

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Southwest Colorado Food System: **Middle of the Supply Chain Strategic Framework**

RFP Issued: October 14, 2026

Questions Due: November 19, 2026

Proposals Due: November 23, 2026

Anticipated Contract: \$30,000-40,000

Primary Contact: Lauren Ames, Food Security Director, lauren@goodfoodcollective.org

1. RFP Overview

The Good Food Collective (GFC) is seeking proposals from qualified consultants or consulting teams to develop a regional **Middle of the Supply Chain Ecosystem Strategy** for Southwest Colorado's food system. While existing research clearly documents the barriers faced by local producers and buyers, this project synthesizes known gaps into a strategic framework to guide future regional collaboration and investment. Using a systems lens across five counties and two Tribal communities, the selected consultant will evaluate food flows, map existing assets and identify critical gaps, and analyze 3–5 potential operational models to help GFC and regional partners determine what actionable, viable solutions could be implemented to support our regional food system.

2. About the Good Food Collective

The Good Food Collective works with partners to build a Southwest Colorado food system that is strong, fair, and works for everyone - supporting farmers, ranchers, and food businesses while making sure all residents have the food they need to thrive. GFC serves a five-county region - La Plata, Montezuma, Dolores, Archuleta, and San Juan counties - and works in partnership with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.

GFC serves as a convener, coordinator, and backbone organization across the regional food system. Its work connects producers, food businesses, distributors, schools, health care institutions, emergency food providers, local and state government, Tribal partners, funders, and community leaders. GFC is commissioning this assessment to help the region move from individual projects and known infrastructure gaps toward coordinated, financially viable, and appropriately governed middle-of-the-supply-chain solutions.



3. Project Context

Southwest Colorado is a rural and remote region characterized by residents' deep sense of place, stunning natural beauty, and strong agricultural traditions. The five southwestern counties and two tribal nations that make up this corner of our state cover over 6500 square miles, with an average population density of 11.58 people per square mile. According to the 2021 Farm Census, there are over 2,900 farms active across our region. We have mid size export farms and ranches that specialize in livestock (primarily beef cattle), hay and forage crop production, and dryland crop production (primarily wheat and beans). We also have many small farms and ranches (between 1-10 acres in production) whose end markets are local. These operations primarily sell direct to consumers via farmers markets, farm stands, or CSAs. Secondary outlets include local grocery stores, restaurants, food banks and pantries, and other local wholesale channels. In 2022, the average market value of agricultural products sold per farm in Southwest Colorado were between \$29,243 to \$37,233. In addition to feeding our communities, agriculture is an essential part of our economy. In Archuleta, Montezuma, Dolores, and La Plata Counties, agriculture is considered a 'base industry', meaning that it is one of the most critical drivers of the economy both within communities, as well as, across the region. In their Community Economic Development Strategies, the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Nations call out food sovereignty and agricultural innovation as priority areas.

Nonetheless, Southwest Colorado small and mid-size producers and wholesale buyers face persistent barriers between production and end markets. These include insufficient or fragmented aggregation, cold and dry storage, value-added processing, transportation, distribution, brokering, inventory coordination, food-safety capacity, and market information. The region also has existing assets, operators, facilities, relationships, and emerging opportunities that should be strengthened rather than duplicated or competing.

Southwest Colorado has wholesale buyers that value local food procurement— like schools, food pantries and food banks, healthcare institutions, independent grocery stores, and restaurants. At the same time, efforts are underway to grow the regional producer base and support existing food businesses to scale. There have also been several investments, at various scales and in different sectors, in supply chain infrastructure and equipment in the last five years. However, local producers still report that they lack access to mid-scale storage, processing, and distribution which prevent them from accessing markets, maintaining farm viability, and halting growth. Similarly, local wholesale buyers report challenges like inconsistent supply, high prices, storage, and access to loading docks as barriers to purchasing local food.



These challenges and needs are well documented in surveys, listening sessions, convenings, and reports. Primary data collection will build heavily on GFC's existing dataset:

1. Four Corners Rocky Mountain Farmers Union 2026 report
2. 2022 Southwest Food and Agriculture Summit [Findings](#)
3. 2024 Southwest Food and Agriculture Summit [Findings](#)
4. 2025 Southwest Food and Agriculture Summit [Findings](#)
5. 2022 Good Food Collective Wholesale Buyer/Seller Survey [Results](#)
6. La Plata County Food System [Plan](#):
7. 2023 La Plata Food Business Findings [Report](#):
8. 2025 La Plata Shared Kitchen [Survey](#):
9. Southern Ute Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) [Report](#)
10. Ute Mountain Ute Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2026-2027 [Report](#)
11. 2026 Montezuma, Dolores, and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe [Food Security Action Framework](#)
12. 2026 Dove Creek Summertime Meal Debrief
13. Southwest Local Food Purchasing Assistance (LFPA) [Report](#)
14. Colorado Department of Agriculture's Community Food Access grants and tax credit applications
15. Colorado's Farm to Loading Dock [Report](#)
16. Colorado's Resilient Food System Infrastructure (RFSI) proposed and awarded [projects](#)
17. Colorado's Business Builder awarded [projects](#)
18. Southwest Farm Fresh Co-op (Case Study)

