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Press Release

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Union Point Farmers' Market celebrates National Farmers Market Week, raising \$500 in local produce for the Weymouth Food Pantry

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Weymouth, MA – The Union Point Farmers' Market joined markets across the country this Sunday in celebrating National Farmers Market Week from August 6-12. Purchases made at the market's five farms were matched by a \$500 donation from Mayor Robert Hedlund, House Majority Leader Ron Mariano, State Representative James Murphy, and State Senator Patrick O'Connor. This donation will be spent equally among the market's farms to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables for the Weymouth Food Pantry.

"This donation is about helping the farmers market do what it does best: stimulate business for local farmers, while improving access to fresh, healthy food for families in need," **said Mayor Robert Hedlund**. "I am glad that we can partner with Union Point to encourage families to meet, and buy from, the local farmers that make the market a healthy, community resource."

"Fresh, local produce is important for everyone's nutrition, but especially for families who are struggling to afford groceries," **said Weymouth Food Pantry Director Cas Casados**. "We are so grateful for this donation and are excited to bring the food to the families we serve."

As demand for local food has continued to grow, so too have opportunities for farmers to market their products directly to consumers. According to statistics recently released by the United States Department of Agriculture, farmers markets and farm stands account for roughly \$2 billion of the \$3 billion that Americans spend annually on farm-direct products. This revenue, in turn, supports the livelihoods of more than 165,000 mostly small and mid-sized farms and ranches. In fact, American farmers and ranchers receive only 15.6 cents of every consumer dollar spent on food, according to the National Farmers Union. Farmers markets provide one of the only low-barrier, low-budget access points where farmers and ranchers can retain a larger share of our food dollars.

The Union Point Farmers' Market began in 2015, and currently hosts five farms and more than a dozen food and plant vendors selling a wide variety of products, including baked goods, eggs, fruits, honey, lavender, meats, preserves, sauces, spreads, vegetables, and more. The market 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. The market is coordinated by Lola Grace Events on behalf of LStar Management.

In the current season, the Union Point Farmers' Market has partnered with the Town-run Weymouth Farmer's Market to assist farmers in accepting SNAP benefits and other forms of electronic payments. The market's new Farm to Family Program, sponsored by the Weymouth Food Pantry, allows shoppers to swipe their EBT and debit cards for wooden tokens, which act as cash at the market. Shoppers using their EBT card receive a "market match" up to \$20 a day, allowing them to double their food purchases. This same match is offered to Weymouth Food Pantry clients who do not qualify for federal food assistance but who meet the pantry's low-income qualifications.

Since the start of the current season, the Farm to Family Program has facilitated more than \$4,000 in EBT and debit card transactions. About one third of these dollars went directly into the hands of the market's five farms. This means that one in every three dollars was also used to purchase healthy fruits and vegetables, creating a win-win situation for farmers and the community.

"Eating more locally-sourced produce has many environmental and health benefits. This contribution will help the Union Point Farmers' Market and the Town of Weymouth ensure that residents have access to these advantages no matter their income," said **House Majority Leader Ron Mariano**.

"Farmers markets are a great way for people to come together and purchase fresh produce while supporting local farmers and small businesses," **stated Representative James Murphy**. "This donation can help to ensure families in the community have access to local fruits and vegetables for a healthy way of life."

"The South Shore's local farmers markets are defining features of our summer months. They provide a great opportunity for residents to purchase fresh produce and support local farmers," **said Senator Patrick O'Connor**. "This donation will support the fantastic work of the Weymouth Food Pantry by buying some of these locally-grown fruits and vegetables for those unable to afford them on a regular basis."

According to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Massachusetts hosts approximately 240 summer and fall farmers markets and another 40 winter farmers markets across the Commonwealth. At nearly \$48 million, the state ranks 5th in the nation for direct market sales and 3rd in the nation for direct market sales per operation. Direct market sales account for 10 percent of Massachusetts' total sales of agricultural products.

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