Statement of Need: Food insecurity comprises a continuum of food shortage, inadequate intake, and worry about food access. Feeding America estimates almost 21,000 food-insecure people in Athens-Clarke Co., Georgia (ACC), a 17% rate of food insecurity. 25.7% of ACC residents are in poverty (US Census, 2019), including nearly 6,000 children (27.3% of the county’s children). The Athens Wellbeing Project's 2018 community survey found 22% of local families reported experiencing food insecurity. Their comprehensive local community health needs assessments found that “Nutrition and dietary habits continue to be a major concern—especially in regard to underconsumption of fruits and vegetables” (p. 11), with related negative health outcomes. 60% of AWP survey respondents reported eating one serving or less of fruit per day and 34% reported eating one serving of vegetables or less each day (p. 16). The assessment also found "significant disparities" for low-income individuals and for racial and ethnic minorities. While shelf-stable, canned food is a frequent element of food distributions, partner organizations report that community members particularly value receiving fresh produce and that current production and distribution of local, fresh produce is insufficient to meet demand. At the same time, food waste is a concern, with some 40% of food produced in the US estimated to be wasted instead of eaten. Based on ratings of how much food is wasted, vs. recycled, composted, or donated to food banks or other food waste solution providers, Georgia is currently ranked as the 8th most wasteful state, and the Georgia EPD has identified "food residuals" as "the largest single category of solid waste being disposed in Georgia's landfills". Much of this is food that is still good (e.g., grocery store products approaching their "sell-by" date; produce that has not been harvested).

Overview: With funding support from an AmeriCorps State grant, the University of Georgia (UGA) Office of Service-Learning will host 20, half-time AmeriCorps members to learn about and directly address local food needs, in collaboration with on- and off-campus partner organizations. These “AmeriCorps Community Food Fellows” commit to a half-time year of service (900 hours, beginning in September and continuing through July) through AmeriCorps, the national service agency. As AmeriCorps members, they receive a small living allowance (totaling $10,800 for a full 900 hours/11 months) and an end-of-service Segal education award. Additionally, as part of this program, the cohort of Community Food Fellows will enhance their understanding of local food systems, food insecurity, food waste, and related community challenges through targeted training opportunities, networking with UGA and community experts, and direct service supporting food security and production, anti-hunger, and food waste reduction initiatives. The Community Food Fellows program will also help members gain awareness of career and educational possibilities in fields such as horticulture, food, non-profit management, and sustainability. Participation in this program has also been submitted to fulfill UGA’s Experiential Learning graduation requirement for participants who are students.

Program Structure: The UGA Office of Service-Learning (OSL) is the administrative home for this program. UGA students, as well as non-students, are welcome to apply to be part of the Community Food Fellows cohort (priority application deadline is August 14, 2023). Fellows commit to 11 months of half-time service (900 hours total, or 20-25 hours per week, starting early September) as part of the AmeriCorps State program. OSL faculty and staff supervise the cohort and work with members as well as
an advisory team of local campus and community stakeholders to meet training needs and to identify, supervise, prioritize, and schedule service opportunities for members.

**Partners and Typical Activities:** Community Food Fellows will initially work broadly to understand local needs and partners and will provide support for short-term and longer-term activities that enhance local food systems. These AmeriCorps members will support a range of local food system needs while growing as leaders and building understanding of structural causes, local needs and resources, and partner organizations. Through their service activities, members benefit the local ACC community, with particular emphasis on low-income older adults and their families; food-insecure youth; as well as specific low-income neighborhoods served by the FC-CIS Neighborhood Leaders.

Under UGA staff supervision, during their initial months of the program (ca. 300 hours of service), members will learn about these communities, needs, and organizations through large- and small-group service activities, visits, and trainings arranged by UGA with the partner organizations. Service activities may include, for instance, planting and harvesting fresh produce at UGArden and other community and/or school gardens such as the Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA); participating in meal preparation, meal bag production, and/or food deliveries with organizations such as Campus Kitchen, ACCA, Abundance Athens, Our Daily Bread, the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia, farmer’s markets, churches, and Neighborhood Leaders programs; organizing and taking part in food pickups from local groceries and restaurants; and produce and fruit gleaning from local farms and urban fruit trees with Concrete Jungle. Fall activities are coupled with regular member training and meetings, focusing on food security and food waste issues locally, nationally, and globally, as well as relevant hands-on skills such as horticulture and safe food preparation, led by community and campus experts and OSL supervisors. Members will also receive CPR/First Aid training as well as training from UGA’s programs serving minors and in using Engage GA, the online volunteer management and recruitment portal.

In spring and summer, members will have the opportunity to further focus their service with one or more partner organizations to provide deeper, more consistent support and leadership, including under the direction of partner organization representatives, and may also provide leadership to supervision and/or recruitment of volunteers. Additionally, they will begin to leverage their growing skills and knowledge to develop and implement small-group or individual projects meeting identified community needs. These will be developed in conjunction with partners, and might include, e.g., identifying new partners for food receipt or distribution; enhancing farmer’s market collaborations to reduce waste; creating food maps of local fruit trees; supporting mobile markets/farm trucks; cross-organization orchestration of pickups, harvesting and gleaning; providing SNAP outreach; leading community nutrition education, meal planning, and cooking demos with fresh produce; etc.

**Questions?** Please contact UGA Office of Service-Learning Associate Director Dr. Paul Matthews, pmatthews@uga.edu, or Program Coordinator Dr. Coleman Allums, coleman.allums@uga.edu.