



PRESS RELEASE

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Dougherty County, Flint River Fresh, and UGA Extension Service awarded \$100,000 Aetna Foundation grant to advance health equity in Dougherty County

DOUGHERTY COUNTY, GA – Dougherty County has announced its selection to receive a grant as part of the Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge, a program funded by the Aetna Foundation, together with the American Public Health Association (APHA) and the National Association of Counties (NACo), supporting communities that are changing the way they work together across sectors to reduce disparities in chronic disease outcomes.

“Access to healthcare and healthy food, as well as other social determinants of health, can significantly impact rates of chronic disease and other health outcomes, with average life spans varying by up to 20 to 30 years in communities that are just a few miles apart,” said Eileen Howard Boone, President of the Aetna Foundation. “We are proud to partner with APHA and NACo to support the work of Dougherty County to drive change and address these social determinants of health – work that is now more important than ever, given the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Dougherty County is leading one of the 20 teams chosen to participate in the Challenge. The team will receive \$100,000 to take action to change the food access system in Albany and Dougherty County and engage community residents as leaders in their work. In addition to the funding, Dougherty County, Flint River Fresh and UGA Extension Service and their partners will participate in one-on-one technical assistance provided by APHA/NACo and a supportive peer-learning network led by *Healthy Places by Design* over the course of the two years.

The project team that will lead the initiative in Dougherty County includes: Dougherty County, Flint River Fresh, and the University of Georgia (UGA) Extension Service. The team will take steps to advance health equity in the county where individuals are disproportionately impacted by health disparities compared to other communities in Georgia.

“The end goal is to go into areas that are food deserts with limited access to healthy food choices and help establish more community garden spaces and develop local community champions by providing tools and resources they need to make an impact where they live,” said Fredando (“Farmer Fredo”) Jackson, Executive Director of Flint River Fresh. “We are working with local government to create policies and economic opportunities to bring fresh food into our local communities.”

The team is proposing an initiative entitled “Dougherty Fresh,” with a goal to create food access and nutritional awareness in underserved communities in Dougherty County.

Dougherty Fresh will work to support the initiative in several ways, including: developing a strategic vision for urban agriculture conversation within our community; working with local government and area businesses to ensure continued success and sustainability of this program beyond inception; coordinate an urban agriculture program to complement and expand current community initiatives, such as addressing food deserts, work with local government to secure the food system, and support farmers and local food hub plans; build partnerships with local government, business, farmers, and others; increase access to healthy, local foods in low-income areas; develop a plan to address food deserts; create opportunities to merge existing initiatives into one large-scale, long-term coordinated effort; develop financial opportunities to support long-term viability of the initiative; and secure funds in partnership with this initiative to ensure longevity and impact.

“The proposed project is an excellent opportunity to enhance our community’s health, sustainability, and connection to the food system,” said James Morgan, Dougherty County Extension Coordinator/Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, UGA. “UGA Extension is pleased to partner with the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District toward this important effort to support urban agriculture and conversation in our local community and we look forward to working with Dougherty County, Flint River Fresh, and other partners in collaboration toward this project.”

“There is no one-size-fits-all approach to achieving health equity,” said APHA Executive Director, Georges C. Benjamin, M.D. “Successful, lasting change comes from cross-sector partnerships and engaging affected individuals and communities, which is why this challenge is so powerful. Together, communities in the Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge will be able to achieve enduring transformations to public health.”

“Counties play an essential role in protecting, promoting and improving health in our communities across the country,” said Mary Ann Borgeson, NACo President. “The Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge recognizes the positive impact of cross-sector partnerships and offers opportunities for counties to develop innovative approaches to meet residents’ health needs.”

For more information, visit healthiestcities.org/communities/Dougherty-county.

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About Dougherty County, Georgia

Located in the heart of Southwest Georgia, Dougherty County is home to internationally recognized quail plantations, a university and technical college. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for all citizens by being accessible and good stewards of our resources, delivering cost-effective, responsive services with integrity, fairness, and friendliness. For more information, visit Dougherty.ga.us. Or, find us on Facebook at facebook.com/Dougherty.ga.us or on Instagram and Twitter @1doughertycoga.