



2023 CONNECTICUT GROWN PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT

C.G.S Sec. 22-38a. A report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment

PREPARED BY THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

INTRODUCTION

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAg) promotes Connecticut Grown farm products through a variety of programs and initiatives to increase the awareness of, and demand for, Connecticut Grown farm products. These programs and initiatives include but are not limited to the components outlined in Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 22-38a (see below), and other related initiatives under the Connecticut Grown Program umbrella.

CONNECTICUT GENERAL STATUTES Sec. 22-38a. Promotion of Connecticut-Grown farm products. Regulations. The Commissioner of Agriculture shall establish and administer a program to promote the marketing of farm products grown and produced in Connecticut for the purpose of encouraging the development of agriculture in the state. The commissioner may, within available appropriations, provide a grant-in-aid to any person, firm, partnership or corporation engaged in the promotion and marketing of such farm products, provided the words "CONNECTICUT-GROWN" or "CT-Grown" are clearly incorporated in such promotional and marketing activities. The commissioner shall (1) provide for the design, plan and implementation of a multiyear, state-wide marketing and advertising campaign, including, but not limited to, television and radio advertisements, promoting the availability of, and advantages of purchasing, Connecticut-grown farm products, (2) establish and continuously update a web site connected with such advertising campaign that includes, but is not limited to, a comprehensive listing of Connecticut farmers' markets, pick-your-own farms, roadside and on-farm markets, farm wineries, garden centers and nurseries selling predominantly Connecticut-grown horticultural products and agri-tourism events and attractions, and (3) conduct efforts to promote interaction and business relationships between farmers and restaurants, grocery stores, institutional cafeterias and other potential institutional purchasers of Connecticut-grown farm products, including, but not limited to, (A) linking farmers and potential purchasers through a separate feature of the web site established pursuant to this section, and (B) organizing state-wide or regional events promoting Connecticut-grown farm products, where farmers and potential institutional customers are invited to participate. The commissioner shall use his best efforts to solicit cooperation and participation from the farm, corporate, retail, wholesale and grocery communities in such advertising, Internet-related and event planning efforts, including, but not limited to, soliciting private sector matching funds. The commissioner shall use all of the funds provided to the Department of Agriculture pursuant to subparagraph (C) of subdivision (5) of subsection (a) of section 4-66aa for the purposes of this section. The commissioner shall report annually to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment on issues with respect to efforts undertaken pursuant to the requirements of this section, including, but not limited to, the amount of private matching funds received and expended by the department. The commissioner may adopt, in accordance with chapter 54, such regulations as he deems necessary to carry out the purposes of this section.

The following is a summary of work and supporting efforts undertaken by the agency throughout 2023.

Statutory Deliverable: Multiyear, Statewide Marketing and Advertising Campaign

OUTCOME 1 - 2023 CT GROWN CAMPAIGN

Overview

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture established the CT Grown program in 1986. Over the last 36 years, the brand and logo have undergone minimal updates and consistent multi-media messaging has been lacking. The last update in 2015 to the CT Grown logo, gave it a minimal update and established brand identity standards. Gov. Lamont's Transition Committee on Agricultural Policy identified the need to launch an agricultural umbrella campaign to highlight CT Grown products.

In 2020, the agency partnered with Miranda Creative, Inc., a women-owned, Norwich, CT, based company to execute a total rebranding and marketing campaign for Connecticut Grown and the agricultural industry.



2023 Accomplishments

During 2023, the following accomplishments were achieved. Most notably....



The 2023 campaign also:

- Developed an asset management tool for 658 video clips and 5,231 photos.
- Established The Farmer's Handbook e-newsletter with 1,255 subscribers and 31.91% open rate.

- Held three sessions of CT Grown Academy, a virtual education for producers to gain experience in Social, SEO, and Canva to advance their own marketing skills with 150 farmers registered.
- Employed three CT Grown ambassadors who collectively attended 20 events/farms, developed content for 8 Farmer's Handbook editions, and garnered 1.9 million social impressions.
- Produced 94 reels and/or video content for social channels increasing views per post from 200 to more than 1,000.
- Developed consistent monthly social content to educate consumers through What's Cooking, What's in Season, and Did You Know...
- Added new social features including Farmer's Voice, event round ups, collaborations, and user-generated content.
- 152,773 page views to CTGrown.org website with new features including language integration and filter integration.
 - 95,452 user sessions
- Grew organic monthly newsletter to more than 8,600 subscribers with a 47% open rate.
- Reached 360,000 households with sponsored emails.
- Paid digital media efforts resulted in over 10 million impressions.



