



March 25, 2024

Commissioner Angela Tovar
Commissioner, City of Chicago Department of Environment
Via Electronic Mail

Re: Support for City of Chicago and County of Cook Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) Food Waste Proposal

Dear Commissioner Tovar,

The NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council) supports the coalition application from the City of Chicago and County of Cook for \$199m for the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants (CPRG) implementation grant. This letter of support is focused on the coalition proposal's food waste reduction strategy component. Through NRDC's Food Matters initiative, we have worked with the City of Chicago to develop strategies to reduce food waste and a multi-agency team dedicated to that work. Over the past three years, our partnership has catalyzed city-wide initiatives ranging from implementing community composting efforts to mapping out opportunities that ensure high-quality surplus food reaches food insecure residents. Chicago's Climate Action Plan (CAP) recognizes waste reduction as a key climate solution, acknowledging that solid waste and wastewater activities account for 7% of the greenhouse gas emissions generated within the city. The CAP's ambitious goals include 90% diversion of residential waste and implementation of equitable waste prevention strategies by 2030. Yet, according to Cook County, the diversion rate for Cook County and Chicago currently sits at only 19% and the region is facing a landfill crisis as there are only four years of landfill capacity left. Achieving these milestones by 2030 demands immediate bold action and substantial funding, propelling Chicagoland towards waste reduction benchmarks on par with those seen in other leading U.S. metropolitan areas. We believe Chicago and Cook County are well positioned to achieve these benchmarks with critical funding from the CPRG implementation grant.

The Chicago/Cook County CRPG coalition proposal advances highly effective greenhouse gas reduction strategies that also have strong environmental justice benefits. One component of the CPRG proposal is a food waste reduction strategy which will include funding for a municipal curbside food scrap collection program, support for industrial, institutional, and commercial entities to implement new or improved organic composting program and food donation programs, expanded composting across Chicago's Public Schools, and new staff positions to manage implementation. The strategy will support cross-agency coordination, infrastructure development, and regional collaboration with a focus on prevention of wasted food across the board. These measures will directly support the ongoing work that NRDC's Food Matters initiative has helped to catalyze and the ambitious CAP goals.

Reducing food waste sits at the intersection of several major crises facing our communities today. When food is sent to landfills, it decomposes, releasing methane—a greenhouse gas more potent than carbon dioxide (IPCC). Methane is a major contributor to climate change, which is causing more extreme weather events, droughts, fires, and other threats that will be felt most acutely in major population centers and diverse

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communities, like the city of Chicago. According to NRDC and EPA modeling, the 2.7 million people who live in Chicago cumulatively generate approximately 512,000 tons of food that goes to waste each year, which emits close to 255,000 MTCO₂e when landfilled. If that food is composted, it prevents 314,000 MTCO₂e, and if that food is eaten and never becomes waste, it can prevent a staggering 2.1 million MTCO₂e. Additionally, according to the Greater Chicago Food Depository, one in five Chicago households is facing food insecurity, underscoring the urgency of maximizing food budgets. The USDA reports that U.S households lose over \$1500 annually on food that goes to waste. Preventing food from becoming waste and redistributing surplus food not only reduces methane emissions from landfills; it bolsters the city's efforts to achieve vital food security, nutrition, public health, and equity goals. Moreover, composting food scraps does not just benefit the environment; it improves soil health—a critical concern in Chicago's environmental justice communities' where concentrations of pollutants are often highest. The practice also helps to prevent soil erosion, reduce flooding risks, advance food sovereignty, conserve water, and improve air quality.

We are committed to supporting the City of Chicago and Cook County in achieving the food waste reduction related workplan described in the proposal. NRDC will not be a sub-recipient on this proposal, will not seek or receive any CPRG, city, or county funding, nor will it be contributing any cost share. Further, no NRDC personnel will serve as primary investigators on this effort. Instead, NRDC intends to provide guidance and support to this effort as part of its mission to reduce food waste across the Chicago region.

The proposal shared by the project team to drastically reduce GHG emissions and food waste is critical for the Chicago region, as well as achieving our national goal of reducing food waste by 50% by 2030, and we look forward to supporting this effort. As one of our nation's largest metro areas, Chicago can show national leadership and quantifiable impact on food waste reduction through the coalition's proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further assistance or information.

Sincerely,

Madeline Keating

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