

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release 5.29.19

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First Awards Announced for Massachusetts Food Trust Program

\$760,000 in loans & grants awarded to healthy food projects across Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Food Trust Program, a public/private partnership overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources and administered by the Local Enterprise Assistance Fund and Franklin County Community Development Corporation, launched October 30, 2018. Today, program administrators announced the first awards made by the Program which include seven projects serving six Massachusetts counties.

The initial funding awards include a total of \$760,000 in both loans and grants to support seven healthy food projects representing the following six Massachusetts counties: Berkshire, Bristol, Franklin, Hampden, Plymouth, and Suffolk. The projects range in scope and size and include support for two grocery store expansions, a food co-op, a greenhouse, an urban farm stand, a youth apprentice program, and a project aimed at increasing produce distribution networks for corner stores.

The Massachusetts Food Trust Program (MFTP) was established in law in 2014 and given a \$6 million capital authorization in the 2016 economic development bond bill. The Baker-Polito Administration released \$1 million in seed funding for the program in the FY19 capital budget. The initial public investment released in the FY19 capital budget has leveraged significant private and federal investment. More than \$4 million in both private and federal funds have been leveraged to the state's \$1 million in seed funding.

"The Baker-Polito Administration was proud to invest in the Massachusetts Food Trust Program, which is working to both support local business owners and increase access to healthy, affordable food in nutritionally underserved communities throughout the Commonwealth," **said Department of Agricultural Resources Commissioner John Lebeaux.**

"This first round of loans and grants will help meet the financing needs of healthy food retailers and distributors that plan to operate in underserved communities, strengthening the local food system while also increasing economic development."

"Since the launch of this program, I've had the opportunity, as part of an aggressive community outreach, to speak with many small business owners and grocers around the state. The MFTP is

providing a funding solution to a number of these businesses who are in need of upgrades and expansions that will increase their fresh produce offerings to better serve their community. We could not be more excited to make these initial awards to seven deserving projects,” **said Gerardo Espinoza, Local Enterprise Assistance Fund.**

“The volume and geographic diversity of applications since the launch of this program has been overwhelmingly exciting. There is a high demand for these funds and I’m glad we are able to partner with LEAF to ensure the food businesses in the western part of our state are able to receive the funding and technical assistance they need to succeed. These first seven awards are just the start of the kind of impact the MFTP will have in low-income, underserved areas,” **said John Waite, Franklin County Community Development Corporation.**

The capital funds released by the state to the MFTP offer local food businesses a “friendly capital” option for financing. The subordinated and below market rate loans provide the flexibility to adapt financing to the needs of the borrower and provide a starting point that draws traditional capital lenders to the project. Grants provided through this program supplement loan financing and support projects that will require loan financing in the future. This lessens the risk for borrowers and incentivizes other funders to come to the table. The MFTP also provides pre-and-post loan business assistance, in order to ensure that entrepreneurs are getting access to the resources they need to be successful and sustainable.

“After years of advocacy work alongside local partners to get this program off the ground, we could not be more pleased with the results. The two program administrators of the MFTP developed a structure with a powerful focus on equity. The program gives preference to projects that build wealth within communities most affected by lack of healthy food access, and that enhance racial, gender, and economic equity. This is exactly the type of investment our communities need,” **said Carlene Pavlos, Massachusetts Public Health Association.**

Applications for MFTP funding are accepted on a rolling basis. More information about the program and application process can be found at: <https://massfoodtrustprogram.org/>.

Massachusetts Food Trust Program Funding Awards:

Vicente's Tropical Grocery (*Plymouth County*) - Vicente’s Tropical Grocery in Brockton received a \$300,000 loan and a \$30,000 grant from the MFTP to help renovate their original store location. The grocery store is known for its vast assortment of high-quality, affordable, and culturally appropriate ethnic food. Brockton has a large population of Cape Verdeans and

Haitians, and Vicente's is proud to provide products which are not commonly available elsewhere and that serve the needs of the Brockton community. Each Vicente's store employs approximately 100 people, and almost all employees are hired from the local community, reflect the diversity of the area, and benefit from Vicente's focus on professional development and upward mobility.

Quabbin Harvest (*Franklin County*) - Quabbin Harvest in Orange received a \$20,000 loan and \$15,000 grant from the MFTP toward restructuring and expanding the operations of their food access program. Located in downtown Orange, Quabbin Harvest is a cooperative food store which provides healthy food at affordable prices while also building community, supporting local agriculture, and respecting the environment. Since their beginning as a volunteer-run produce share program, the store has demonstrated a commitment to affordability and was the top enroller of Healthy Incentive Program customers in the state during the first year of the Healthy Incentives Program.

The Food Project (*Suffolk County*) - The Food Project in Roxbury received a \$10,000 grant from the MFTP for technical assistance to explore demand and best practices for a produce distribution network for corner stores in the Dudley Square neighborhood. The Food Project currently grows and distributes produce and has been an ongoing leader working to increase food access across the Dudley neighborhood in Boston.

Wellspring Harvest (*Hampden County*) - Wellspring Harvest in Springfield received a \$15,000 loan and a \$15,000 grant from the MFTP which will support greater stability and access to their hydroponic greenhouse. Organized as a worker cooperative, Wellspring Harvest is located in a diverse, low-income community and has prioritized creating jobs for low-income residents and providing local, fresh produce to the city and region.

Adams Hometown Market (*Berkshire County*) - Myrtle Street Supermarket d/b/a Adams Hometown Market in Adams received a loan of \$250,000 and a grant of \$25,000 from the MFTP to help cover the cost of reopening a store where a Big Y supermarket recently shut down. The Big Y closed in early March 2019 and was the only grocery store within a 3 mile radius to provide fresh produce to the local community. Adams Hometown Market opened at the end of March 2019. In addition to sourcing locally grown and produced food, they have already hired more than 50 employees, many of whom were previously employed by Big Y and all of whom are from the surrounding community.

Seeds of Change (*Suffolk County*) - The Common Good Project, an initiative of Common Good Cooperatives Inc. in Boston, will receive a \$30,000 loan from the MFTP. The loan will help to

bring their Cooperative Urban Farm for lower resourced women into a full production farm for wholesale and retail distribution and expand their seasonal Dorchester based farm stand. With a focus on equity based leadership and economic development for Women of Color by Women of Color, the goal of The Common Good Project as a social enterprise and as a Massachusetts Benefit Corporation, is to support local fresh food access through participatory place-making and training towards sustainable social entrepreneurship of women of color.

Farm and Community Collaborative (*Plymouth County*) - The Farm and Community Collaborative (serving Plymouth and Bristol counties) received a \$30,000 loan and a \$20,000 grant to acquire a commercial truck and increase food access via two Gateway City farmers markets in New Bedford and Brockton. The Collaborative's model involves paid apprenticeships for local residents, primarily youth and veterans, to grow and harvest produce which they then sell at local farmers markets. Their presence at these markets will help fill gaps left by retiring farmers and vendors and help market managers and their partners meet their goals of employing local residents, better reaching the community, and diversifying the local agricultural sector. The Collaborative aims to help alleviate food insecurity among Gateway City residents believing that farm fresh produce provides a powerful opportunity to solve hunger.