

LEVERAGING ONEIDA COUNTY'S INVESTMENT: Grants to CCE Bring More Services to Community, 2020 Public Market



The Oneida County Public Market re-opened in mid-May and is back on track for Saturdays at Utica's Union Train Station following a spring of uncertainty fueled by Covid-19. Vendors and patrons alike are reinvigorated at the sight of market tables covered with the true signs of summer in Upstate New York — plump strawberries, zucchini the size of baseball bats, and green peas that really 'snap.'

With its network of resources and visionary capacity in serving the agricultural sector, Oneida County awarded the contract for Public Market management to Cornell Cooperative Extension Oneida in 2019. CCE engaged with a full-steam-ahead approach focused on leveraging the County's investment and securing additional resources to enhance the solid Market operations framework it had inherited. Before the start of the 2020 season -- CCE's second year of oversight -- new investments valued at \$310,000 had been secured from public/private partners:

\$247,548: A USDA-FMPP grant (Farmers Market Promotion Program) will facilitate CCE's vision of continued Market growth for three years and through the end of 2022. Initiatives supported by the grant will bring innovative and much-needed services to both area farmers and Market patrons, including refugees;

\$9,257: An AHA Community Impact Award (American Heart Association) will sponsor Market-based Nutrition Tours and services for adults, as well as nationally-recognized children's programming to help create responsible young consumers with positive eating habits and shopping skills;

\$53,312: An AmeriCorps VISTA investment is bringing approximately 2,000 hours of manpower valued at over \$53,000 to CCE, the Public Market, and the farming community with specific goals of promoting and enhancing the Market experience for local refugees, small and emerging farmers, and families in need of food and nutrition services.

TURNING INVESTMENT INTO

IMPACT 

In tandem with resources committed by Oneida County and CCE, grant investments will establish Oneida County Public Market as the region's premier outlet for direct-to-consumer sales of locally-grown produce, meats, value-added specialty products, and hand-made merchandise, as well as quality family and resident outdoor recreation. Grant-supported activities commenced in spring and will go through the growing season, fall/winter Markets, and 2021. Initiatives include:

-  **The addition of full-time Market Director (Beth Irons) to facilitate consumer enhancements, public outreach, Market sustainability —** Current efforts include: improved signage; COVID-19 event precautions; installation of fresh-water drinking facilities; increased promotion of SNAP-EBT card acceptance at farm markets; the addition of shopping carts; and expansion of the nationally-recognized *Power of Produce* program wherein kids' activities earn POP tokens to purchase their own foods at Market (FMPP/AHA funding);
-  **Weekly Public Market fresh food and nutrition tours —** guided by CCE's EatSmart NY trained and certified staff. Attendees receive shopping vouchers upon completion to purchase local products (AHA funding);
-  **Creation of an e-commerce sales platform** featuring pickup options at weekly Markets to increase producer sales, accessibility, consumer convenience, and COVID-19 safety precautions (FMPP funding);
-  **Value-Added Business expansion and education for farmers—** In collaboration with the Farm & Food Business Incubator at Mohawk Valley Community College, four-week workshop sessions of *Farm-to-Market* are introducing producers to the processes of creating and marketing value-added products such as sauces, gluten-free baked goods, prepared meals, frozen desserts, and more (FMPP funding);
-  **Preparation for recruitment of a volunteer Ambassadors Corp —** VISTA volunteer Diamond Hogans is prepping to launch a Volunteer Ambassadors Corps to hail the benefits of fresh foods among low-income, under-served, and refugee families/neighborhoods. She is developing job descriptions, a volunteer manual, and an orientation program — all assets that will remain impactful long after her Oneida County assignment (FMPP funding).



CCE WELCOMES VISTA VOLUNTEER

Diamond Hogans of Atlanta, GA arrived in Oneida County in July and hit the ground running for her responsibilities at the Public Market and with immigrant farmers. She studied sociology at Georgia State University, and has prior experience working with Habitat for Humanity and refugee groups. Diamond is interested in food systems and urban/emerging agriculture projects as a means of addressing poverty. In her own words, "the last thing I want to do is stand on the sidelines when I can get involved in changing lives and communities." We'll take you up on that, Diamond! Welcome to CCE and Oneida County!