Certain reports and studies referenced above are non-public. We will share these documents with the selected consultant(s) upon execution of the contract.

The next phase requires a clearer understanding of what middle-supply-chain infrastructure and functions are needed at what scale; whether demand and supply can support them; and which solutions and models fit the region.

4. Project Purpose and Intended Outcome

The purpose of this project is to determine which middle-of-the-supply-chain interventions are needed in Southwest Colorado that can most effectively and feasibly increase the flow of locally and regionally produced food, including specialty crops, poultry products, meat, grains for human consumption, and value-add products to dependable markets, strengthen producer and food-business viability, and overall improve access to good food. The strategic framework



should be created using a systems-lens, meaning it should identify opportunities for expansion across local producers, supply chain, and wholesale buyers rather than segment them.

The final product must enable the GFC and partners to:

1. Have a more granular understanding of the Middle of Supply Chain pain points and gaps which more clearly delineates differences which gets us past the notion of “our middle of the supply chain is lacking” to a point where we can clearly state that “the evidence shows that our middle of the supply chain needs to address these issues.”
2. Clearly define which middle-of-the-supply-chain functions GFC and other partners should lead, support, convene & coordinate, incubate, or defer to private business or partner organizations.
3. Identify which physical, mobile, or organizational infrastructure models (e.g., shared logistics, modular processing, aggregation hubs) merit capital investment and grant seeking over the next 3–5 years.
4. Assess realistic order-of-magnitude capital costs, operating expenses, revenue streams, and risk allocations for recommended solutions before committing capital or launching operations.
5. Maximize underutilized facilities, equipment, and logistics routes across the five-county region and Tribal partner communities before building redundant infrastructure.
6. Match regional producer capacities with wholesale, institutional, retail, and emergency food demand through viable aggregation, distribution, and procurement pathways.
7. Target interventions that lower barriers to market access, reduce disproportionate cost/risk burdens, and expand economic opportunity for small-scale, Indigenous, and historically excluded producers and food enterprises.

5. Geographic and Market Scope

The primary geographic boundaries are Southwest Colorado, including La Plata, Montezuma, Dolores, Archuleta, and San Juan counties and, where we are invited and where appropriate, the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Tribal communities. The consultant should also consider cross-border supply and market relationships that materially affect feasibility, including relevant connections with other parts of Colorado and the Four Corners region.

Producers will include small to mid size farmers, ranchers, value-add manufacturers, and producers who are growing and raising specialty crops, poultry products, meat, grains for human consumption, and processing value-add products in Southwest Colorado.



End markets should include schools health care, senior-serving institutions, Tribal institutions, food pantries and food banks, grocery stores and other food retailers, restaurants, food hubs, and other wholesale buyers.

6. Scope of Work

GFC expects a collaborative, mixed-method approach that analyzes Southwest Colorado's middle food supply chain through a holistic 'systems lens.' Rather than evaluating production, processing, distribution, and end markets as isolated segments, this project will examine the structural bottlenecks and feedback loops across the entire regional food ecosystem. The project will synthesize existing data, validate findings and fill in data gaps with targeted stakeholder engagement and research, and design interconnected, operational solutions. The GFC will form and convene an Advisory Committee with geographic and sector representation reflective of our region to ground-truth strategy throughout the project.

Phase 1: Project Initiation, Methodology, and Data Synthesis

- Launch the project with GFC and the Advisory Group to finalize core decision questions, systemic boundaries, engagement strategy, timeline, and final deliverable structures.
- Deliver a methodology memo establishing a holistic evaluation framework (linking operational feasibility, producer viability, local market opportunities, regional economic multiplier effects, equity, and food access).
- Review and synthesize GFC's 18+ existing regional and statewide reports, datasets, and surveys.
- Gather additional secondary data to fill in critical information gaps to construct a baseline picture of regional food flows, seasonal bottlenecks, and cross-sector dependencies without duplicating past research.

