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**Fresno-Merced Ag Tech Initiative scores Nation-wide Federal Grant**

*Local coalition will compete for up to \$100 million to supercharge Central Valley economy*

Fresno, Calif.— The Fresno-Merced Future of Food Innovation coalition, led by the Central Valley Community Foundation (CVCF), was named by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) as a finalist in the \$1 billion Build Back Better Regional Challenge. The coalition will advance to Phase 2 and compete for up to \$100 million in American Rescue Plan funding to develop and scale the food and agriculture technology engineering industry in the Central Valley, support small farmers and food entrepreneurs, and improve the local food system.

The challenge is assisting communities nationwide in their efforts to accelerate economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and build local economies that are resilient to future economic shocks. The Build Back Better Regional Challenge is the largest economic development initiative from the U.S. Department of Commerce in decades.

Key coalition partners include the California Department of Food and Agriculture, University of California, Merced; Fresno State; the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Fresno Metro Ministry; Cultiva La Salud; Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation; the City of Fresno; and the community colleges serving the five-county region.

EDA received 529 applications from regions in all 50 states and five territories, and the 60 finalists represent regions that formed extraordinary coalitions, demonstrated

regional needs, and presented bold proposals to grow their target industry clusters. Ranging from rural communities and coastal towns to major metros, the finalists make up a diverse cross-section of the United States.

In Phase 2, finalists will compete for significant implementation assistance. EDA will award 20-30 coalitions each up to \$100 million. These awards will assist communities in executing ambitious plans to supercharge their regional economies across a variety of strategic growth sectors. The deadline for Phase 2 applications is March 15, 2022.

"We are elated to be awarded this funding, and we are so appreciative of the EDA for believing in the future of the Central Valley," stated CVCF CEO Ashley Swearingin. "F3 will help diversify our regional economy by developing clean technology needed for sustainable food production both here and around the world, and it will help connect our small farms and local-serving food businesses to global economic opportunity."

The Central Valley is the top agriculture producer in the nation and impacts agriculture on a global scale but captures little of the value-added processing and technology that would add higher-paying, stable jobs for the residents of our region.

F3 will develop a world-class, Climate-Smart Food and Ag Tech Engineering Cluster that develops advanced, sustainable food production and food manufacturing focused on cross-disciplinary engineering capabilities in digitalization and data science, mechatronics, equipment, and systems integration. F3 is part of the greater Fresno DRIVE (Developing the Region's Inclusive and Vibrant Economy) initiative also supported by CVCF.

"UC Merced was built in the Valley, for the Valley, and this grant funding is squarely within our core mission of uplifting the region," said UC Merced Chancellor Juan Sánchez Muñoz. "We are proud to partner with such dedicated organizations in advancing the economic prosperity and food security of our immediate community and the nation."

F3's application to the Economic Development Administration proposes five inter-related projects that support the development of the Climate Smart Food and Ag Technology cluster, including research and development, workforce development, support for the local food system, and investment in small businesses and micro-enterprises in the food industry.

"Fresno State is excited to participate as a full partner in this important effort," said Fresno State President Dr. Saùl Jimènez-Sandoval. "F3 establishes the foundation for the farmer of the future and plays a vital role in helping our Valley address the challenges of producing 60 percent more food by the year 2050."



“F3 will allow for the creation of a more inclusive, just, and fair food system where even the smallest micro business, like mobile vendors, can share in the economic prosperity generated, said Genoveva Islas, Founder and Director of Cultiva La Salud. “This is a huge win for the Valley!”

### **About the Central Valley Community Foundation**

The Central Valley Community Foundation (CVCF) has been a trusted partner in philanthropy in the Central Valley for more than 50 years. Its mission is to connect capital and communities for a just and thriving Central Valley. As the only nationally-accredited community foundation serving the six-county Central San Joaquin Valley, CVCF attracts investment and deploys resources to solve persistent economic, environmental, and social challenges in the Central Valley.

[www.CentralValleyCF.org](http://www.CentralValleyCF.org) | Follow @CentralValleyCF on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

### **About Fresno DRIVE**

The Fresno DRIVE Initiative (Developing the Region’s Inclusive and Vibrant Economy) is a 10-year community investment plan drafted with input from a 300-person steering committee representing over 150 organizations in the Greater Fresno Region. The comprehensive plan identified a portfolio of investable initiatives aimed at increasing economic mobility and addressing racial disparities. The plan is comprised of 19 initiatives in three sectors: economic development, human capital and neighborhood development. The Urban Institute’s 2018 research on economic mobility in California’s largest cities revealed that Fresno ranks 59th out of 59 for economic and racial disparity.

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### **About the American Rescue Plan Programs**

The Build Back Better Regional Challenge is one of many EDA programs aimed at building strong regional economies and supporting community-led economic development. Under the American Rescue Plan, EDA was allocated \$3 billion in supplemental funding to assist communities nationwide in their efforts to build back better by accelerating the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and building local economies that will be resilient to future economic shocks.

American Rescue Plan funding enables EDA to provide larger, more transformational investments across the nation while utilizing its greatest strengths, including flexible funding to support community-led economic development. With an emphasis on equity, EDA investments made under the American Rescue Plan will directly benefit previously underserved communities impacted by COVID-19. For more information about EDA’s American Rescue Plan programs, visit [eda.gov/ARPA](http://eda.gov/ARPA).

**About the U.S. Economic Development Administration**

The mission of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) is to lead the federal economic development agenda by promoting competitiveness and preparing the nation's regions for growth and success in the worldwide economy. An agency within the U.S. Department of Commerce, EDA invests in communities and supports regional collaboration in order to create jobs for U.S. workers, promote American innovation, and accelerate long-term sustainable economic growth. For more information about EDA, visit [eda.gov](http://eda.gov).

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