

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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350 teachers, farmers, chefs and advocates gather for the Massachusetts Farm & Sea to School Conference

Leominster, MA -- December 6th Today farm to school advocates representing communities from Provincetown to the Berkshires gathered together for the 5th Massachusetts Farm & Sea to School Conference, hosted by Massachusetts Farm to School. From cooking demonstrations to curriculum development intensives, the event offered those looking to get students excited about local food and agriculture the tools to do so.

The keynote speaker was Onika Abraham, Director of Farm School NYC. She is one of the co-founders of Black Urban Growers. Her commitment to social justice work is reflected in her efforts to recruit Farm School NYC students that reflect the diversity of New York City, especially those from low resource and socially disadvantaged communities, and help them achieve their professional farming goals. Onika opened the day by encouraging everyone to reflect on their own connections to agriculture and food, and how to collectively draw upon these experiences to help shift to a more equitable food system.

Conference workshops covered a wide range of topics including procuring local food for institutions, garden based learning, nutrition education, and cooking with farm fresh foods. This year's conference also highlighted issues of racial equity and social justice in the farm to school movement. "As we expand farm to school activity throughout the state, we must ensure that the people who grow, process, and serve our food are treated justly, that our farmland and our fisheries are preserved for future generations, and that healthy foods are a right and not a privilege," explains Mass. Farm to School Co-Director, Simca Horwitz. "The peer learning and connections that happen when we bring together all of these individuals is what will help us achieve this vision of a more healthy and sustainable food system."

Farm to School programs have exploded across the country in recent years, with a wide range of impacts on local economies, student health, and learning. Massachusetts 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 Mass. Farm to School, visit www.massfarmtoschool.org or contact Simca Horwitz at Simca@massfarmtoschool.org or call 413-253-3844.

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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, promotes local food and agriculture education for students, and supports networking of farm to institution practitioners.

Schools or communities interested in starting or expanding a Farm to School program can visit Mass. Farm to School's website at www.massfarmtoschool.org for resources, information, and ways to get involved.