Region One Education Service Center
1900 W. Schunior, Edinburg, TX 78541 • Ph (956) 984-6000 • Fax (956) 984-7655

Daniel P. King, Ph.D.
Executive Director

March 18, 2024

Dr. Can (John) Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley,
1201 W. University Dr. Edinburg, TX, 78539

Dear Dr. Saygin,

Please accept this letter of support on behalf of Region One Education Service Center (Region One ESC) for the proposed initiative, "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation," proposed by The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) Center for Advanced Manufacturing Innovation and Cyber Systems (CAMICS). Central to this endeavor is the innovative introduction of an expedited composting program targeting school food waste.

This forward-thinking strategy aims to significantly reduce the volume of food waste destined for landfills, thereby curbing methane emissions from these sites. The project envisions equipping school cafeterias with cutting-edge composting machines that boast a sleek, compact design. These machines are engineered to transform food waste into high-quality compost within a mere 24-hour period. Such rapid conversion not only enhances waste management efficiency but also produces nutrient-rich, pathogen-free compost ideal for various applications. Schools stand to benefit immensely, utilizing the resulting compost for beautifying landscapes, growing food onsite, and even supporting entrepreneurial ventures in composting-related fields like vertical and smart farming, as well as initiatives in the green and circular economy. At the heart of these composting machines is the groundbreaking use of a powerful yet entirely safe proprietary bacterium, acidulo™. This technology's ability to swiftly convert organic waste into compost underscores our project's potential to contribute meaningfully to environmental sustainability while fostering economic development within our educational communities.

Region One ESC, as one of the 20 Educational Service Centers granted authority by the State of Texas and recognized as a Local Education Agency with a Non-Profit Designation, holds a strategic and pivotal role in the educational landscape of South Texas. Positioned at the gateway of the United States/Mexico border, we are perfectly placed to serve comprehensively across eight counties and 48 school districts. With a commitment to supporting 675 K-12 campuses that collectively enroll 439,638 students—a notable 96.9% of whom are Hispanic—our role is critically essential in steering the educational endeavors of these communities towards success. Our dedication to the "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation" project is a testament to our alignment with our foundational mission of enhancing educational outcomes and fostering economic development in the communities we fervently serve.

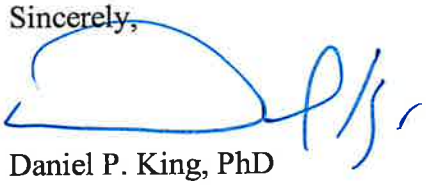
The Region One Educational Service Center in collaboration with UTRGV's CAMICS, is poised to: 1) facilitate collaborations with school districts for the installation of composting machines in cafeterias; 2) provide professional development and training to school districts on recycling, composting, ecological farming, and promoting healthy lifestyles; 3) offer comprehensive training programs -in collaboration to teachers, students, and parents on the advanced manufacturing techniques required to produce, operate, and maintain the composting equipment; 4) Support incubation services for parents and low-income families interested in exploring business opportunities linked to composting, including ventures in vertical farming, smart farming, and the green/circular economy, and; 5) Establish an assessment and evaluation process to ensure the effectiveness of the services and the implementation of the project at school sites.

Our involvement in this project reflects Region One ESC's commitment to collaborative and effective strategies to support our schools. Through comprehensive assessments, building partnerships, offering professional development, efficiently using resources, and carefully overseeing educational programs, we aim to boost student performance, improve operations, and drive economic and social progress in our communities.

We believe this project is key not only to reducing GHG emissions in our area but also as an example for others seeking environmental sustainability. It aligns with the EPA's goals for waste recycling to lower GHG emissions. Additionally, we expect it to generate significant economic growth by creating durable, high-quality jobs in the high-tech manufacturing field, including opportunities for engineers, technicians, and specialists in biology and ecology. This initiative promises to equip our workforce for a future of innovation and prosperity, thanks to the combined strengths of all partners involved.

