FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Central Square Welcomes Winter Farmers Market to Starlight Square, Strengthening Food Access and Pandemic Recovery in the Neighborhood

WALTHAM, MA, February 23, 2021 - With food insecurity at an all-time high across Massachusetts, Mass Farmers Markets - producer of the annual Central Square Farmers Market - and the Central Square Business Improvement District set out to increase access to fresh, locally grown food for Cambridge residents in the dire times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Arise out of the collaboration is Central Square’s very own and first-ever winter farmers market, scheduled to operate in March and April at Starlight Square and as an extension of Poppportunity, two symbiotic initiatives aimed at providing a safe space for neighbors to gather, heal, receive essential services, and begin economic recovery. The winter market has received seed funding from the Cambridge Community Foundation for its pilot season.

The Central Square Winter Farmers Market will launch on Monday, March 1st at 12 pm with brief remarks and ribbon cutting by the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture (MDAR) Commissioner John Lebeaux, Mass Farmers Markets Executive Director Edith Murnane, and Central Square BID Executive Director Michael Monestime, with special guests from the City of Cambridge Mayor’s Office. The market will run eight consecutive Mondays, March 1st to April 19th, from 12 to 4 pm, and include well-known and long-time Massachusetts farmers, ranchers and fishermen Stillmans Farm, Stillman Quality Meats, Red’s Best, and Boston Smoked Fish. Joining them from Poppportunity is Sherman and Cherie’s Beezy Bees. In addition to being part of the first-ever winter market in Central Square, these vendors will also be the firsts in Massachusetts to test out the newly developed Winter MarketSheds, modular market stalls designed to set up quickly at winter markets to protect vendors from the cold, and easily disassembled and stored away in the spring when markets transition to the summer season.

“The Winter Farmers Market Initiative is an exciting way to allow farmers markets to continue to meet the needs of their communities this winter,” said Department of Agricultural Resources Commissioner John Lebeaux. “The winter market stalls provide shelter to the vendors and their products while allowing the market to operate in an outdoor setting, thus providing a safer shopping experience for consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Congratulations to Mass Farmers Markets for spearheading this innovative initiative”.

--- page 1 of 6 ---
The Central Square Winter Farmers Market joins a group of rising community resources based in Central Square addressing food insecurity, including non-profit Project Restore Us, the newly-opened Daily Table, and neighborhood collaborations to stock several community fridges.

There is a tremendous amount of need in the community. We’ve seen that since the beginning of the pandemic. If you look at any part of our district, there are mutual aid efforts in motion to support residents dealing with food insecurity. Central Square’s community centers, restaurants, and small businesses have all stepped up to meet the level of crisis we’re facing. Working in collaboration with the Central Square Farmers Market to open a pilot site early is another way the BID can help not only residents but also local farmers and food producers.

Starlight Square has proven to be a site where anything is possible. By taking a space for cars and turning it into a place for people, we created a destination in the neighborhood that can respond dynamically to what the community needs. First it was a safe place for the arts and non-profit community to transition outside, then it became a place for economic recovery with the introduction of Popportunity, and now it will integrate a new Farmers Market footprint. We said last March, the recovery from COVID-19 will happen outside. We encourage everyone to bundle up and support the Farmers Market, our Popportunity shops, including Comfort Kitchen, and an amazing season two at Starlight.”

- Michael Monestime, Executive Director, Central Square Business Improvement District

The Central Square Winter Farmers Market is part of a larger Winter Farmers Market Initiative started by Mass Farmers Markets in the fall of 2020. Motivated by the heightened food insecurity rates across Massachusetts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Edith Murnane, Executive Director of Mass Farmers Markets, set out to find a solution to keep farmers markets open as critical food access points for SNAP-eligible individuals and families this winter. In previous years, there were only 40 or so farmers markets open during the winter, compared to 200+ farmers markets during the summer.

"The vision behind the Winter Farmers Market Initiative is to ensure that Massachusetts residents can access all the benefits of farmers markets during traditional New England winters.

While this pilot is first and foremost about food access, the team - at Mass Farmers Markets and our partners Place Practice and the Central Square BID - recognized that in order to make food available, we also needed to address the environment. New England winters make outdoor farmers markets tough, especially for the vendors. We needed to solve that problem.

These MarketSheds allow us an amazing opportunity to change how we do winter. We now get to create outdoor spaces that work for everyone. The benefits include: farm fresh food, marketplaces for local farmers and food producers, a lively and healthy space where neighbors get to see one another, and a stronger and more resilient food system.”

- Edith Murnane, Executive Director, Mass Farmers Markets

Inspired by the famous Christmas markets in Europe, Murnane and a team of local professionals - designers, architects, engineers, green builders and planners - set out to devise a solution that would create a hospitable outdoor vending environment at farmers markets. The team, made up of Sarah Howard, LEED AP and Steven Nutter, AICP of Place Practice; Rick Williams and Phil Lemarche of Exhibit Technology; and Arick Dyrdal, a military veteran and owner of Design Build Boston, created a set of modular market stalls, or officially
MarketSheds, that would provide the flexibility and protection farmers markets need to remain operational during the winter months. The MarketSheds come in two sizes - 6’ by 8’ or 6’ by 12’ - and can be assembled with 2-3 people and a minimal set of tools within a few hours’ time. When the winter season is over, the MarketSheds can be taken apart and stored until next winter. Most importantly, all materials and fabrications are locally sourced and produced to invest back into the local economy.