Phase 2: Targeted Asset and Gap Assessment

- **Supply & Demand Synthesis:** Map product flows, volumes, and seasonal imbalances across primary categories (specialty crops, meat, poultry products, grains, value-add) relative to institutional, retail, and emergency food demand.
- **High-Level Asset & Route Mapping:** Create a high-level visual inventory of regional middle-supply-chain assets (storage, processing, distribution, logistics routes, workforce), evaluating opportunities for co-location, shared equipment, and multi-use coordination across the 5-county region and Tribal partner communities.



- **Stakeholder Validation & Outreach:** Conduct interviews and at least three focus groups to validate secondary research and uncover operational or financial bottlenecks.
- **Gap, Risk & Bottleneck Analysis:** Identify structural service gaps, underutilized infrastructure, cost/risk burdens across the chain, and specific barriers facing small, Indigenous, and historically excluded producers.

Phase 3: Models and Solutions

- Identify 3 to 5 potential operational or organizational models tailored to the region's scale. Models should focus on solutions that serve multiple producer types and market outlets simultaneously (e.g., shared, routes-based transportation fleet; distributed micro-processing & aggregation pods; or co-located Farm-to-Loading Dock micro nodes)
- Share 3 to 5 relevant peer models from rural, geographically dispersed, or Tribal contexts, highlighting how other communities overcame similar geographic, spatial, scale, and supply/demand challenges.
- Compare and evaluate the proposed models. Identify where the leverage points are, and outline the options, models, and decision pathways that GFC and its regional partners can collectively explore.

7. Required Deliverables

1. **Project work plan and methodology memo:**
 - Finalized research questions, methods, community engagement plan, data needs, site-visit itinerary, evaluation criteria, schedule, and deliverable outline.
2. **Integrated Regional Food System & Asset Assessment:**
 - A concise synthesis report analyzing regional food flows, seasonal supply-demand mismatches, asset network gaps, and structural equity barriers
 - A visual regional asset map and an editable data inventory (Excel/CSV format) capturing facilities, operators, and logistics connections that can be edited after the project to capture change over time.
3. **Ecosystem models:**
 - A side-by-side analysis of 3 to 5 networked operational models, including what operational models exist, what conditions make them viable in our region, and what role should GFC play versus other partners.
 - Outline the order-of-magnitude trade-offs, financial profiles, and governance options so GFC and partners can decide together who leads, supports, or incubates each piece
 - Summary of peer, regional case studies and key takeaways.
4. **Source files and handoff:**



- All final and editable source files, models, datasets, maps, interview instruments, and presentation materials, accompanied by a handoff session with GFC staff.

8. Stakeholder Engagement and Project Governance

The consultant will be expected to design an engagement process that is focused enough to be efficient while ensuring that recommendations reflect the lived and operating realities of the people who produce, move, purchase, prepare, and access food.

The engagement approach should include, as appropriate:

- Farmers, ranchers, and food entrepreneurs representing different products, scales, geographies, and market experience.
- Food hubs, distributors, aggregators, processors, transporters, storage operators, and existing or prospective facility operators.
- Institutional and wholesale buyers, including schools, health care, senior services, Tribal institutions, food banks and food pantries, grocery stores and other retailers, and restaurants.
- Local, Tribal, state, and federal government representatives with relevant roles in economic development, agriculture, procurement, transportation, public health, land use, and infrastructure.
- Community leaders and organizations representing people most affected by food insecurity and inequitable access to markets and capital.
- Funders, lenders, impact investors, community development finance organizations, and other capital partners.

Proposals should describe how the consultant will compensate or otherwise reduce barriers to participation when asking producers, food entrepreneurs, wholesale buyers, or other community members to contribute substantial time, and how confidential business information will be handled.

9. GFC Contributions and Project Leadership

GFC expects this work to be a partnership rather than a consultant-led process operating at a distance. GFC can contribute staff time, an advisory committee, institutional and local knowledge, and on-the-ground capacity. However, internal staff time is limited to the areas below:



Lauren Ames, Food Security Director

Lauren Ames will serve as GFC's primary point of contact and project manager. Lauren will recruit, form, coordinate, and facilitate the Advisory Committee; support the design and execution of engagement activities and interviews; contribute to data synthesis and strategic model development; and ensure the project remains aligned with GFC's desired outcomes and funder expectations. Lauren has approximately four hours per week available for this project through December 31, 2026, and approximately six hours per week from January through April 2027. The consultant's schedule should make strategic use of this concentrated capacity during project launch, engagement, analysis, and model development.

Rachel Landis, Executive Director

Rachel Landis will support the project as needed to ensure organizational alignment, help secure necessary funding and resources, and serve as an additional thought partner. Rachel will serve as the final organizational signatory for any major changes to the approved project scope, schedule, budget, or strategic direction.