Social: *Top 4 Campaigns*

Q1 | Summer 2022 - This Way To

Total Paid Reach: 2,237,000

Clicks: 3,960

Amount Spent: \$1,324.11

English & Spanish creative solutions with detailed targeting to reach diverse audiences.

Q2 | Bring CT Grown Home For The Holidays

Total Reach: 150,000

Impressions: 195,000

Amount Spent: \$418.56



Social: *Top 4 Campaigns*

Q3 | Spring/Summer - Pick
Connecticut Grown

Impressions: 259,000
Amount Spent: \$402.97

Q4 | Find Your Plate

Impressions: 982,719
Amount Spent: \$1,839.97

The top performing
impression/awareness campaigns.



2024 Goals & Initiatives

In 2024, DoAg will continue the CT Grown campaign with a more targeted approach to maximize the available budget by:

- Unifying CT Grown brand messaging across all efforts
- Expanding Ambassador program
- Leveraging available resources including photo/video assets and collaborations with new partners
- Increasing UGC efforts on social media
- Encouraging entry-level consumers through new content avenues

OUTCOME 2 – PRESS EVENTS & PRESS RELEASES

Overview

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture

2023 Accomplishments

- 20 press releases issued promoting programs, resources and events pertaining to CT Grown
- 22 press/media events coordinated.
- Dozens of media interviews conducted promoting CT Grown products, accessibility, and awareness.

2024 Goals & Objectives

- Implement enhanced tracking of events and media analytics to better inform and address gaps in messaging.

OUTCOME 3 - ADDITIONAL AGENCY RADIO, DIGITAL, PRINT, EVENT, SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS & OUTREACH

Overview

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Outreach: The Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAG) conducted promotion of the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), Connecticut Grown farm products and farmers' markets with support from the Department of Social Services (DSS) Office of Skill Development

(OSD) to reach low-income seniors and eligible WIC households through the Visix Network. This was done in partnership with the CT Department of Public Health's WIC program targeting consumer awareness of fresh CT Grown produce available at farmers' markets.

2023 Accomplishments

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

DoAg worked with OSD to continue presentations on the DSS and DMV Visix Network screens at DSS service centers and DMV locations throughout the state for the second year in a row. The displays initially ran in July and first announced the availability of the program and encouraged use of benefits, running effective from July 1 to November 30. The second video reminded participants of the program end date and to use benefits before the expire and those display ads ran from September 30 to November 7. The third ad announced the program closing date with a reminder to use benefits before expiration, and that was available from November 7 to November 30. Each graphic appeared on screen for 20 seconds for readability and available in both English and Spanish and included images of the new electronic FMNP food benefit.

First message from July 1 – September 30:



Second message from September 30 to November 7:

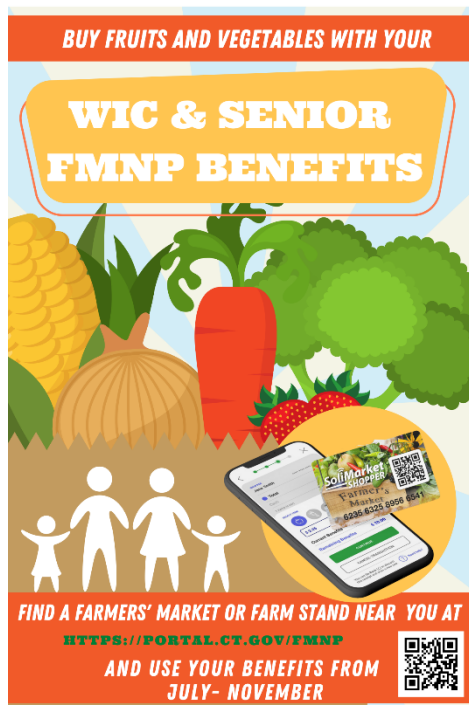


Third message from November 7 to November 30



DoAg updated posters for distribution sites and signboards for farmers' markets to raise awareness of opportunities to use FMNP/SFMNP benefits. 11x17 posters for benefit distribution sites included a QR code to access the most recent listing of authorized redemption sites. 25x36 signboards were updated to reflect the transition to the new electronic FMNP food instruments for farmers markets to display at their markets to promote that they were an authorized redemption site.


11 x 17 Posters:



24 x 36 Signboards




DoAg printed an additional 40,000 tri-fold brochures with tips and recommendations on how to best utilize the S/FMNP benefits to purchase CT Grown farm products were produced. These brochures were distributed to 23 local WIC offices where all participants are eligible. Brochures were produced in English and Spanish and were distributed to senior organizations to promote usage of the FMNP benefits.