We are excited about the potential to make a meaningful impact on GHG reduction nationally. If you have any further questions regarding our commitment, please do not hesitate to contact us at 956-984-6000 and/or at dking@esc1.net.

Sincerely,



Daniel P. King, PhD
Executive Director

ESC 20
Serving the Educational Community

April 1, 2024

Dr. Can (John) Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley,
1201 W. University Dr. Edinburg, TX, 78539

Dear Dr. Saygin,

Please accept this letter of support on behalf of Education Service Center, Region 20 (ESC-20), for the proposed initiative, "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation," proposed by The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) Center for Advanced Manufacturing Innovation and Cyber Systems (CAMICS). Central to this endeavor is the innovative introduction of an expedited composting program targeting school food waste.

This strategy aligns with our goals at ESC-20 to significantly reduce the volume of food waste. Schools stand to benefit in equipping their cafeterias with cutting-edge composting machines, engineered to transform food waste into high quality composting, which otherwise would be destined for landfills. The benefit for schools utilizing the resulting compost for school gardens fosters respect and concern for the environment as a whole and an opportunity to observe nature at work and demonstrate interconnections.

ESC-20, as one of the 20 Educational Service Centers granted authority by the State of Texas and recognized as a Local Education Agency with a Non-Profit Designation, holds a strategic and pivotal role in the educational landscape of South-Central Texas. We serve nineteen counties and 58 school districts. With a commitment to supporting 593 K-12 campuses that collectively enroll 443,520 students Our dedication to the "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation" project is a testament to our alignment with our foundational mission of enhancing educational outcomes and fostering economic development in the communities we serve.

Education Service Center, Region 20 in collaboration with UTRGV's CAMICS and other ESC's, is poised to: I) facilitate collaborations with school districts for the installation of composting machines in cafeterias; 2) provide professional development and training to school districts on recycling, composting, ecological farming, and promoting healthy lifestyles; 3) offer comprehensive training programs -in collaboration to teachers, students, and parents on the advanced manufacturing techniques required to produce, operate, and maintain the composting equipment; 4) Support incubation services for parents and low-income families interested in exploring business opportunities linked to composting, including ventures in vertical farming, smart farming, and the green/circular economy, and; 5) Establish an assessment and evaluation process to ensure the effectiveness of the services and the implementation of the project at school sites.

Our involvement in this project reflects ESC-20's commitment to collaborative and effective strategies to support our schools. Through comprehensive assessments, building partnerships, offering professional development, efficiently using resources, and carefully overseeing educational programs, we aim to boost student performance, improve operations, and drive economic and social progress in our communities.

We are excited about the potential to make a meaningful impact on GHG reduction nationally. If you have any further questions regarding our commitment, please do not hesitate to contact us at 210-370-5207 and/or at jaclyn.perez@esc20.net.

Sincerely,

Jeff Goldhorn

Jeff Goldhorn (Apr 1, 2024 15:04 CDT)

Jeff Goldhorn, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Education Service Center, Region 20

Letter of Commitment

Patrik Johansson
President & Owner
CONPAT Group AB
Skarkered 142
SE-313 97 Simlangsdalen
Sweden
patrik@solserv.se
+46 708 31 30 10

March 19, 2024

Dr. Can Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
1201 W. University Dr.
Edinburg, TX 78539

Dear Dr. Saygin,

I am writing on behalf of Conpat, a leading innovator in environmental sustainability solutions based in Sweden, to express our intent to establish a production facility for composting machines in the Rio Grande Valley area. This is to support The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) grant application, "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation." This initiative, which has the potential to significantly improve the health standards of low-income families, is a crucial step towards providing them with high-wage employment opportunities and transforming the region into a clean society.

Our decision to set up this facility hinges on market demand reaching or exceeding 20 composting machines per month. We anticipate this criterion will be met imminently, given the increasing awareness and adoption of composting as a key element of waste management and sustainability efforts.

