Field & Fork Network Awarded $175K for their Ready To Grow Food Hub Planning Project

Field & Fork Network is thrilled to announce they have received funding from Farm Credit Northeast and the Western New Power Proceeds Allocation Fund to commence their Ready to Grow Food Hub Planning Project. This project has been championed by the organization for the last three years as a necessary step in connecting more of our locally grown agriculture products to the regional wholesale market. The planning initiative will entail a thorough market analysis, agriculture production analysis and infrastructure analysis of the 5 county region; Erie, Niagara, Orleans, Genesee, and Wyoming to best determine the feasibility of a food hub.

Food Hubs have been popping up all over the United States as more communities are investing in regional food systems. Food Hubs are defined by the USDA as: "A business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand." The Ready to Grow Food Hub Planning Project will determine the appropriate business model that will best meet the needs of our region’s growers and food buyers. “Of the 7,500 farms that exist in Western New York, more than 88% of those are considered small farms. And many grow and raise outstanding agriculture products. Unfortunately due to market constraints, these farmers have been left out of the wholesale market. We expect this project to address and eventually mitigate those market barriers for both farmers and for institutional buyers who want to source local products,” says Lisa Tucker, co-founder and Executive Director of Field & Fork Network.

Field & Fork Network will be working with New Venture Advisors and the Harvest NY team out of Cornell University to execute the project. New Venture Advisors is a Chicago-based consulting firm with expertise in the assessment, design, launch and development of businesses in the local food and sustainable agriculture arena. Since 2009 New Venture Advisors has worked on more than 13 food hub ventures across the country. “Food hubs are emerging as critical infrastructure in rebuilding local and regional food systems, and we see their positive impacts on growers and communities across the nation. We are thrilled to partner with Field & Fork Network and the Harvest New York team to develop a food hub for Western New York, which will catalyze the food system and bring the fresh, nutritious and delicious local food found at the farmers market to supermarket shelves, school cafeterias and everyday restaurants,” states
Kathy Nyquist, founder and principal of New Venture Advisors.

The Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest NY team will provide additional assistance and resources as part of their goal to develop new agricultural economic development opportunities in Western New York. “The Harvest NY team is excited to join Field and Fork Network and New Venture Advisors as a project collaborator on this important work. We strongly believe it’s a critical step in creating a stronger and more resilient regional food system in Western New York,” says Cheryl Thayer, Harvest NY’s Agricultural Economic Development Specialist.

The Ready to Grow Food Hub Planning Project will have additional oversight from an advisory board populated with key leaders and stakeholders in the local food and agriculture industry. Members of the advisory board are Nathan Rudgers from Farm Credit East; Diane Held from American Farmland Trust & Cornell University Cooperative Extension of Erie County; Paul Bencal from Bencal Farms; Mark Rountree from the Department of Environment & Planning of Erie County; Philip Gotwals from Agricultural & Community Development Services LLC; Julie Blackman from Blackman Homestead Farm; Eben Kennedy from Wegmans Markets; and Carolyn Rosiek from Farm This Way.

Field & Fork Network is a non-profit food and farming organization dedicated to building a thriving regional food system in Western New York. Founded in 2008, the mission of the organization is to build capacity for a thriving regional food system in WNY. They promote connections between the consumers, food producers, and food buyers in the 8 county region. They strive to create a practical economic engine for local, sustainable agriculture and to provide our region with access to fresh, healthy food.

Field & Fork Network will host a public meeting to review the project and introduce the project team on October 30, 2013 at 7pm at the Erie County Fire Training Academy, 3359 Broadway, Cheektowaga, NY 14227.

For more information about Field & Fork Network and the Ready To Grow Food Hub Planning Project please contact Lisa Tucker at 716-465-5704 or via email at fieldandforknetwork@gmail.com. Field & Fork Network’s website is www.fieldandforknetwork.com.