



Regional Environmental Council
of Central Massachusetts

NEWS RELEASE

The Regional Environmental Council (REC) has been awarded of a USDA Farm to School grant to support school & community gardens.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Worcester, MA – The Regional Environmental Council has been selected as an awardee of a USDA Farm to School grant. This award, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), will help bring fresh, local foods into schools and foster economic opportunity for America’s farmers over the next school year. This grant will be used in collaboration with **May Street School, North High School, Vernon Hill School, the Worcester Senior Center, Worcester State University**, and the **EcoTarium**. The goals of this grant are to:

1. Develop a partnership model that will increase the sustainability of school gardens and create a structured program for summer maintenance. For this goal, the REC is working with the **May Street School** and **Worcester State University, Vernon Hill School** and the **Worcester Senior Center**, and **North High** and the **EcoTarium**.
2. Increase student exposure to farm activities and build student/parent knowledge of local food resources through field trips to local urban farm sites and visits from the REC Mobile Farmers Market stops.
3. Expand experiential learning opportunities by working in collaboration with teachers, administrators, and parents to develop and implement curriculum for each school site to ensure sustainable long term integration of the school garden into the culture of the school.

“The EcoTarium is thrilled to build on its strong relationships with both North High and the REC to connect youth to both the environment and to the important role locally sourced food plays in improving the health of our community and our world in this Farm to School program and partnership.” Says Lucy Hale, President of the EcoTarium.

“The Worcester Senior Center is excited to join the partnership of the REC and Vernon Hill School to support the integration of the school garden into the culture of the school,” said Patty Hainsworth, at the Worcester Senior Center.

“Working with the REC has been an amazing experience for our students and staff,” said Sabrina Pechie, the garden coordinator at Vernon Hill School. “The staff is so helpful and supportive. They are always willing to help in anyway possible. Our school garden is flourishing!”

"At North High School we are really excited to expand our community gardens and provide more opportunities for all students to get involved in this initiative. It is important to think about how food gets to our table and how we as a school community can promote community gardens and farms," says Lisa Houlihan, Principal at North High.

"USDA's Farm to School Program is a win-win," said Brandon Lipps, USDA's Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services. "The grants announced will help build bright futures for our children by connecting them to where their food comes from, while also nourishing the local economy and supporting American agriculture."

To help target funds to high-impact projects, FNS awarded bonus points to applications serving schools with a high population of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals; submitted by or serving tribal nations; and located in or targeting an Opportunity Zone, a census tract designation for low-income communities. In all, the projects will serve more than 7,610 schools and 2.5 million students, more than half of whom are eligible for free or reduced priced meals.

Visit the FNS [website](#) for more information about this year's grantees and projects. "This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the USDA. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government."

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About the REC: The Regional Environmental Council of Central MA (REC) is a food justice organization located in Worcester, Massachusetts. The mission of the REC is to bring people together to create a just food system and to build healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities in Worcester, MA and beyond.