In conjunction with our investment in local production capabilities, we committee our support to this EPA project as a supplier, and if selected, we will facilitate the placement of our composting machines in schools throughout Texas. We support the educational initiatives, which aim to instill the principles of composting and waste reduction in students from a young age. The acceptance of this proposal is projected to elevate the demand for our machines to approximately 80 units per month.

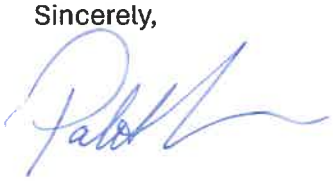
To accommodate this anticipated growth, our proposed facility of 40,000 square feet comprises several advanced manufacturing machines and tools at a total investment of 6 million USD. The production facility will require a diverse and skilled team of approximately 50 employees including 5 CNC operators, 14 qualified welders, 8 assembly personnel, 6 electrical assembly experts, 6 service and maintenance personnel and 8 management employees to manage operations, logistics, and community engagement.

We believe that establishing a production facility in the Rio Grande Valley not only serves our business objectives but also contributes significantly to the local economy through job creation and educational initiatives. Furthermore, this venture aligns with our mission to empower communities to embrace sustainable practices.

We are keen to discuss this project further with your team and explore how we can collaborate with local stakeholders to make this vision a reality. We are prepared to provide additional information and engage in detailed planning discussions at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for considering our letter of intent. We look forward to the possibility of working together to promote sustainability and education within the Rio Grande Valley.

Sincerely,



Patrik Johansson

President & Owner

CONPAT Group AB

VICENTE GONZALEZ
34TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CAPITAL MARKETS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, ILLICIT FINANCE, AND INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–4315

WASHINGTON OFFICE
154 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225–2531

BROWNSVILLE OFFICE
835 E. LEVEE ST., 6TH FLOOR
BROWNSVILLE, TX 78520
(956) 682-5545

gonzalez.house.gov

March 28, 2024

The Honorable Michael S. Regan
Administrator
U.S Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Regan:

I write to express my support for The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grants: Implementation Grants General Competition for their project titled "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation." If awarded, UTRGV would utilize funds to lead the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), in adopting and scaling up food waste recycling programs in schools while also creating high-paying technology jobs in manufacturing.

As you know, food waste contributes significantly to methane gas emissions, comprising 22 percent of municipal solid waste (MSW) and 58 percent of methane gas emissions from landfills. In the United States, we discard nearly 60 million tons of food every year, surpassing any other country globally. Texans alone contribute approximately 5.7 million tons of wasted food annually, with each person generating an estimated 325 pounds of waste. Moreover, each school generates about 67 pounds of food waste per student annually. This excessive food waste predominantly ends up in landfills, where it becomes the single largest component taking up 24 percent of space. UTRGV aims to address this pressing issue by leading a regional effort to adopt and scale up food waste recycling in schools through advanced composting technologies in the RGV. This initiative holds immense promise for transformative environmental, social, educational, and economic benefits, particularly for low-income, underserved, and rural communities. Collaborating with Swedish researchers from Lund University and Solserv AB, UTRGV's Center for Advanced Manufacturing Innovation and Cyber Systems (CAMICS) has developed an innovative technology capable of converting food waste into compost within just 24 hours, significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Unlike existing methods in the Rio Grande Valley that require composting periods of nine months to a year, this approach would offer a faster and more efficient solution to organic waste management.

Additionally, through partnerships with Texas Regional Education Service Centers, local municipalities, and research organizations, UTRGV plans to install large-scale composting facilities, provide incubation services for business opportunities related to composting, and create

high-paying technology jobs in manufacturing. The project would also provide training in additive manufacturing, robotics, PLC programming, and AI which are needed to manufacture, operate, and maintain the composting equipment.

