



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OAKLAND, Calif., April 2, 2015 – In an announcement yesterday morning from Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Oakland's Mandela MarketPlace, in partnership with Alameda Health System's Highland Hospital and Credibles.co, received \$422,500 through the USDA's Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant program. This innovative partnership will use matched services from Highland Hospital to support Highland patients enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) access a SNAP-match for purchases of healthy fruits and vegetables in community markets and corner stores.

Mandela MarketPlace's grant is one of many announced as part of the larger \$31.5 million allocated for the FINI grant program this year, a remarkable pledge by the government to support healthy food environments for our nation's most food insecure. Secretary Vilsack, a longtime champion of community food security, said, "Encouraging low income families to put more healthy food in their grocery baskets is part of USDA's ongoing commitment to improving the diet and health of all Americans."

"We are so excited by the partnership and possibilities that USDA-FINI catalyzes. A 'trifecta' of Hospital, Community-Based Organization, and Business that will make healthier foods much more accessible and affordable for SNAP consumers and their families," said Dana Harvey, Executive Director of Mandela MarketPlace. "The innovation of a technology like Credibles.co, which allows a range of retailers to make purchasing healthier foods easier, married with the knowledge of health professionals can only have a good outcome."

This unique partnership allows Highland Hospital to identify patients living in low food-access neighborhoods for a healthy food incentive program. Participation in the program will supply patients with a SNAP-match credit account that will add funds when they purchase healthy foods at local corner stores in Mandela MarketPlace's retail network. The credits will be accessed through Credibles.co, a Bay Area-based startup platform that will allow the retailers to issue, manage, and redeem SNAP-incentive transactions. "Credibles is excited to work with Mandela MarketPlace and local food businesses in the West Oakland community to issue 'edible credits' for healthy, fresh food," said Arno Hesse, the company's CEO. "Smartphone apps, now used by people of any economic and health status, are an easy and innovative way to offer incentives for buying fruits and vegetables," he continued.

This groundbreaking collaboration will benefit Oakland's local food economy along with SNAP participants, and will serve to support Highland Hospital's community presence. The hospital also plans to bring clinical staff to grocery sites in Mandela MarketPlace's network of retailers, to engage with residents about community nutrition and health and provide CalFresh enrollment information. Dennis Hsieh, Resident in Highland's Emergency Medicine department, said, "I am extremely excited about this partnership. From the Highland Health Advocates Program, we know that food is one of our patients' top priorities. The USDA FINI grant will give AHS-Highland's healthcare providers an opportunity to work closely with Mandela MarketPlace and Credibles to prescribe food to our patients and help them live healthier lives."