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# Press Release

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## **Town, Union Point partnership cultivates growth in farmers market shopping and vendors**

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Weymouth, MA – Mayor Robert Hedlund announced today that Town staff are reporting significant growth in farmers market shopping and vendors following a mid-season review of the Town's new partnership with the Union Point Farmers' Market. Debit card purchases of "market bucks," or wooden tokens that act as currency at the market, are up 70 percent compared to mid-season 2016 at the Town-run farmers market on Legion Memorial Field. The Union Point Farmers' Market now has 32 registered vendors – more than 1.5 times the number that participated in the Weymouth Farmer's Market last summer.

"We set out to combine the best elements of both farmers markets, and to continue the success of the Town and Food Pantry's Farm to Family program, which helps low-income families purchase fresh produce. What's developed is a stronger market and a more vibrant community experience than either the Town or Union Point has been able to achieve on its own," **said Mayor Robert Hedlund**. "Sales are up, vendors are happy, and shoppers have more to choose from and enjoy than at any prior year's farmers market."

For the summer of 2017, the Union Point and Weymouth Farmers' Market teamed up to support a single market experience for residents of Weymouth. Lola Grace Events of Hanson assumed the role of market coordinator for Union Point, while Town staff committed to operating the Town and Food Pantry's Farm to Family program, allowing

shoppers to use federal food assistance (SNAP/EBT) and other forms of electronic payments for market purchases at Union Point.

The Union Point Farmer's Market currently runs every Sunday, 10 am to 1 pm, offering live music, free fitness classes, and convenient access to Union Point's playground and dog park. Town staff run a table at the market where shoppers can purchase market bucks using an EBT or debit card. Families using their EBT card are given a "market match" up to \$20 a day. This same match is provided to Weymouth Food Pantry clients who do not qualify for federal assistance but who still meet the pantry's low-income qualifications.

In a mid-season comparison of market bucks transactions between 2016 and 2017, Town staff report that overall purchases of market bucks are up 25 percent compared to last season and payments to vendors for redeemed tokens are up 26 percent (see Figures 1 and 2). Purchases using debit cards are up 70 percent alone, accounting for nearly all the growth in market buck transactions (see Figure 3). Purchases by low-income households are on par with those last year, indicating that the Farm to Family program has avoided any significant loss of growth as a result of the changes in 2017 (see Figures 5 and 6).

"What we're seeing is a large expansion of market buck transactions, which is benefiting both residents and vendors," **said Town Administrative Services Coordinator Nicholas Bulens.** "More than half of all market bucks redeemed at the Union Point Farmers' Market are used to purchase produce and go directly into the hands of the local farms. This means our farmers are doing more business, and Weymouth families are taking home more fruits and vegetables."

"Lola Grace Events is enjoying our partnership with Weymouth this season and couldn't be happier with the growth of the Union Point Farmers' Market. We believe this season truly encompasses all aspects of what a community farmers markets should be, from providing an abundance of local farms and vendors to including the Farm to Family Program for the first time at Union Point," **said Lola Grace Events' Owner and Creative Director Rachael Gross.** "We look forward to continuing this partnership for years to come"

Aside from market buck purchases, Town staff further compared the number and variety of vendors between the 2016 market at Legion Memorial Field and the current market at Union Point (see Table 1). The comparison showed that the Union Point Farmers' Market has more than 1.5 times the number of vendors that participated at Legion Memorial Field last summer. These vendors further offer a wider variety of food for market shoppers, including cheese, eggs, meat, preserves, and sauces. The Union Point Farmers' Market currently sustains six farms – more than either farmers market has registered in previous years.

"We've been delighted this year that the partnership has attracted so many more vendors," **said Food Pantry Director Cas Casados.** "Now, Farm to Family Program participants get access not only to fresh produce at the market, but to meat, cheese, and eggs as well. That's a huge improvement for the families we serve."

"The season ends October 15th, so we'll run another analysis at that time; but we are very pleased with the trends," **said Bulens**. "We were unsure what to expect after all the changes this year; but the data show we have a very strong market thanks to our new partnership."

Weymouth's Farm to Family program and other Town-run market activities are organized by a steering committee composed of volunteer employees from the Town's Health Department, Mayor's Office, Planning Department, Recreation Division, and the Weymouth Food Pantry. This operational model is unique for farmers markets, since most communities, including Braintree, Hingham, and Quincy, have citizen-based nonprofits that take on the responsibility of market management.