As the Congressman representing the 34th Congressional District of Texas, I commend UTRGV for its leadership and innovation in addressing this critical issue. This project not only aligns with EPA's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions but also presents a unique opportunity to foster economic growth, promote environmental sustainability, and enhance community resilience.

I fully support UTRGV's grant application and ask that you consider this request in accordance with all applicable rules, regulations, laws, and guidelines. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Legislative Director, Jocelyne Barajas, with my office at Jocelyne.Barajas@mail.house.gov or at (202) 225-2531.

Sincerely,

Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

City of McAllen
Office of the Mayor

JAVIER VILLALOBOS
MAYOR

March 21, 2024

Dr. Can Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
1201 W. University Dr.
Edinburg, TX 78539

Dear Dr. Saygin,

On behalf of The City of McAllen, I am pleased to express our support for The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant application, "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation." This initiative, focusing on recycling, conservation, and green energy, aligns perfectly with the city's proactive measures to address environmental and sustainability issues. These initiatives demonstrate the city's commitment to a sustainable future and contribute to its vibrant, engaging, and healthy environment. Importantly, our efforts align with broader regional and global attempts to combat climate change and promote environmental stewardship, further emphasizing the city's commitment.

Currently, the City of McAllen is the only city in the Rio Grande Valley that has an organic waste composting program and facility. Our current system, however, takes between 9 months to 1 year for waste to be composted and requires a large number of acres to store the waste while it is composting. We understand that UTRGV is proposing the implementation of innovative technology that can convert food waste and any organic waste, into compost in just 24 hours, with significant greenhouse gas reduction.

The City supports the proposal UTRGV has outlined that would include the following initiatives:

1. **Collaborative Educational Enhancement:** This initiative takes a comprehensive approach to education and involves a wide range of stakeholders, including UTRGV, Region One ESC, local public and charter schools, school principals, and educational staff. The goal is to introduce

composting machines into school cafeterias, not just for environmental sustainability but also as a dynamic educational tool. The initiative also aims to promote awareness and appreciation of sustainable practices among students, preparing them for a future where ecological responsibility is crucial. This would entail professional development and training programs for school districts, covering important topics such as recycling, composting, ecological farming, and promoting healthy lifestyles. By embedding these principles into the educational fabric, the initiative aims to create an inclusive learning environment that equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable living.

2. **Economic Incubation Enhancement for Community Empowerment:** Recognizing the immense potential of entrepreneurship, this project aims to encourage the entire school community as well as families from low-income backgrounds to participate in the emerging sectors of composting, vertical farming, smart farming, and the wider green/circular economy. By providing targeted support and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset, this program will create business opportunities that are aligned with sustainable practices. The initiative not only promises to boost economic growth, but also aims to make significant contributions to the community's environmental sustainability. The city supports the installation of composting equipment, financed through EPA funding, at the local recycling center. This investment underscores the project's importance and its potential for success.

The City of McAllen strongly believes that when local governments, educational institutions, and communities unite to address complex challenges, we can drive forward both social progress and environmental stewardship. UTRGV's proposal aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance climate resilience, and improve socio-economic conditions across the community. The project's scalability and adaptability promise widespread benefits beyond the immediate region, potentially setting a precedent for similar initiatives across Texas and the United States.

In summary, the City of McAllen fully supports UTRGV's grant proposal to the EPA which will bring together the diverse strengths of all partners to make a considerable impact on GHG reduction and sustainable development in South Texas and beyond.

Sincerely,

Javier Villalobos
Mayor
City of McAllen

Helen Ramirez
City Manager

City of BROWNSVILLE Texas
On the Border, By the Sea and Beyond

Brownsville All-America City 2001 / 2014

March 22, 2024

Dr. Can Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
1201 W. University Dr.
Edinburg, TX 78539

RE: EPA Grant Letter of Support

Dear Dr. Saygin,

On behalf of The City of Brownsville, I am pleased to express our commitment to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant application, "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation." This initiative, which has the potential to significantly improve the health standards of low-income families, is a crucial step towards providing high-wage employment opportunities.

