



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 18, 2011

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Connecticut Department of Agriculture Announces Regional Farm-to-School Grant

Agriculture Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky announced today the Northeast Regional Steering Committee of the National Farm-to-School Network has been awarded a \$250,000 USDA Cooperative Agreement Contract to expand and coordinate farm-to-institution work throughout the six-state region (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). In collaboration with many New England partners including the New England Governors Commission on Agriculture, American Farmland Trust, and Franklin County Community Development Corporation, the organizations that make up the Northeast Steering Committee will be tackling distribution, processing, state-level organizing, and regional coordination.

Projects will include expanding processing of local foods at the Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center and starting a new processing project, the Real Food Institute, in Mid-Coast Maine. Project partner Kids First in RI will work closely with the vendor that delivers fresh produce to schools in all six New England States through the Department of Defense Fresh Program to develop a model distribution system for local foods that creates more transparency in the supply chain from farmer to consumer.

The grant is focused on what will it take to get New England's colleges, schools, hospitals, and other institutions to buy and serve food grown in New England. A partnership of farm-to-school and farm-to-institution professionals from the six-state region is taking concrete steps to provide the infrastructure that will help to change the food system.

A series of “learning communities” will be established to identify roadblocks and opportunities for increasing institutional purchasing of local products as well as documenting the most successful new strategies.

“The steering committee is thrilled to have raised these funds but we hope to raise an additional \$750,000 to truly fulfill the work that needs to be accomplished to continue to connect local farms to our local schools and other institutions,” said Dana Hudson of Vermont, Northeast Regional Project Coordinator.

Judy Canales, USDA Rural Development Director of Business Programs/Renewable Energy programs, toured the Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center recently to see how the regional food system collaboration works. She described the \$250,000 grant as “seed money.”

Commissioner Reviczky said, “I look forward to the regional effort to create more markets for our Connecticut farmers. This is a significant and underutilized market, and we hope to expand the use of CT Grown products, like produce, milk, and beef. We need to overcome the barriers, and help our schools buy farmers’ products, and ultimately expanding production. We are also excited to look at extending their seasonality by exploring processing and preserving products for winter sales to these same institutions.”

With annual school food expenditures for the six New England states at \$149.8 million, the economic opportunity for New England agriculture is significant. If local schools purchased only 5% of local foods, that would increase New England agriculture economy by \$7.5 million ... 20% would be \$29.9 million.

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