrepreneurs to launch, stabilize, and scale their businesses without taking on significant upfront capital risk.

The four entrepreneurship kitchens will be leased to individual businesses for 12 to 36 months at below-market rates, providing consistent, exclusive access to fully equipped, code-compliant facilities. Unlike traditional shared-use kitchens, which can limit scheduling and production capacity, this model offers entrepreneurs the stability needed to increase output, hire employees, refine products, and build both wholesale and direct-to-consumer markets. By reducing barriers to entry and supporting business growth, this investment strengthens Michigan's small business ecosystem, supports value-added agriculture, and keeps more food dollars circulating within local communities.

The education and workforce training kitchen will serve as a hub for culinary training, nutrition education, and job preparation. It will support both youth and adults in developing practical skills in cooking, food safety, and food production, aligned with high-demand sectors such as food service, institutional kitchens, and food manufacturing. This creates a direct and accessible pathway into employment while helping address ongoing labor shortages across the state.

Located in a low-income area where many residents face barriers to accessing fresh, healthy food, the River & Rail Food Hub integrates these kitchens into a broader, community-centered ecosystem. This includes a locally sourced farm stop, a revitalized farmers market, and a mobile market that expands geographic access. Together, these components create a complete pipeline from workforce training to production to sales, increasing access to affordable, nutritious food while supporting local farmers and food producers. This appropriation represents a strategic and responsible use of taxpayer dollars by funding permanent infrastructure that will generate long-term economic, workforce, and public health benefits. It leverages more than \$1 million in non-state funding from federal, philanthropic, and private sources, maximizing return on investment. Aligned with regional and statewide priorities, this project not only strengthens Jackson's economy but also serves as a scalable, replicable model for other Michigan communities seeking to build resilient, locally driven food systems.