As the largest and rapidly growing city in the Rio Grande Valley, Brownsville, Texas, is the county seat of Cameron County and serves as a leading center for the region's administration, culture, and economic activity. Perched on the southern tip of Texas on the border and flanked by the Gulf of Mexico, Brownsville is uniquely positioned to take advantage of border trade with Mexico and growing the Port of Brownsville, the only deepwater port located on the U.S.-Mexico Border. Recent activity at SpaceX is an indication that space innovation and development is in Brownsville to stay, and The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) has made higher education in and around Brownsville attainable, affordable, and an immense return on investment for families and the City, underscoring the City's relevance to the grant application.

Brownsville has long focused on quality-of-life initiatives and realizes the substantial value in this partnership. The initiative, focusing on recycling, conservation, and green energy, aligns well with the City's proactive measures to address environmental and sustainability issues such as water conservation efforts and the 100 miles of hike, bike, and walking trails. These initiatives demonstrate the City's commitment to a sustainable future and contribute to its vibrant, engaging, and healthy environment. Importantly, Brownsville's efforts align with broader regional and global attempts to combat climate change and promote environmental stewardship, further emphasizing the City's commitment.

The City supports the proposal UTRGV has outlined that would include the following initiatives:

1. **Collaborative Educational Enhancement:** This initiative takes a comprehensive approach to education and involves a wide range of stakeholders, including UTRGV, Region One ESC, local public and charter schools, school principals, and educational staff. The goal is to introduce composting machines into school cafeterias, not just for environmental sustainability but also as a dynamic educational tool. The initiative also aims to promote awareness and appreciation of sustainable practices among students, preparing them for a future where ecological responsibility is crucial. This would entail professional development and training programs for school districts, covering important topics such as recycling, composting, ecological farming, and promoting healthy lifestyles. By embedding these principles into the educational fabric, the initiative aims to create an inclusive learning environment that equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable living.

2. **Economic Incubation Enhancement for Community Empowerment:** Recognizing the immense potential of entrepreneurship, this project aims to encourage the entire school community as well as families from low-income backgrounds to participate in the emerging sectors of composting, vertical farming, smart farming, and the wider green/circular economy. By providing targeted support and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset, this program will create business opportunities aligned with sustainable practices. The initiative not only promises to boost economic growth, but also aims to make significant contributions to the community's environmental sustainability. The City supports installing composting equipment, financed through EPA funding, at the local recycling center. This investment underscores the project's importance and its potential for success.

The City of Brownsville believes that when local governments, educational institutions, and communities unite to address complex challenges, it can drive forward both social progress and environmental stewardship. UTRGV's proposal aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance climate resilience, and improve socio-economic conditions across the community. The project's scalability and adaptability promise widespread benefits beyond the immediate region, potentially setting a precedent for similar initiatives across Texas and the United States.

In summary, the City of Brownsville fully supports UTRGV's grant proposal to the EPA which will gather the diverse strengths of all partners, making a considerable impact on GHG reduction and sustainable development in South Texas and beyond.

Sincerely,

Helen Ramirez, AICP
City Manager

THE CITY OF Edinburg

March 25, 2024

Dr. Can Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
1201 W. University Dr.
Edinburg, TX 78539

Dear Dr. Saygin:

On behalf of the City of Edinburg, I express our commitment to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant application, "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation." This initiative, which has the potential to significantly improve the health standards of low-income families, is a crucial step towards providing them with high-wage employment opportunities.

The City Edinburg is a rapidly growing city in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. As the county seat of Hidalgo County, it serves as a leading center for the region's administration, culture, and economic activity. Founded as an agriculture-based community in the early 20th century, Edinburg has evolved into a bustling urban center with a diverse economy. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and its School of Medicine, which has made Edinburg a hub for education and healthcare, underscores the city's relevance to the grant application.

