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***Mass. Farm to School* Receives USDA Grant to Host Statewide Farm to School Conference**

*Amherst, MA December 3, 2015* – **Massachusetts Farm to School** is pleased to announce that they have received support through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm to School Program, a national effort to strengthen the connection between school cafeterias and students with local farmers and ranchers. Massachusetts' non-profit organization Mass Farm to School received a \$25,000 training grant to impact cafeterias, classrooms and communities across the Commonwealth.

"Farm to school programs work—for schools, for producers, and for communities," said USDA Secretary Vilsack. "By serving nutritious and locally grown foods, engaging students in hands-on lessons, and involving parents and community members, these programs provide children with a holistic experience that sets them up for a lifetime of healthy eating."

"Every student deserves access to healthy food and the farm to school program helps families, farmers, and our local economy," Congressman Jim McGovern said. "Connecting our local farmers and local schools ensures that each student gets the fresh fruits and vegetables they need to stay healthy and succeed as they continue to learn and grow. I am grateful to Secretary Vilsack for investing in our farmers and students and to all of our partners in Amherst and throughout Massachusetts who are helping to make this program a success."

Mass. Farm to School will use the funds to organize and host their fourth statewide Farm to Cafeteria Conference. This conference, last held in January of 2015, brings together over 400 farmers, school foodservice directors, educators, students, policy makers and community advocates for a full day of learning and networking. Attendees will spend the day learning about local food procurement practices, school garden resources, agriculture education opportunities, and farm to school best practices from around the Commonwealth. The Conference will also include a farmer/buyer trade show which will allow local food producers and distributors to interact directly with institutional purchasers.

Farm to school programs are one of the many tools and resources USDA offers to help schools successfully serve healthier meals. In the past three years since the bipartisan passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, kids have eaten healthier breakfasts, lunches and snacks at school. Over 97 percent of schools report that they are successfully meeting the updated nutrition standards.

Massachusetts Farm to School was founded in 2004 as a grassroots initiative to increase access to healthy, locally-grown food in schools and other institutions across the state. The organization facilitates sustainable purchasing relationships between local institutions, distributors and local farms, promote local food and agriculture education for students, and support networking of farm to institution practitioners. Mass Farm to School works to support a thriving Massachusetts food economy where institutions are a profitable and accessible market for farms and where buying, serving, and teaching students about local food is ingrained in the fabric of public schools, colleges and universities.

For more information visit, [www.massfarmtoschool.org](http://www.massfarmtoschool.org) or call (413) 253-3844. Photos available upon request.

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