

## Farmers markets get grants to grow on

Lower Cape efforts to expand reach of farmers markets get federal funding



Linda Harris of Brooklyn, N.Y., buys vegetables at the Truro Farmers Market in August. The market's organizers have received a USDA grant to help put locally grown food within reach of more Cape Codders. Merrily Cassidy/Cape Cod Times file

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TRURO — Two Lower Cape organizations have received U.S. Department of Agriculture grants totaling nearly \$200,000 to increase public awareness of farmers markets.

Sustainable CAPE, the Truro-based Center for Agricultural Preservation and Education, received \$99,912 to expand its farm-to-school and local outreach programs and form a coalition of farmers markets.

The Eastham-based Community Development Partnership will use its \$100,000 grant to create a Farmers Market Development Program to help growers with business plans, financing challenges and transitioning to year-round production.

The grants are part of an ongoing USDA initiative to support local and regional food systems as a way of revitalizing rural economies and communities.

Nationwide, purchases of locally produced food have grown to nearly \$12 billion and the number of farmers' markets has increased by 61 percent to 8,500 since 2009, the USDA said.

Only four organizations in Massachusetts received the agency's Farmers Market Promotion Program grants.

Sustainable CAPE Founding Director Francie Randolph said getting the USDA grant was exciting for her small organization.

"We are thrilled," she said. "We'll create a coalition of farmers markets — the Truro, Orleans, Wellfleet and Orleans Winter markets — and we'll probably put out a call to see if anyone else wants to join us."

The federal grant builds on a 2014 state grant that Sustainable CAPE used to create local educational programs on the health and nutritional benefits of locally produced food. That effort currently involves bringing farmers into the Truro and Wellfleet elementary schools.

"Over the next two years, the grant will help us link schools and farms in seven elementary schools and help increase school cafeteria demand for locally produced food," Randolph said. "I really believe the next iteration of the local food movement is deepening the relationship between farmers markets and farm-to-school programs."

Sustainable CAPE also presents nutrition and education programs in housing developments and libraries to promote farmers markets in general and to let people know that many farmers markets accept SNAP and WIC benefits and senior discount coupons.

The Truro and Orleans Farmers Markets raise funds to offer "doubling" incentives so that people who rely on such assistance can purchase additional food with their benefit dollars.

The Community Development Partnership started the Orleans Winter Farmers Market last year.

"This is a really big deal," Jay Coburn, executive director of the partnership, said of the USDA grant. "It enables us to do a lot more promotion of the market and

work with farmers to help them strengthen their businesses and produce more product.”

The Cape’s climate is “perfect” for year-round farming activities, he said. More growers are investing in hoop houses and high-tunnel houses, which can cost thousands of dollars, to grow produce like arugula and spinach even during the coldest, darkest times of the year.

“Hearty greens do very well as long as you keep the temperature above 20 degrees,” Coburn said.

Advancing nutrition, food safety and food security and building employment opportunities by supporting local businesses are all part of the partnership’s mission, Coburn said.

The Orleans Winter Farmers Market will feature greens, root vegetables, meat, poultry, eggs and food products when it restarts in December at the Nauset Regional Middle School. It also will accept benefit payments.

“We’re fundraising now to double, if not triple, SNAP benefits,” Coburn said. “It’s a great way of keeping money in the local economy.”

Longtime Cape summer resident Gus Schumacher is a former USDA undersecretary of agriculture for food and foreign services and co-founder of Wholesome Wave, a Connecticut- and Washington-based organization dedicated to increasing affordable access to fresh, local and regional food. “These two terrific grants are national recognition of the innovative work underway by Francie Randolph at the Truro Farmers Market and Gretel Norgeot at the Orleans Farmers Market and the Community Development Partnership team in Eastham,” Schumacher said.

“We are delighted that these markets are now partners with Wholesome Wave,” he added, “fostering links with local school children and improving health for all Cape residents.”

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