

Is There a Grocery Store Near You?

Many low-income families do not have access to a grocery store that offers a quality selection of products at modest prices. That makes it virtually impossible to afford a balanced diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables.

Utilizing a \$10 million investment by the Rendell Administration, the Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI) is working to change that through grants and loans to businesses that want to start or expand grocery stores in under-served areas.

Hannah Burton of The Food Trust in Philadelphia is monitoring the impact of the Initiative and promoting its expansion. She reports that to date 23 projects have been approved for eligibility and eight have received funding commitments. The eight stores are located in Philadelphia, Eddystone, Darby, Gettysburg, and Pittsburgh and involve total project costs of more than \$22 million. The FFFI has committed \$6,685,000 million in grants and loans to leverage this investment. These eight projects will result in the creation of more than 1,000 new jobs and represent approximately 290,000 square feet of new retail space.

Projects in the financing pipeline are diverse in size, ranging from a 1,000 square foot produce store to a 57,000 square foot full service supermarket. The Initiative is going so well that Governor Rendell's 2006 budget invested an additional \$10 million, which will be leveraged to create an \$80 million financing pool.

The lead partners in the venture are the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and The Reinvestment Fund, a nonprofit lender.