Regional relationships and convening capacity

GFC brings established relationships, deep community trust, and a robust regional food-system network. GFC can use these relationships to help convene key decision-makers, prospective partners, and subject-matter experts for the Advisory Committee, interviews, and validation sessions. This local access and convening capacity is a critical enabling factor for completing meaningful regional engagement within the proposed project timeline.

10. Consultant Qualifications

Competitive respondents will demonstrate:

- Direct experience assessing and developing regional food supply chains, food hubs, aggregation and distribution systems, value-added processing, institutional procurement, or comparable middle-supply-chain enterprises.
- Experience with food systems and systems thinking.
- Knowledge of rural and geographically dispersed markets; experience in the Mountain West, Four Corners, or Tribal contexts is strongly preferred.
- Skill in equitable stakeholder engagement and in working with small and historically underserved producers, food businesses, and communities.
- Ability to facilitate candid cross-sector decision-making among businesses, institutions, government, nonprofit organizations, and community partners.



- Ability to think and develop solutions that are strategic, place-based, and creative.
- Excellent written, visual, and verbal communication, including the ability to present complex financial and operational findings to varied audiences.

11. Budget and Contract Parameters

GFC has established a not-to-exceed contract budget of \$40,000, inclusive of travel, lodging, meals, stakeholder-engagement costs including stipends or honorariums, materials, and all other expenses. Respondents should propose a scope that can be completed within this ceiling and should clearly identify any assumptions or optional work that affects cost.

Payments will be tied to mutually agreed milestones and acceptance of deliverables. The final contract will establish payment schedule, confidentiality, data handling, insurance, ownership and permitted use of work product, and other standard terms.

12. Anticipated Schedule

GFC anticipates an approximately eight-month consulting engagement beginning in January 2027 and concluding by July 15, 2027. The schedule below is intended to allow sufficient time for regional engagement, market validation, financial analysis, stakeholder review, and revision while still moving viable concepts toward funding and implementation discussions during 2027.

Milestone	Anticipated Date
RFP released	October 14, 2026
Deadline for questions	November 19, 2026
Proposals due	November 23, 2026
Interviews and selection	December 7-16, 2026
Contract executed	December 18, 2026



Milestone	Anticipated Date
Project kickoff	January 4, 2027
Planning and methodology	January 4 - mid February 2027
Supply, demand, asset, and gap information gathering	Mid February - April 30, 2027
Data analysis	May 30, 2027
Asset and gap assessment, models/solutions, and recommendations	June 16, 2027
Project close out and handoff	July 15, 2027

Respondents may recommend adjustments to the project schedule, provided the proposal explains how the proposed sequence supports meaningful engagement, sound analysis, and timely decisions. The work plan should include clear decision points at which GFC and its partners determine which concepts warrant further analysis and advancement.

13. Proposal Requirements

Proposals should be concise and include the following, in order:

1. Cover letter and primary contact information.
2. Understanding of the project, including the key feasibility and decision questions the respondent believes must be answered.
3. Proposed approach, methods, work plan, stakeholder-engagement strategy, and schedule.
4. Description of the proposed solutions, models, and recommendations methodology.
5. Project team, roles, relevant qualifications, availability, and ID any subcontractors.
6. Two or three examples of comparable work, with links or attachments where available, and at least two client references.



7. Detailed budget including estimated hours, travel, community engagement expenses, etc.
8. Disclosure of actual or potential conflicts of interest.
9. Any assumptions, requested client contributions, or data dependencies that could materially affect scope, cost, or schedule.

14. Evaluation Criteria

Criterion	Weight	What GFC Will Consider
Understanding and approach	25%	Clarity of project understanding; rigor, practicality, and fit of the proposed methods.
Relevant experience and team	25%	Food supply-chain, business-modeling, finance, institutional procurement, rural and Tribal-context experience; team capacity.
Quality and usability of proposed deliverables	20%	Likelihood that the work will produce useful models and recommendations that the GFC and partners can implement.
Stakeholder engagement	15%	Approach to inclusive, efficient, and respectful engagement and validation.
Budget and value	10%	Cost reasonableness, transparency, and value within the available budget.



Criterion	Weight	What GFC Will Consider
References	5%	Track record, quality of deliverable execution, and client satisfaction.

15. Submission Instructions and Questions

Submit one electronic PDF proposal by November 23 to Lauren Ames, lauren@goodfoodcollective.org with the subject line: **Middle Supply Chain Strategic Framework Proposal - [Respondent Name]**

Proposals received after the deadline may not be considered. Submit written questions by November 19 to the same email address.