Figure 1

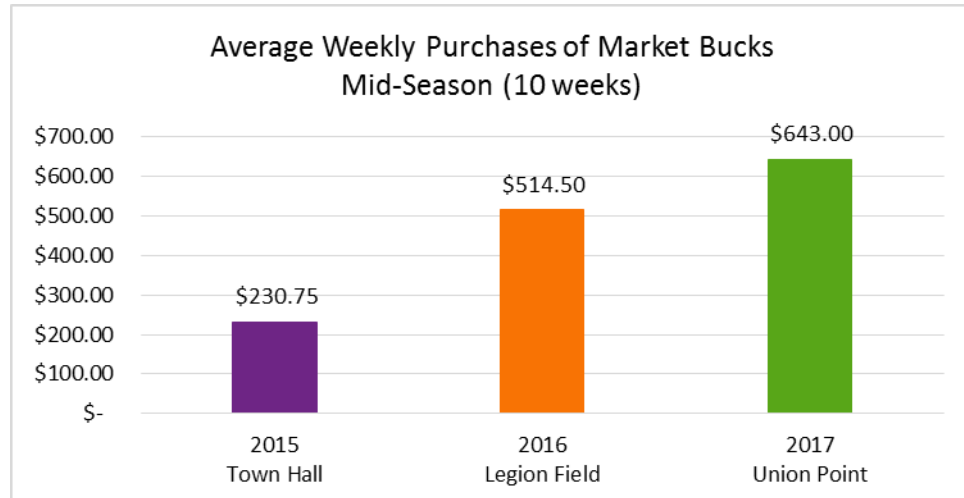


Figure 2

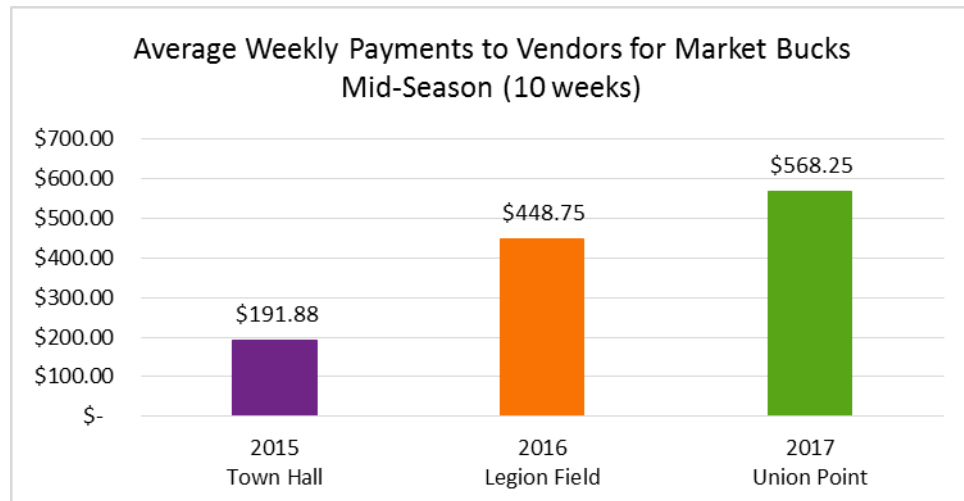


Figure 3

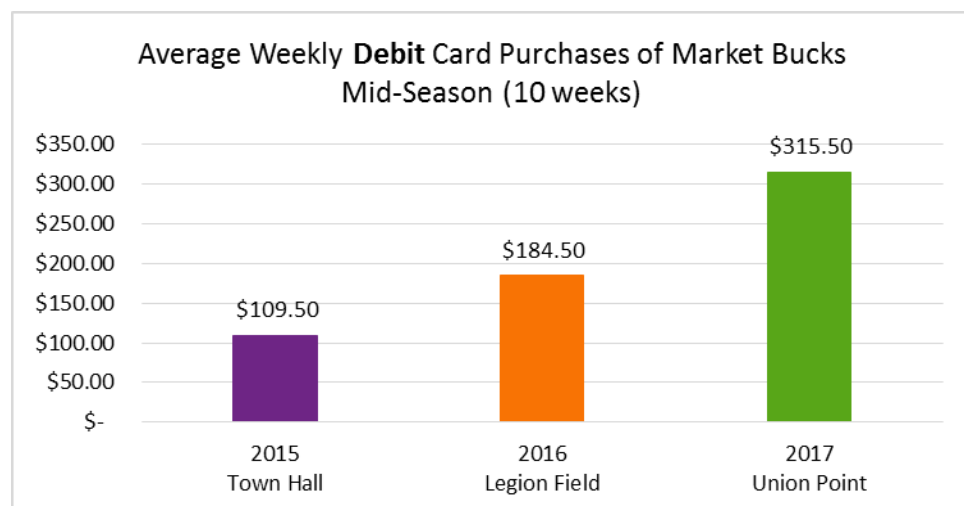


Figure 4

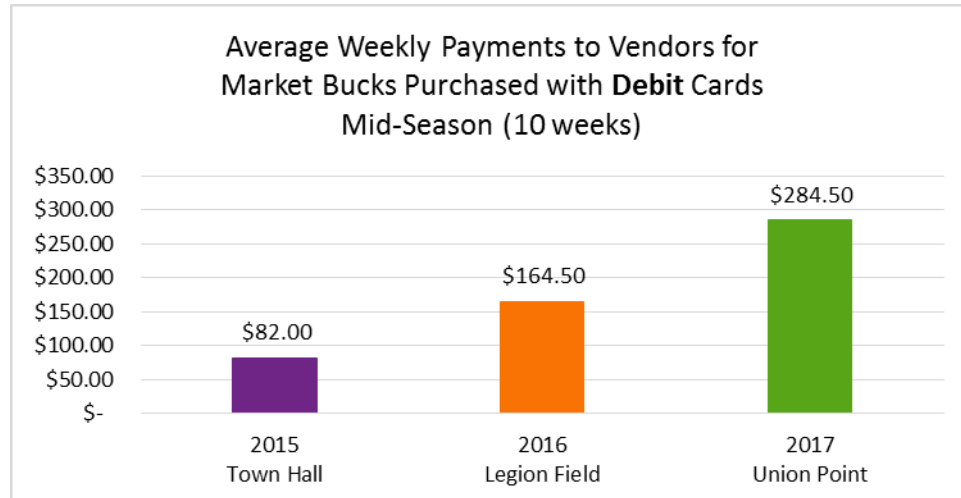


Figure 5

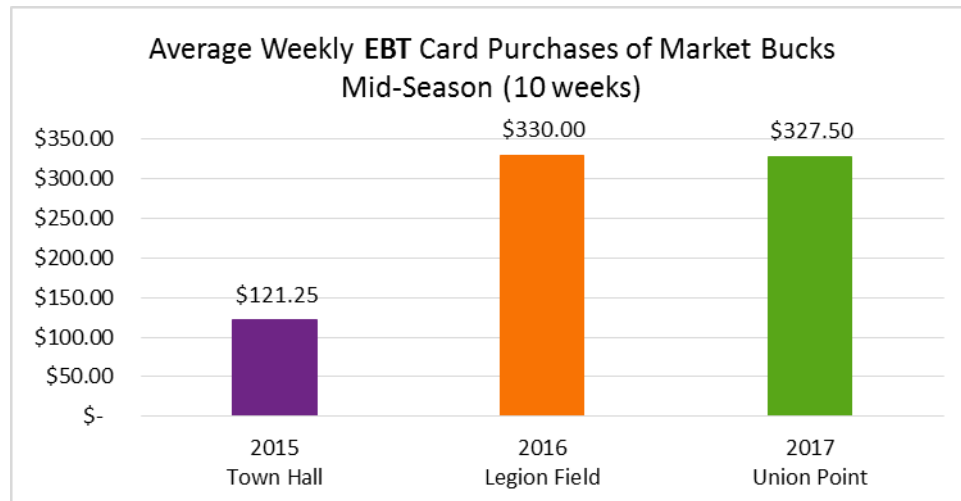


Figure 6

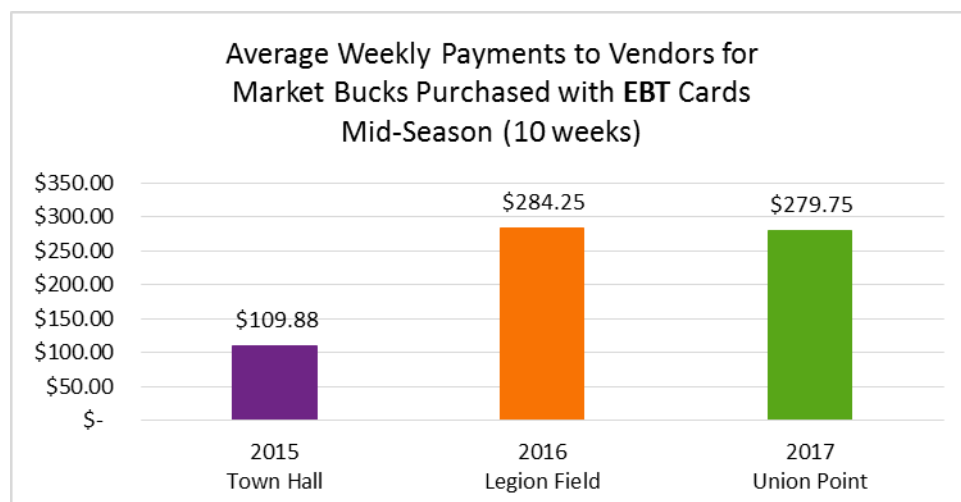


Table 1

## Farmers' Market Vendors

	2016 LEGION FIELD	2017 UNION POINT
Farmers/Growers	4	6
Bakeries	3	2
Cheese/Dips	0	3
Eggs	0	1
Fish	1	0
Honey	1	2
Meat	0	1
Preserves	0	1
Sauces	0	1
Other Food	3	4
Other Plants	2	1
Non-Food or Plants	6	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>32*</b>

\* While the total tally of the "2017 Union Point" column is 34, the total number of registered vendors at Union Point is 32. Two vendors sell products in multiple categories.

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