



Press Release
For Immediate Release
October 21, 2020

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Legislators, School Staff, and Advocates Gather to Celebrate New Bedford's Expanding Farm to School Program

NEW BEDFORD, MA, Oct. 21, 2020 - On a crisp fall afternoon, state legislators from New Bedford joined with school officials and community partners to celebrate new efforts underway in the district to improve school meals and experiential education opportunities. The event was part of the annual Massachusetts Farm to School Month celebration. It was hosted in partnership with Massachusetts Farm to School, a statewide organization that supports schools to increase local food sourcing and education and the Marion Institute, which supports garden based education in New Bedford schools.

At a time when schools are facing unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19, participants were eager to celebrate how the district has stepped up to serve students throughout the pandemic, and to recommit to their long term vision for the district's farm to school program.

New Bedford has an ambitious agenda and has not let the COVID-19 pandemic stall their plans. The goal of eventually providing garden based education to all students is advancing - with teachers from six elementary schools attending a training this summer at Round the Bend Farm to equip them with the skills to lead their students in hands-on lessons in the garden. When school buildings closed in March, the Food Service Department didn't miss a beat, quickly transitioning to providing meals to remote learners and even offering supplemental grocery bags to families struggling with food insecurity. "Our role as the School Nutrition Department is to ensure that students have the nourishment they need to learn. Whether school buildings are open or closed, that's our responsibility. And I know that by providing more scratch cooked, local foods, we're only going to serve our students better," explained Rob Shaheen Director of Food Services for the New Bedford Schools.

"New Bedford is an inspiring example for school districts in Massachusetts. They have a bold vision for providing their students with the highest quality, locally sourced meals and bringing classroom lessons to life through hands-on learning in the school garden. They are taking advantage of every opportunity - from training, to state grants and more - to strengthen their program for their students," says Simca Horwitz, Co-Director of Massachusetts Farm to School.

New Bedford Public Schools was a recipient of a new Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program established as part of the state's COVID-19 relief effort. The district was awarded \$1.4 million which will support the construction of a new central kitchen facility, dramatically increasing the districts' capacity to process and cook with locally grown ingredients. "These public investments are good for our students, our farms, and our communities," says State Representative Paul Schmid, who represents New Bedford and co-chairs the state legislature's

Food System Caucus, a group that successfully advanced the new grant program. “By incorporating more local foods into school meals, we ensure students have access to the healthy meals they need to thrive and we help spur economic recovery in this difficult time.”

In 2016 the Massachusetts legislature designated October as Farm to School Month. The month serves as an opportunity to commend the farm to school programs which support improved nutrition and academic achievement among the student population and represent potential markets for local farmers, growers, and food producers in school settings.

Founded in 2004, Massachusetts Farm to School has been at the forefront of the nationwide farm to school movement. Over $\frac{1}{3}$ of the state’s school districts provide access to healthy, local foods and spend an estimated \$10.2 million annually on Massachusetts produced food.

For more information about Massachusetts Farm to School visit, www.massfarmtoschool.org. Photos available upon request.

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