Edinburg is a city dedicated to quality-of-life initiatives and is set to benefit significantly from this partnership. The initiative, focusing on recycling, conservation, and green energy, aligns perfectly with the city's proactive measures to address environmental and sustainability issues. These initiatives demonstrate the city's commitment to a sustainable future and contribute to its vibrant, engaging, and healthy environment. Importantly, Edinburg's efforts align with broader regional and global attempts to combat climate change and promote environmental stewardship, further emphasizing the city's commitment.

The City supports the proposal UTRGV has outlined that would include the following initiatives:

1. **Collaborative Educational Enhancement:** This initiative takes a comprehensive approach to education and involves a wide range of stakeholders, including UTRGV, Region One ESC, local public and charter schools, school principals, and educational staff. The goal is to introduce composting machines into school cafeterias, not just for

environmental sustainability but also as a dynamic educational tool. The initiative also aims to promote awareness and appreciation of sustainable practices among students, preparing them for a future where ecological responsibility is crucial. This would entail professional development and training programs for school districts, covering important topics such as recycling, composting, ecological farming, and promoting healthy lifestyles. By embedding these principles into the educational fabric, the initiative aims to create an inclusive learning environment that equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable living.

2. **Economic Incubation Enhancement for Community Empowerment:** Recognizing the immense potential of entrepreneurship, this project aims to encourage the entire school community, as well as families from low-income backgrounds, to participate in the emerging sectors of composting, vertical farming, smart farming, and the wider green/circular economy. By providing targeted support and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset, this program will create business opportunities that are aligned with sustainable practices. The initiative not only promises to boost economic growth, but also aims to make significant contributions to the community's environmental sustainability. The city supports installing composting equipment, financed through EPA funding, at the local recycling center. This investment underscores the project's importance and its potential for success.

The City of Edinburg believes that when local governments, educational institutions, and communities unite to address complex challenges, we can drive forward both social progress and environmental stewardship. UTRGV's proposal aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance climate resilience, and improve socio-economic conditions across the community. The project's scalability and adaptability promise widespread benefits beyond the immediate region, potentially setting a precedent for similar initiatives across Texas and the United States.

In summary, the City of Edinburg fully supports UTRGV's grant proposal to the EPA, which will bring together the diverse strengths of all partners to make a considerable impact on GHG reduction and sustainable development in South Texas and beyond.

Sincerely,

Ramiro Garza, Jr.
Mayor

Pharr

MAYOR Ambrosio Hernandez, MD

COMMISSIONERS Michael Pacheco I Roberto "Bobby" Carrillo I Ramiro Caballero, MD I Daniel Chavez I Ricardo Medina I Itza Flores

March 23, 2024

Dr. Can Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
1201 W. University Dr.
Edinburg, Texas 78539

Dear Dr. Saygin,

The City of Pharr is delighted to extend its support to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant application, titled "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation." This initiative holds immense potential to significantly elevate the health standards of low-income families while concurrently opening avenues for high-wage employment opportunities.

Situated strategically in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, the City of Pharr stands as a beacon of diversity and bi-cultural richness, mere minutes away from the Mexico border. Our city's robust economic foundation, bolstered by a highly skilled youthful workforce and a vibrant business ecosystem, positions Pharr as a frontrunner among U.S. border regions. With its inception dating back to 1916, Pharr earned the moniker "Hub City of the Valley" owing to its pivotal location at the crossroads of two major highways. Today, Pharr continues to thrive as a pivotal commercial hub, with the Pharr International Bridge serving as a crucial conduit for cross-border trade. Notably, the Pharr International Bridge, in its 28 years of existence, has burgeoned into the 3rd largest trade nexus on the Texas-Mexico border, reigning as the top border crossing point in the U.S. for produce. In the initial half of 2023 alone, exports facilitated through Pharr's International Bridge amassed a staggering $8.79 billion, fortifying ties with global markets.