USING YOUR FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM CHECKS:

- WIC and Senior FMNP participants can use their checks to buy (only) fresh fruits, vegetables, fresh cut herbs, and eggs.
- If you buy more than amount printed on the check, farmers may accept cash or SNAP to cover the amount over the check value. WIC cards may not be used at farmers' markets.
- Checks cannot be exchanged for cash.
- Senior FMNP participants may also use their checks to purchase honey.
- No change or tokens may be given for checks.
- Lost or stolen checks will not be replaced. Please report lost or stolen checks to the agency which gave you the checks.
- Checks must be used between July 1st and November 30th
- Farmers' Market checks CANNOT be used at grocery stores.
- Farmers' Market checks can be accepted only by FMNP certified farmers who display this sign:




SHOPPING TIPS

- Look around the entire market and visit several FMNP vendors.
- Take your time to decide what to buy and think about how you can make the most out of your purchase.
- Remember that fresh fruits and vegetables won't stay fresh for long. Prevent food waste by buying smaller amounts of several items.

HOW DO I STORE FRUITS AND VEGGIES?

- Store most veggies in your fridge! Put fresh produce like leafy greens and berries in the crisper unwashed. Wash all produce with running water just before use.
- Keep onions and potatoes in a cool, dark cupboard or pantry. Not in the fridge.
- For longer storage, consider freezing or canning produce. To learn more, search: Seasonal tips for food storage.

WIC & SENIOR FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM

PROVIDING FRESH, UNPROCESSED CT GROWN FRUITS, VEGETABLES, FRESH, CUT HERBS, AND EGGS TO ELIGIBLE CT SENIORS, WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND INFANTS



CONNECTICUT GROWN
A Way of Life

Learn more at www.CTGrown.gov/FMNP

(Side 1)



(Side 2)

DoAg certified 231 farms to benefit from over \$600,000 in benefits redeemed for only Connecticut Grown fruits, vegetables, fresh-cut herbs, honey, and eggs.

In 2023 the Department of Agriculture transitioned the Farmers Market Nutrition Program to an electronic platform. This transition replaced a paper check system and made an electronic mobile app available to 27,031 users and reusable shopper cards to 40,078 users.

Farm-to-Chef: In 2023, the agency's Farm-to-Chef program promoted its annual Farm-to-Chef week at dining venues through the state from September 9-September 16 through a variety of digital advertisements including social media, web presence, and a full-length newsletter.

The agency's various social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok) were utilized to keep Connecticut Grown products and information at the forefront of consumers' minds with more than 6 million impressions across platforms.



Connecticut Farm-to-Chef Week
Join Us: September 9-16 2023



TASTE THE FLAVOR OF CONNECTICUT GROWN,
BROUGHT TO YOU BY FARMERS AND CHEFS
THROUGHOUT THE STATE!



DoAg promoted Farm-to-Chef Week on *social media and through statewide listservs leading up to and during the week.*

Connecticut Apple Marketing Board: The Connecticut Apple Marketing Board maintained a Facebook page with 13,243 followers.

Overall agency promotion: Across the agency's seven Facebook pages there are more than 44,790 followers and more than 7,190 followers on four Instagram pages.

2024 Goals & Initiatives

- To **consolidate the number of Facebook pages to better align with overall Connecticut Grown campaign** and agency initiatives.
- To **increase the total number of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.) followers by 5% and increase total social media reach by 10%.**
- To successfully **amplify the overall Connecticut Grown campaign through program/industry specific promotions.**
- To further **expand the reach and student excitement around CT Grown for CT Kids Week** by engaging CT Grown for CT Kids Grant awardees.

OUTCOME 3 - CONNECTICUT GROWN STORE

Overview

In 2014 DoAg launched the Connecticut Grown Store, a dedicated marketplace for Connecticut Grown apparel and merchandise, to help promote the Connecticut Grown brand. Sales are used to replenish inventory and help sustain the project.

The launch of the new CT Grown logo was the catalyst for new items being added to the store, including apparel for men, women, infants, and children, as well as producer items to promote CT Grown, including tents and flags. Merchandise and producer items were promoted through social media and the CT Weekly Agricultural Report. Additional updates were made to the website to reflect the new logo and tagline, as well as updated images of merchandise.



To view the store please visit:
<https://connecticutgrownstore.com/>

2023 Accomplishments

- During 2023, the online store **processed 238 transactions totaling more than \$14,545**. This is an increase in transactions of 23% from the previous year
- The online store had 12,653 site visitors, with the highest traffic recorded in June with 1,497 visits, and year to date record sales of \$4,293.
- The store was promoted and online sales were encouraged at fall fairs, including Big E, as well as throughout the year to farmers via the Connecticut Weekly Ag Report
- Advertisements for the Weekly Ag Report are now processed on the store and included the purchase of 168 ads totaling sales of \$1,157.75
- **Added new inventory** to website including ceramic mugs, water bottles, sweatshirts, and more, all with the CT Grown logo. The **most popular items on the store were POP signs and CT Dairy temporary tattoos, which are offered at no cost to farmers with free shipping**, as well as items with the new logo, including CT Grown tents, baseball hats, knit winter hats, and t-shirts.

