

# Organically Grown launches fund for partner organizations

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SHAWN LINEHAN

Paulo Martinez Cortes from Sunrise Organic Farm one of Organically Grown's grower partners in the Albany, Ore.-area.

Eugene-based organic food distributor Organically Grown is launching a new [Mission Fund](#) taking a percentage of profits and investing them into a program to [support mission-aligned partners](#) in the community.

The first allocation to the fund is \$100,000, and half of it has been earmarked for organizations working with vulnerable populations such as farmworkers and retail workers who lost homes or otherwise suffered from Oregon wildfires.

The other half was invested in the California BIPOC Farmer and Land Steward Fund. This organization offers short-term relief to farmers who are people of color and indigenous land stewards who need support during the Covid-19 pandemic. The group's long-term mission is to help ecosystems led by people of color build resilient regional food economies.

“We have seen such need, big and small, to work with growers and customers and mission-aligned community groups,” said CEO [Elizabeth Darrow-Nardi](#). “We see using this Mission Fund to target resources to companies and organizations big and small who are doing this work and in need of more funding.”

Recipients must be companies and organizations working in:

- Promoting diversity and equity in the food system
- Improving organic agriculture
- Mitigating climate change
- Promoting fair labor practices and progressive food policy
- Preserving natural resources and biodiversity

- Reducing nonrenewable resources and environmental degradation

The group plans to operate the fund on a rolling basis for applications. Money will be awarded as grants or low-interest loans, depending on what makes the most sense for the recipient, said Darrow-Nardi.

The size of the fund will vary based on company performance. A portion of profitability is earmarked for the fund, similar to a dividend program. However, because the company ownership is a perpetual use trust, instead of paying shareholders the money goes to company stakeholders.

The Mission Fund was created as part of Organically Grown's trust ownership structure. In 2018, the company underwent the huge transition from an S Corp to a Sustainable Food and Agriculture Perpetual Purpose Trust.

Under these new bylaws the company prioritizes investing in stakeholder groups such as its 250 employees, growers, customers and the community.

The new ownership allows the company to stay true to its mission, said Darrow-Nardi, and removes the quarterly pressure of profitability.

"We take the longer horizon," she said. "Part of that was developing investment programs to reward those involved in the business and help grow the aspects of the community most important to us."

At this point there isn't a geographic limitation for applicants as long as they meet the mission criteria. The company has an internal team and some outside advisers, including from Kitchen Table Advisors, Viva Farms and Oregon Tilth, who will make funding decisions. Darrow-Nardi expects most of the interest in funds will come from the Pacific Northwest and West Coast, where the company mostly operates.

Organically Grown's fund is the latest effort from the corporate world to help fund an ecosystem and get capital to organizations and [businesses who have limited options](#) from investors or banks. Portland grocer New Seasons started a [low-interest loan fund](#) last year and has invested \$112,000 in local businesses.

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