

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS & IMPACTS

\$400,000

in Healthy Food Financing Initiative grant funding to build social incubation capacity and develop a revolving loan fund.

\$950,000

in total sales projected for 2014 through worker-owned Mandela Foods Cooperative.

200,000

pounds of produce distributed through Mandela Foods Distribution.

700+

residents reported eating more fruits and vegetables because of Mandela MarketPlace enterprises.

Profile: Mandela MarketPlace

Oakland, California



Situated in the northwestern tip of Oakland and bordered on all sides by major freeways and an industrial port, the community of West Oakland and its 25,000 residents had long borne witness to the devastating impacts of limited access to affordable, healthy food. The neighborhood, with a rich history of community engagement, still disproportionately bore the burden of Alameda County's highest rates of unemployment, poverty, and diet-related disease, with 45 percent of households earning less than \$25,000 a year and 48 percent of adults suffering from obesity. When community members participated in a health needs assessment in 1999, the findings revealed what was already known — that the community was saturated with unhealthy food — but the results galvanized local community leaders into action. A core group of mothers took the lead, and residents, organizations, agency, and business representatives began to organize to address the root causes of these inequities and identify solutions. At the top of the list was to develop a community-owned grocery store.

[Mandela MarketPlace](#) grew out of these grassroots community organizing efforts to shift resource dynamics, giving residents access to healthy food retail and neighborhood development funding. Incorporated in 2004, Mandela MarketPlace is a nonprofit organization that currently works in partnership with local farmers, local residents, and community-based businesses to build health, wealth, and assets through cooperative food enterprises. Mandela MarketPlace assists multiple business enterprises and fosters community leadership with the goal of building both a sustainable local food system and an inclusive local economy.

In 2009, the efforts of Mandela MarketPlace and local community leaders culminated in the opening of [Mandela Foods Cooperative](#) (MFC), a 2,200-square-foot, worker-owned enterprise that serves as West Oakland's only full-service grocery store. In less than five years from opening, Mandela Foods Cooperative serves about 250 customers daily and is already on track



Mandela Foods Cooperative's storefront in West Oakland, California. This worker-owned grocery store is Mandela MarketPlace's first social enterprise.

to make \$950,000 in sales by the end of 2014, all while maintaining their commitment to not sell alcohol, tobacco, and products with high fructose corn syrup. MFC currently has four worker-owners and two employees. Its goal is to create opportunity for at least eight ownership and three employee positions with a strong priority to fill jobs with local residents, consumers, and existing employees. Through a partnership with the city's Highway to Work program, which supports marginalized youth through apprenticeships and job training, MFC hired their first youth graduate from the program in June 2014.

In 2013, Mandela MarketPlace was awarded a \$400,000 [Healthy Food Financing Initiative](#) (HFFI) grant to capitalize a \$115,000 revolving loan fund for local food enterprises and expand their social enterprise incubation services. The first businesses that Mandela MarketPlace will finance with HFFI loans are Mandela Foods Cooperative, Zella's Soulful Kitchen Cafe (in-store café at MFC), and [Mandela Foods Distribution](#) (MFD). With this HFFI support, Mandela Foods Cooperative will invest in equipment and expand marketing and outreach to increase sales and grow its customer base, leading to new employment and ownership opportunities for low-income residents. With HFFI support, Mandela Foods Distribution successfully established a partnership with California FarmLink to offer an innovative, early-season "Harvest to Market Financing" loan product for small family farmers who have faced challenges in accessing capital in traditional lending markets. MFD will utilize its loan to increase delivery and consumption of fresh produce by creating stronger distribution links between their network of family farmers of color within a 200-mile radius and food-based businesses in Oakland. In 2013, MFD distributed 200,000 pounds of produce and collectively increased local farmers' income by \$61,000.

Mandela MarketPlace is also supporting other burgeoning healthy food enterprises. Chef Dionne Knox, a community leader and gifted entrepreneur, is scaling up her catering business, and on August 25 will open Zella's Soulful Kitchen as a Mandela MarketPlace-incubated enterprise housed inside MFC. Dionne will use locally sourced ingredients from the MFD network to offer an array of healthy Southern recipes. Mandela MarketPlace also supports local vendors with technical assistance to increase healthy food retail access points in West Oakland through the [Healthy Neighborhood Store Alliance](#) and pop-up local produce stands. In fall 2014, the organization will launch a partnership with Oakland Unified School District to set up produce stands at three schools offering residents access to fresh produce grown by MFD farmers.

The organization's business model highlights the importance of creating sustainable links across all nodes of a food system as a way to not only improve health but also to build and keep wealth in the community.

"We are increasing the amount of nodes to get produce out so we can support the economy of our local producers. To increase [MFC's] sales means they are increasing the food they are buying [which] builds jobs among local family farms and their own economies as worker owners and employees. It's the harder way, but in the long term, it will be sustainable and build community impact." - Mariela Cedeño, Director of Social Enterprise and Microfinance, MMPlace

The growth of Mandela MarketPlace's enterprises would not be possible without an organizational commitment to community building. Meaningful resident engagement and leadership development underpin business practices. These core values are embodied in the quality of the jobs and opportunities for professional growth that exist for enterprise employees, all of whom are community residents and of color.

For more information about the Healthy Food Access Portal, contact us at info@healthyfoodaccess.org.