The first MarketShed was erected at the Dorchester Winter Farmers Market on the site of the Epiphany School on February 11th, with Wayland Winter Farmers Market installing the second one on February 13th. Orleans Winter Farmers Market expects to set up and launch two MarketSheds on Saturday, February 27, with Central Square Winter Farmers Market in Cambridge being the fourth and largest installment of five MarketSheds on Monday, March 1st when the first winter market opens.

Winter MarketSheds being installed at the Dorchester Winter Farmers Market and Wayland Farmers Market launch events. More details and images can be found at WFMI Dorchester Launch and WFMI Wayland Launch.
Keeping farmers markets open also means keeping marketplaces open for local growers, ranchers and fishermen to do business and stay afloat during the difficult economy. Farm vendors are typically in an older age bracket and more at risk of being infected with COVID-19. Many have reduced their market attendance in order to minimize their risk, prioritizing larger markets that are more profitable, leaving smaller markets in smaller communities without much fresh produce options.

The initial Pilot Phase of the project has received funding from the state in Governor Baker’s FY2021 budget and is sponsored by House Representative Liz Malia representing 11th Suffolk District, and State Senator Becca Rauch representing Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex Counties. The funding was critical to provide the market stalls at no cost to the six markets. While farmers markets in Massachusetts are deemed essential, they are often volunteer-run and lack funding for infrastructure purchases, especially when a systemic crisis arises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This important investment in our local food system infrastructure will provide for greater food access, security, and resiliency in Massachusetts.

In Phase 2, the team is working to expand the program to municipalities throughout the state, especially Gateway Cities. To make this a reality, the team is actively seeking funders, sponsors and partners to contribute to and help build a more resilient regional food system.

**Due to current MA COVID-19 gathering restrictions, the launch events are invitees only. Please wear a mask & keep 6 ft social distance.**

More details of the 2021 Winter Farmers Market Initiative and launch sites/dates are available at http://massfarmersmarkets.org/wfmi/mediabrief

Farmers markets interested in Phase 2 should complete an inquiry form at wintermarketsheds.com

Sponsors interested in partnering with the Winter Farmers Market Initiative team should email sponsor@massfarmersmarkets.org

--- page 4 of 6 ---
Mass Farmers Markets (MFM) is a 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit organization that partners with farmers, consumers, and communities across the state to improve the health of individuals, strengthen community vitality, and enhance local farm viability. The organization was founded in 1978 with a partnership between the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, the University of Massachusetts Extension Service, and farmers from across the state. In addition, the organization directly runs three markets, in Copley Square, Central Square, and Davis Square.

Executive Director Edith Murnane leads a team of 10 at MFM using her deep expertise in developing food systems that support farmers, food businesses and all enterprises along the food chain while creating food access for Massachusetts residents. Previously as part of Mayor Menino's administration, Edith established the Office of Food Initiatives, launching the Micro Urban Farming Initiative, the Urban Agriculture Re-zoning work, the Restaurant Roadmap, the Food Truck Initiative, and the Food System Resiliency Initiative.

Central Square Business Improvement District / Cambridge, MA

Led by Executive Director, Michael Monestime, the BID’s work revolves first and foremost around placekeeping. Cities like ours are constantly in flux. To maintain and uplift what makes Central special, we leverage longstanding, intergenerational relationships to create spaces and opportunities for local residents, artists, and entrepreneurs to benefit from the richness of Central Square's Cultural District. In addition to our programming and pop-ups, the BID manages a team of Block-by-Block ambassadors and outreach workers. As stewards for the neighborhood, they are a welcoming presence in the Square, working to connect at-risk neighbors with social services, provide assistance to shop owners, residents, and visitors, and maintain ourshared public spaces.

Place Practice / Somerville, MA

MFM is working closely with Place Practice consultants Sarah Howard, LEED AP and Steven Nutter, AICP to coordinate project delivery. Howard and Nutter have over 40 years combined experience helping communities, municipalities and non-profits conceptualize, develop, and deliver needed built environment projects, from affordable housing and heritage trails to net-zero energy homes and community farm infrastructures.
EXHIBIT TECHNOLOGY / Leominster, MA

http://www.exhibit-technology.com
Rick Williams, Partner
rwilliams@exhibit-technology.com / 978-751-8680
Phil Lamarche, CAD Engineering & Design
plamarche@exhibit-technology.com / 978-751-8680

With over 55 years of collective experience in the industry, Exhibit Technology is a leading source of fabricated custom exhibit and millwork. They work directly with design firms, general contractors, retailers, architects, exhibit companies and event planners to take ideas and develop them into fabricated products. Their manufacturing facility is well equipped to produce projects from one of a kind to roll-outs for multiple locations.

DESIGN BUILD BOSTON / Somerville, MA

http://www.designbuild-boston.com
Arick Dyrdal, Owner
arick@designbuild-boston.com / 603-479-9489

A veteran and minority-owned and operated company, owner Arick Dyrdal brings a commitment to community and leads a team with a focus on building net-zero, multi-unit contemporary developments, especially those involving modular construction. He holds an Unrestricted Construction Supervisor License and Home Improvement Contractor License, is Passive House Certified, and is in the process of taking his Registered Architect exams.

###