

Press Release  
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Contact:  
Simca Horwitz  
413-253-3844

[simca@massfarmtoschool.org](mailto:simca@massfarmtoschool.org)

## **Massachusetts Farm to School Month & 2017 Kale Blazer Celebrated at Farm to School Awareness Day at the MA State House**

BOSTON, MA, Oct. 27, 2017 - Farm to School advocates from across the Commonwealth gathered at the Massachusetts State House on Thursday, October 26th to share their stories of bringing healthy, locally grown foods and food education to students with each other and their legislators. They heard from the 2016 Kale Blazer award winner **Senator Anne Gobi** and **Representative Smitty Pignatelli**, speaking on behalf of the Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture Committee, **Representative Stephen Kulik**, Director of the USDA's Office of Community Food Systems **Erin Healy**, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Commissioner **John Lebeaux**, Director of the Office of Food and Nutrition Services at the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education **Rob Leshin**, and the 2017 Kale Blazer award winner Chicopee Public Schools Food Service Director **Joanne Lennon**.

The Massachusetts Farm to School Kale Blazer is an individual who has demonstrated excellence and leadership in farm to school activity in Massachusetts. Joanne Lennon is a long time supporter and advocate for farm to school and her commitment to sourcing and serving healthy local food to her students continues to be a priority as she oversees 15 cafeterias and serves over 100,000 meals each month. Joanne said, "We find local products to be superior in freshness and taste, and the kids can tell the difference when we serve local food — I have high schoolers asking for seconds when we serve Hadley asparagus." Joanne consistently finds new and innovative ways to expand her local menu items and connect her efforts in the cafeteria to other parts of the school and local community by supporting lessons around local food in the classroom and school garden and by purchasing as much as she can from local farms.

Senator Gobi was a co-sponsor of Bill H.2782 which proclaimed October as Farm to School month in Massachusetts, increasing awareness about farm to school programs. "Healthy eating and sustainable practices are crucial to ensure that children and families are able to grow and succeed," Senator Gobi said. "The Massachusetts Farm to School organization is helping bridge an important gap between communities and their fresh, local options, while allowing students the opportunity to learn about how their food and health choices impact the local economy. Through their efforts, everyone benefits."

Erin Healy, Director, Office of Community Food Systems, USDA, said, "farm to school has multiple benefits, health benefits, economic benefits, and educational benefits. [It] reaches beyond the school environment and helps create jobs for our local farmers... for every \$1.00 spent on local food an additional \$0.86 is spent in that local economy."

Val Snowdon, Director of Education at Mill City Grows in Lowell, MA, said, "Farm to School Awareness Day provided an incredible opportunity for local organizations within the Commonwealth to come together to celebrate successes of the farm to school movement and encourage lawmakers to continue supporting our efforts. Mill City Grows was very fortunate to talk with staff from our state representatives' offices and discuss our school garden program with Senator Eileen M. Donoghue and Representative Rady Mom, who even gave us a tour of the state house."

Farm to School programs have exploded across the country in recent years. Massachusetts Farm to School has been at the forefront of this movement, with a strong statewide program since 2004. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm to School Census finds that 171 Massachusetts school districts are helping 422,000 students gain access to healthy, local foods and helping school cafeterias spend an estimated \$10.2 million on Massachusetts produced food.

For more information about Massachusetts Farm to School visit, [www.massfarmtoschool.org](http://www.massfarmtoschool.org). Photos available upon request. #####