Driven by an unwavering commitment to enhance the quality of life, Pharr has consistently championed projects that resonate with our community's needs. Our city fervently encourages environmental stewardship among residents, epitomizing our aspirations to transition into a sustainable community. We actively engage in Environmental Education initiatives, hosting monthly community clean-up drives in our quest to emerge as one of the Rio Grande Valley's cleanest cities. Furthermore, Pharr takes pride in its relentless pursuit of augmenting the community's well-being through the establishment of new parks, city-wide festivals, and a myriad of community-centric events. Noteworthy endeavors such as our broadband internet project, aimed at bridging the digital divide, underscore our commitment to fostering inclusive growth.

In a tribute to Earth Day in 2019, Pharr inaugurated its own recycling center, operated under the auspices of the Pharr Public Works Department. The Pharr City Recycling Center stands as a testament to our dedication, accepting used tires, motor oil, and various recyclables, while also offering educational programs tailored for children across all age groups. From 2017 to 2018, the center succeeded in collecting over 22,000 tires, 375 tons of recycled materials, and 56 tons of used motor oil, exemplifying our unwavering commitment to public service excellence.

Crucially, Pharr's endeavors align seamlessly with broader regional and global initiatives aimed at combatting climate change and fostering environmental stewardship, reaffirming our city's resolute commitment to the cause.

With unwavering support, the City of Pharr endorses the proposal outlined by UTRGV, encapsulating the following pivotal initiatives:

1. **Collaborative Educational Enhancement**: This multifaceted initiative adopts a holistic approach to education, engaging diverse stakeholders including UTRGV, Region One ESC, local public and charter schools, school administrators, and educational staff. The primary objective is to introduce composting machines into school cafeterias, not merely as a means to bolster environmental sustainability but also as dynamic educational tools. Central to this initiative is the cultivation of awareness and appreciation for sustainable practices among students, priming them for a future where ecological responsibility assumes paramount importance. To this end, the initiative envisages comprehensive professional development and training programs for school districts, covering pertinent topics such as recycling, composting, ecological farming, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. By ingraining these principles into the educational fabric, the initiative endeavors to foster an inclusive learning environment that equips students with the requisite knowledge and skills for sustainable living.

2. **Economic Incubation Enhancement for Community Empowerment**: Acknowledging the transformative potential of entrepreneurship, this initiative endeavors to galvanize the entire school community, alongside families hailing from low-income backgrounds, towards active participation in burgeoning sectors such as composting, vertical farming, smart farming, and the broader green/circular economy. Through targeted support and the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset, this program aims to incubate business opportunities aligned with sustainable practices. Beyond stimulating economic growth, the initiative holds the promise of making substantial contributions to the community's environmental sustainability. The city stands firmly behind the installation of composting equipment, financed through EPA funding, at the local recycling center, underscoring the significance of this investment and its potential for success.

The City of Pharr firmly believes that when local governments, educational institutions, and communities converge to address multifaceted challenges, we chart a course towards both social progress and environmental stewardship. UTRGV's proposal stands as a testament to this ethos, aspiring to curtail greenhouse gas emissions, fortify climate resilience, and ameliorate socio-economic conditions across our community. The project's scalability and adaptability augur well

for widespread benefits extending beyond the immediate region, potentially setting a precedent for similar initiatives across Texas and the United States.

In summation, the City of Pharr pledges its wholehearted support to UTRGV's grant proposal to the EPA, which promises to harness the diverse strengths of all partners in effecting substantial reductions in GHG emissions and fostering sustainable development across South Texas and beyond.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jonathan B. Flores
City Manager

CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Dr. Can (John) Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
1201 W. University Dr.
Edinburg, TX 78539

Dear Dr. Saygin,

On behalf of the City of San Antonio Solid Waste Management Department, we offer our support for your proposed initiative, "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation" proposed by The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Center for Advanced Manufacturing Innovation and Cyber Systems.

