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PRESS RELEASE

# Baker-Polito Administration Supports Urban Agriculture Projects Across Massachusetts

Eight Urban Farming Enterprises Receive Grants to Improve Operations

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Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

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**LOWELL** — The Baker-Polito Administration today announced \$343,079 in grants for eight urban agriculture projects across the state. The funding continues the Administration’s support for an emerging urban agriculture sector and a commitment to ensure city residents have access to fresh food. The announcement was made by Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) Commissioner John Lebeaux during an event at UMass Lowell.

“Massachusetts’ urban agriculture programs remain a critical way to address food access and food insecurity in the Commonwealth’s urban areas, while revitalizing communities and creating local jobs,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “Our administration is proud to provide funds to help these innovative enterprises expand and improve their operations.”

“Urban food production positively impacts the health and standard of living of residents, and is an avenue for local job creation and improving community camaraderie,” **said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito**. “Many of today’s grant recipients also have programs dedicated to youth development and leadership, inspiring the next generation of Massachusetts farmers.”

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) launched an Urban Agriculture Program to support the emerging urban agriculture sector in early 2014. As of today, MDAR’s Urban Agriculture Program has released four rounds of funding which have provided support for 57 urban agriculture projects and facilitated five statewide urban agriculture conferences, attracting hundreds of practitioners, advocates, and policy makers.

“In urban areas, small-scale urban agriculture sites can make a big difference in increasing access to fresh, healthy produce, preserving open space and beautifying neighborhoods,” **said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary (EEA) Matthew Beaton**. “Through the Urban Agriculture Program, the Baker-Polito Administration is dedicated to supporting the growth and viability of food production in urban centers.”

“I am so pleased that MDAR is able to award eight organizations with Urban Agriculture Program grants this year,” **said MDAR Commissioner John Lebeaux**. “Each grant recipient has their own original way of increasing access to locally grown food with programs that will support mobile markets, new infrastructure or equipment for commercial food production.”

Urban agriculture ranges from traditional in-ground growing and rooftop farms, to aquaponics, greenhouses and “freight farms.” The local food movement is taking root in neighborhoods, especially where vacant land or buildings are available and fresh food is hard to find. Previously funded projects have reached communities including Boston, Springfield, Lowell, Holyoke, Lawrence, Salem, and Somerville.

The successful demonstration of these projects has ranged from innovative markets, expanding production space, refurbishing production facilities and investments in market opportunities within low to moderate income communities.

The following projects received grants:

**Wellspring Greenhouse, Springfield - \$65,400**

Wellspring will use its award to build a hydronic growing system, and purchase equipment and materials for their large-scale greenhouse. The grant will enable the company to increase its energy efficiency, enhance sales and create more economic opportunities in the Springfield community.

**Urban Farming Institute, Roxbury - \$50,908**

Urban Farming Institute will use this funding to increase overall farm production with the purchase of small hand tools, amendments for soil health, refrigeration cooler, and pick-up truck for distribution purposes.

**Gardening the Community, Springfield - \$74,230**

Gardening the Community will use this award for the construction of a permanent farm stand. The stand will create a new direct market in a low-income neighborhood and will be on the site for their Walnut St. Farm.

**NUBIA, Boston - \$4,104**

NUBIA will use this funding to purchase a “walk behind” tiller with snow attachment. This additional piece of equipment will be crucial for production prep and winter maintenance for this organization’s growing number of production sites.

**UMass Lowell, Lowell - \$71,808**

UMass Lowell will utilize its grant award for equipment, installation and tools for the final phase of their Urban Agriculture Innovation Site. The project is in partnership with a local urban farm that will be a model of sustainability and organic food production.

**Victory Program, Boston - \$27,221**

The Victory Program will use its award for their urban farm capacity building project, which includes greenhouse infrastructure, soil enhancement, and equipment for production efficiency. The overall project will help to increase produce production and commercial sales to the Dorchester and Mattapan neighborhoods.

## **Mill City Grows, Lowell – \$36,934**

Mill City Grows will utilize its award for the purchase of several pieces of mobile equipment to help their staff manage and maintain multiple urban farm sites.

## **Regional Environmental Council, Worcester – \$12,474**

The Regional Environmental Council will utilize its grant to upgrade their current marketing and mobile market vehicle and add to the small scale tools in their commercial kitchen to diversify products for their markets. They will also pilot a packaged food program utilizing food grown on the YouthGROW urban farm.

“Urban agriculture plays a vital role throughout greater Lowell by assisting families struggling with food insecurity, promoting healthy dietary habits, and supporting our local economies,” **said State Senator Eileen Donoghue (D-Lowell)**. “This grant funding will support UMass Lowell and Mill City Grows as they continue their important work in expanding urban farm sites and encouraging environmental sustainability. Congratulations to these two outstanding institutions for all they do for our community.”

“My congratulations to UMass Lowell and Mill City Grows for their respective grants that will allow them to build upon their innovative programs to produce healthy foods in a sustainable and accessible manner,” **said State Representative Thomas A. Golden, Jr. (D-Lowell), Chairman of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy**. “These grants are critical to spur the growth of urban food production and I thank the Baker-Polito administration, Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Beaton, and Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Commissioner Lebeaux for their leadership on this program.”

“Congratulations to both Mill City Grows and UMass Lowell for the tremendous change you are fostering by creating an urban agricultural garden where Lowell’s residents can not only take part in farming but our children can see and learn the value of sustainable, environmentally proactive lifestyles,” **said State Representative Rady Mom (D-Lowell)**.

“Urban agriculture programs throughout the state highlight the commitment this administration has made to offering innovating and sustainable projects, and I commend the Department of Agricultural Resources for their funding and support towards facilitating these partnerships with Mill City Grows and UMass Lowell,” **said State Representative David Nangle (D-Lowell)**.

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