



**MCKINNEY FAMILY
FOUNDATION**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NEWS RELEASE – McKinney Family Foundation announces
finalists for inaugural Legacy Prize**

Indianapolis, IN (Oct. 15, 2026) – The McKinney Family Foundation has announced the finalists for its inaugural Robert H. McKinney Legacy Prize, a new award designed to help enhance Indiana’s rural communities through new connections and collaboration.

The Foundation unveiled the Legacy Prize in May in honor of founder Robert H. McKinney. Through the Legacy Prize, the Foundation will award \$250,000 to applicants demonstrating new or existing partnerships in rural Indiana working together to create economic opportunity, improve access to resources, support local farms and businesses, and make communities better places to live, work and engage.

More than 100 applications from around the state were submitted through the end of July; a select group of applicants were then invited to present to a panel consisting of Foundation board members, rural Indiana community members, and other key stakeholders.

After a round of September interviews, the Foundation announced its five finalists:

Indiana Rural Resilience Initiative – Sunovis Ranch

The Indiana Rural Resilience Initiative is a statewide effort designed to help rural Indiana communities participate in—and benefit from—the opportunities created by renewable energy development. Using solar grazing as a practical starting point, the Initiative will bring together farmers, landowners, agricultural producers, solar developers, educators, researchers, and community leaders to strengthen connections between energy, agriculture, and rural economic opportunity. Overall, the Initiative seeks to build a sustainable, replicable model that keeps agriculture active on the land, creates new opportunities for Hoosier farmers and families, and strengthens rural communities across Indiana.

Rural Food Security & Agrivoltaics Partnership – Doral Renewables

Doral Renewables and more than 10 partners are turning an operating Indiana solar farm into a food-security engine, using agrivoltaics to grow crops, raise livestock, and train farmers and students in Starke and Pulaski Counties. The initiative will utilize three dedicated agrivoltaic pilot sites – a cattle grazing hub, a mixed livestock and specialty crop block, and an education and workforce block – to help supply local markets, schools, senior centers, and food banks with locally grown food. Over three years, the partnership plans to train 30 farmers, engage 300 students, and produce nearly 48,000 pounds of food annually, supporting an estimated 40,000 meals a year, all on land already generating clean energy.

Septic Assistance, Financing, and Education (SAFE Hoosiers) – Lake Monroe Water Fund

Approximately 30 percent of Indiana's population is impacted by failing septic systems, and it can cost a homeowner up to \$50,000 to repair or replace a septic system. This often becomes cost-prohibitive for many rural homeowners, leaving them with a ticking time bomb that can harm their health, make their home unlivable, increase heat-trapping gas emissions, and pollute drinking water sources. Through SAFE Hoosiers, the Lake Monroe Water Fund is bringing together resources from state agencies, financial institutions, and philanthropic partners to create a new innovative financial assistance pilot program for low-to-moderate income households in the Lake Monroe watershed. This program will provide grants and low-interest loans to repair or replace septic systems that are failing or at risk of failure, keeping rural Hoosiers, our communities, and our water safe. This innovative program will have a significant impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions as well. The pilot program will replace or repair 150 septic systems in the Lake Monroe Watershed.

Sustainable Local Food System for Warren County

In Warren County, where access to fresh food and connections to the land are increasingly limited, this initiative aims to help families become creators – instead of just consumers – of their own food and future. This will be accomplished through a network of raised-bed gardens, backyard chickens, beekeeping, and youth education coupled with training opportunities through Purdue Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Health Department. Residents will be equipped with tools, knowledge, and support to grow food, build skills, strengthen connections, and share what they produce with others. The initiative will turn individual acts of growing into a community movement, creating opportunities for children and adults to learn, neighbors to help one another, and local resources to circulate within the community.

Hoosier Heartland Resource Conservation and Development Council

A new program from Hoosier Heartland Resource Conservation and Development Council empowers women to make good, science-based land use and management decisions that lead to stronger farm enterprises and more viable communities. The group facilitates small learning circles where women learn from technical experts and each other, gaining the knowledge, connections, and resources needed to care for their land and make informed decisions. Women4theLand plans to launch three regional Community Hubs in West Central, Southeast, and East Central Indiana; the Hubs will help women landowners navigate land management decisions, generational land transitions, and business opportunities by connecting them with trusted local partners, Community Ambassadors, conservation professionals, business resources, and peer networks. The program's three

pillars are land stewardship, business development, and leadership/legacy, with outcomes measured through conservation adoption, business resilience, leadership roles, partnerships, and community action.

“It was incredibly inspiring to see all the amazing applications we received – and tremendously difficult to narrow it down to this list of five finalists,” said Marni McKinney Waterfield, President of the McKinney Family Foundation and daughter of Robert H. McKinney. “Each one embodies the spirit of the Legacy Prize and Robert H. McKinney himself, who devoted much of his life’s philanthropic efforts to help build and strengthen environmentally and economically resilient communities throughout the state. Together, they demonstrate the ingenuity, innovation and effort present throughout our state and beyond.”

Legacy Prize applicants were asked to demonstrate collaborative work – either proposed or already existing – that will make a tangible difference in rural Indiana today, while also building toward a stronger long-term future. In selecting its five finalists, the Foundation and its review panel prioritized applications that show collaboration across multiple organizations; demonstrate how sustainability can be a gathering point for multiple organizations in a region; appear realistic, within reach, and repeatable in other rural communities; and offer clear economic and quality of life benefits for the neighbors in the community.

“Our objective with the Legacy Prize is to identify and support efforts that can deliver results that can last and grow over time through collaboration, shared leadership, and practical solutions,” added Stephanie Goodrid Lawson, Executive Director of the McKinney Family Foundation.. “It was clear that all of our applicants – and especially these outstanding finalists – are committed to working together to help build stronger communities and a better quality of life.”

McKinney Family Foundation will host a legacy event on Nov. 11 to celebrate its impact and formally announce the Robert H. McKinney Legacy Prize Winner. For more information on the Legacy Prize, visit the Foundation [website](#).

About the The McKinney Family Foundation

The McKinney Family Foundation (MFF) is a multi-generation family foundation established in 2007 by Robert H. and Arlene A. McKinney and their five children – Robert C. McKinney, Marni McKinney Waterfield, Kevin K. McKinney, Kent A. McKinney, and Lisa C. McKinney. The Foundation’s mission is built on two primary pillars: Environmental Sustainability and Inclusive Democracy. MFF strives to empower Indiana leaders and communities by strengthening the field of environmentally engaged students, professionals, civic leaders and philanthropists. Through strategic partnerships, MFF advocates for clean air, safe water, and environmentally resilient communities while seeking to empower Indiana communities to live in a healthier, more prosperous, and more sustainable manner. Learn more at the MFF [website](#).