



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Governor Announces \$285,000 in Funding for Third Year of FreshConnect Farmers' Market Program

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Funds to Support Farmers' Market, Youth Market, and Food Box Projects to Bring More New York State Farm Products to Underserved Communities

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced \$285,000 in available funding for the third year of the Governor's "FreshConnect" program, which brings fresh food from New York farms to underserved communities throughout the state. The FreshConnect program assists New York farmers by increasing the sale of locally-grown food products while improving nutrition and promoting economic development around the state through projects like youth markets, delivery of products to low-income housing facilities, and new initiatives at traditional farmers' markets.

"The FreshConnect program has been a real success in promoting healthy living while supporting the State's vibrant agricultural industry," Governor Cuomo said. "This year, the program will provide even more avenues for low-income New Yorkers to purchase affordable, healthy, and locally-grown food. We are also continuing to support more marketplaces where local farmers can sell their goods and expand their operations. Through this program, more New Yorkers can eat healthy and New York farmers can sell more

products – that is what FreshConnect is all about.”

Launched by the Governor in 2011, the FreshConnect program is designed to foster new farmers’ markets and support existing markets that provide fresh produce to high-need areas throughout the state. In some areas, the program serves rural or urban populations that do not have sufficient access to grocery stores; in others, it provides low-income, high-unemployment neighborhoods with healthy, New York-grown produce, as well as local jobs.

In 2011, the program provided viable market locations for over 100 farmers, helped create local jobs for youth in urban areas, and helped increase the sale of locally grown food. In 2012, an expanded FreshConnect program awarded grants through a competitive process to support work at over 50 project sites to better connect New Yorkers with local farm products. The program's flagship 125th Street Fresh Connect Farmers’ Market, located at the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. New York State Office Building in Harlem, attracted approximately 2,000 people each week that it was open in 2012 and will continue to operate in 2013.

The funding announced today will be awarded through a competitive process. Regional market authorities, public benefit corporations, not-for-profit corporations, and local government entities are eligible to apply, including entities that participated in the FreshConnect program in prior years. The procurement documents and applications are available at the Department of Agriculture and Markets’ website:

www.agriculture.ny.gov/RFPS.html. Applications are due by April 3, 2013.

The funding will be distributed through initiatives designed to meet the different needs of underserved communities throughout the state and will support innovative methods to provide those communities with better access to New York farm products. These include:

· FreshConnect Farmers' Market Grant Program: Funding will support multiple grant projects to improve access of underserved communities to New York farm products at farmers' markets. Under this component, new and existing farmers' markets, municipalities and not-for-profits may apply for up to \$10,000. The best ideas on how to improve access to farmers' market produce will be awarded funding.

· FreshConnect Youth Market Program: Funding will support multiple youth-staffed market programs, one of the most effective models for reaching nutritionally underserved neighborhoods. Youth markets also help train youth to operate all aspects of a farmers' market in the neighborhood using food purchased from local farmers. Youth will be active participants in all aspects of planning and running the market. Funding will be awarded to organizations that can demonstrate sustainability and growth of youth market programs.

· FreshConnect Food Box Program: This program supports pilot projects that will enable underserved, low-income communities to purchase fresh, locally-sourced fruits and vegetables in pre-packed boxes. Food Box customers will have the flexibility to pay for their boxes weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly depending on the pick-up schedule of each project. Food Box customers will have the option to use Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to pay for their boxes. State funding would cover administrative costs associated with a qualified organization procuring, transporting and distributing the food to low-income New Yorkers.

· FreshConnect Checks: This year's FreshConnect program will continue the "FreshConnect Checks" initiative, a rebate incentive that encourages New Yorkers receiving SNAP benefits to use those benefits at farmers' markets. FreshConnect Checks will provide \$2 rebate checks for every \$5 in SNAP benefits spent at participating markets. In addition to SNAP, FreshConnect-funded projects 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, to ensure that all citizens have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, regardless of income. In 2011, over \$2.5 million in SNAP sales occurred at farmers' markets throughout the state.

- Microgrants for Capital Improvement Projects: Microgrants of up to \$2,500 each will be available through a Request for Applications process for capital improvement projects at farmers' markets that improve access to farm products by underserved communities. Grants will be dispersed on a first come, first served basis as completed applications are received. The application for the microgrants program will be available at www.agriculture.ny.gov beginning March 20, 2013.