The City of San Antonio recognizes the importance of waste diversion, recycling and greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies. We have several goals and initiatives in place to affect positive change. I believe our sustainability goals and practices line up with this proposed initiative. I very much hope that you receive this grant as I would like to see enhancements and improvements that can help our local community and the country. Please keep me posted on the status of this proposed initiative and let me know how we can be of assistance in the future.

Sincerely,

David Newman
Director

P.O. Box 839966, San Antonio, TX 78283-3966

March 22, 2024

Dr. Can Saygin
Senior Vice President for Research
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
1201 W. University Dr.
Edinburg, TX 78539

Dear Dr. Saygin,

On behalf of SME, I express our strong support to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) grant application, "GHG Reduction and Economic Development through Community Organic Waste Recycling, Composting, and Economic Incubation." This initiative, which has the potential to significantly improve the health standards of low-income families, is a crucial step towards providing them with high-wage employment opportunities through advanced manufacturing and transforming the region into a clean society.

SME is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing transformative technology adoption and developing current and future talent in manufacturing. Our workforce division, Tooling U-SME, works with thousands of companies, including more than half of all Fortune 500® manufacturers and over 1,000 educational institutions across the country. The manufacturing industry never stops innovating. Neither do we. Tooling U-SME provides personalized, hands-on guidance to help schools, higher education, and employers deliver best-in-industry instruction. Through proven classes, industry-recognized certifications, custom programs, and learning consulting services, we are working every day to build a strong manufacturing workforce for the renaissance of US Manufacturing.

Tooling U-SME has been collaborating with UTRGV team since 2019 on several large projects related to advanced manufacturing education and workforce training with funding support from DoD MEEP (Manufacturing Engineering Education Program) and DoD DMC (Defense Manufacturing Communities) program. We are part of the UTRGV recent grant from DoD to establish the America's Additive Foundry Consortium, providing training for thousands of students from underserved communities on advanced manufacturing technologies such as Advanced Robotics and Additive Manufacturing, which are fundamental to modern manufacturing systems. We are excited about the chance to prepare next generation of talent to transform the landscape of the manufacturing workforce, innovation, and entrepreneurship at Rio Grande Valley, where a large population from underserved and underrepresented communities reside. Within the scope of the proposed work, the partnership between the Tooling U-SME and UTRGV is ready to support several key initiatives:

1. Collaborative Workforce Training for the Proposed Composting System: Tool U-SME has a broad base of manufacturing content in fundamental and advanced manufacturing, including robotics, automation, smart, additive, machining, metrology, machining, welding, electric vehicle production, and more. We will work with UTRGV team to identify further learning resource needs that may be offered in training and professional development programs for school districts. By embedding these core manufacturing topics into the educational fabric, we can not only equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be hired in the manufacturing firms, we but

also prepare the next generation green workforce – much of which is a manufacturing workforce - who will contribute the goal of GHG reduction set by EPA.

2. Facilitate the Team in Enhancement of Advanced Manufacturing for GHG Reduction, Economic Prosperity, and Community Empowerment: Recognizing the immense potential of entrepreneurship, this project aims to encourage the entire school community as well as families from low-income backgrounds to participate in the emerging sectors of composting, vertical farming, smart farming, and the wider green/circular economy. We will facilitate, when possible, the UTRGV team to provide targeted support, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and creating business opportunities that are aligned with sustainable manufacturing. The initiative not only promises to boost economic growth, but also aims to make significant contributions to the community's environmental sustainability. We are poised to participate in this project, providing technical support and/or solutions available at SME if needed.

In summary, the SME and its workforce divisions Tooling U-SME support UTRGV's grant proposal to the EPA. Regional-led initiatives are critical to enable transformations that benefit communities. This collaboration brings together partners with diverse strengths, positioning it well to make a considerable impact on GHG reduction, sustainable development, and advanced manufacturing in South Texas and beyond.

Sincerely,

Kris Ward
Sr. Director, Strategy & Business Development
SME