State Awards FreshConnect Farmers’ Market Grants

A total of 17 farmers’ markets across the state -- many run by nonprofit groups -- will be receiving more than $350,000 under the FreshConnect Farmers’ Market program. Currently in its fourth year, the FreshConnect Farmers’ Market program has increased capacity for farmers to directly market their products to consumers while providing New Yorkers in underserved communities with new opportunities to purchase farm fresh products.

“Increasing access to farmers’ markets opens the door for New Yorkers to purchase fresh goods, live healthier lives, and provide a boost to local businesses,” Governor Cuomo said. “Supporting these marketplaces gives communities greater opportunity to make healthy food choices, grows our thriving agricultural industry, and showcases the world-class products that our farmers provide.”

This year, the FreshConnect Request for Proposals (RFP) focuses on supporting traditional farmers’ markets and youth market grant projects across the state. Under this initiative, new and existing farmers’ markets and not-for-profits applied for up to $10,000, and those with the best ideas on how to improve access to markets participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) were awarded funding.

In addition, more than $200,000 in “FreshConnect Checks” will be released this year to serve low-income families across the state, including, for the first time, $50,000 will be directed to veterans of all ages. Checks will be distributed through veterans’ facilities beginning this summer based on proximity to eligible farmers’ markets.

The “FreshConnect Checks” program encourages recipients to use their SNAP benefits at participating farmers’ markets by providing an additional $2 in incentive coupons for every $5 in SNAP benefits spent at a participating farmer’s market. In 2013, over $3.2 million in SNAP sales occurred at farmers’ markets throughout the state. In addition to SNAP, FreshConnect-funded projects aim to ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of income, have access to fresh fruits and vegetables and are encouraged to accept other nutrition incentives, such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Fruit & Vegetable Checks, Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program checks, and Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition checks.

“FreshConnect Checks increase the purchasing power of SNAP recipients shopping at farmers’ markets, while giving them the chance to easily buy fresh, locally-grown produce,” said New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) Commissioner Kristin M. Proud. “These farmers’ markets are having a positive impact in underserved communities by increasing access to healthy, nutritious food at an affordable price, an arrangement that benefits both consumers and the farmers.”

“Governor Cuomo’s Fresh Connect program helps farmers markets to achieve their goal to make fresh, healthy, and locally grown foods available to all consumers regardless of income level,” said Executive Director of the Farmers’ Market Federation of New York Diane Eggert. “The grants help farmers markets access the SNAP program, allowing consumers to use their SNAP benefits at farmers markets in low income communities across the state. The Fresh Connect program is a win-win for everyone: consumers have more healthy and affordable food choices and farmers gain a new consumer base.”

Among the awardees are:
• Bellevue Preservation, Inc., Schenectady, $3,500;
• Philmont Beautification, Inc./Philmont Farmers’ Market Program, Philmont, $9,760;
• Council on the Environment, Inc d/b/a GrowNYC, NYC, $10,000;
• The Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project LDC (MARP), NYC, $10,000;
• Corbin Hill Food Project, NYC, $10,000;
• BronxWorks, NYC, $10,000;
• Cypress Hills Local Development Cooperation, NYC, $10,000; and
• Harlem State Office Building (125th Street), NYC, $10,000.