



For Immediate Release

**Spirit of Big Five Foundation Announces Newest Active Project: "Vía Cocina"**  
*Innovative Social Enterprise in Colombia Inspired by Founder Brian Johnston to Transform Community Nutrition*

**Jan 12, 2026, STUART, FL** - The Spirit of Big Five Foundation is proud to announce its newest active project, [\*\*Vía Cocina - Food Train\*\*](#), a transformative social enterprise located in Medellin, Colombia. The project is the vision of founder Brian Johnston, a Toronto native who left a successful corporate banking career at age 25 to dedicate his life to humanitarian work. After volunteering in over 70 countries and witnessing the power of food to connect cultures, Johnston settled in Medellin to launch this 8-year community activity and infrastructure expansion.

The initiative is designed to improve food security and nutritional value in low-income neighborhoods while creating sustainable economic opportunities. This holds profound significance as it honors the memory of Big Five's founder, Mahen Sanghrajka. Born out of a vision to offer more than just tourism experiences, Vía Cocina embodies Mahen's belief that the spirit of travel should leave a destination better than it was found.

**Sustainable Agriculture and Nutritional Independence** While Colombia is rich in agricultural potential, many citizens in low-income neighborhoods lack access to the tools needed for self-sufficiency. Vía Cocina addresses this by implementing advanced **Hydroponic and Drip Irrigation systems**.

These systems serve a dual purpose: they provide an immediate source of fresh, nutrient-dense produce for the community kitchen, and more importantly, they function as a live classroom. By teaching local families how to build and maintain these water-efficient systems, Vía Cocina empowers them to grow their own food regardless of space limitations, fostering long-term nutritional independence and "food for life".

**Innovative Technology for Community Wellness** Complementing its agricultural initiatives, Vía Cocina employs specialized culinary technology to transform budget ingredients into high-quality nutrition. The facility utilizes **Weber Pellet Smokers** and **Dry Agers** to cure and elevate affordable proteins, alongside **Solar Food Dehydrators** and **Gelato Machines** that enable families to preserve fresh produce and create healthy, sugar-free products for both food security and entrepreneurship.



**A Sustainable Cycle of Impact** Vía Cocina operates as a social enterprise where tourism directly funds community welfare. Income generated from **private culinary experiences, such as those featured on Big Five itineraries featuring Medellin**, helps subsidize training, equipment, and food supplies for local residents.

"What makes Vía Cocina so unique is its built-in engine for independence," said Ashish Sanghrajka, CEO of Big Five Tours & Expeditions. "We are incredibly excited to welcome this as our newest project because it perfectly mirrors the Spirit of Big Five Foundation's core mission. We align ourselves with projects that are focused on becoming self-sustaining social enterprises rather than those that rely on donations in perpetuity. This initiative proves that tourism can be the catalyst that allows a community project to eventually fund itself, creating a lasting legacy of dignity and resilience."

For more information on Big Five and the Spirit of Big Five Foundation's commitment to sustainable tourism, please visit [www.bigfive.com](http://www.bigfive.com).

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#### **About Big Five Tours & Expeditions**

Big Five Tours & Expeditions, family-owned and operated, founded in Kenya in 1973 and a [Certified B Corporation™](#), is renowned for customized, luxury adventure travel to 44 destinations worldwide. Big Five has been recognized by the travel industry for its sustainable tourism commitment and is a regional member of the WTTC, allowing the brand to further expand its impact on a global scale by supporting SMEs around the world. Since its inception, the company has built its reputation on environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.