2024 Goals & Initiatives

- Offer at least one **new CT Grown merchandise** product for sale
- **Increase sales by 10%**
- Design and source at least **one custom item for CT Grown Forestry**

OUTCOME 3 - DISTRIBUTION OF THE WEEKLY AGRICULTURAL REPORT

Overview

The Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report was established in the 1920's and is the agency's primary form of communication to the industry, partners, and constituents.

The Ag Report includes:

- notable articles about Connecticut agriculture
- educational opportunities and program news from the agency
- press highlights
- produce, meat and poultry auction and wholesale pricing
- Industry-sponsored events and announcements
- state, federal, and philanthropic grant opportunities, and
- Industry-sponsored events
- marketing tools for CT producers provided by the CT Grown campaign

It also includes job opportunities and advertisements related to the industry.

2023 Accomplishments

The Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report transitioned to an all-digital platform in 2020, using Mailchimp as the production and distribution platform. Print subscriptions remain discontinued to reduce the overall program expenses and subscribers have been encouraged to sign up for a free digital subscription.

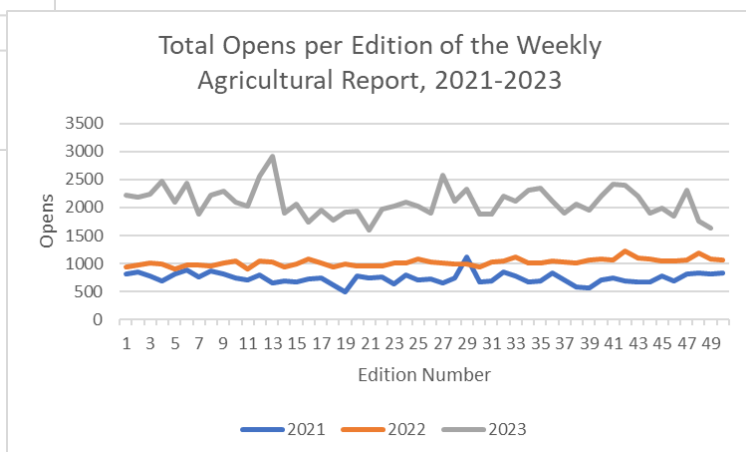
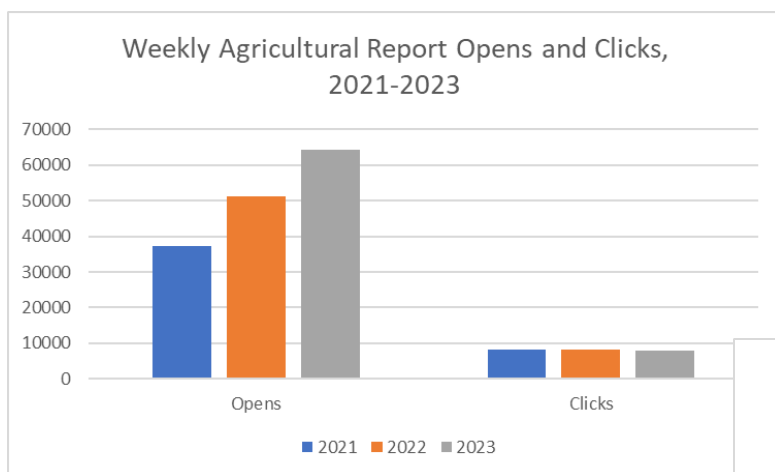
In 2023, the weekly publication was again utilized to deliver information to the industry as the pandemic and public health restrictions continued to change. This was also a valuable tool for communicating local, state, and federal resources – including natural disaster declarations due to excessive rainfall and support for various agricultural sectors impacted. Additionally, the Ag Report was crucial to share information on how producers could engage with the CT Grown campaign and report the progress of that effort.

In 2023 advertisement space for the Ag Report could now be purchased through the CT Grown Store. This advancement allowed for ease and efficiency in purchasing ad space by limiting postage and wait time for an ad to run.

Lastly, a translated version of the CT Weekly Agricultural Report, available in Spanish, is now available each week on the website as a link to reach a more diverse audience of producers with valuable information and resources.

In 2023:

1. 50 issues of the CT Weekly Agricultural Report were distributed to over 3,000 subscribers
2. A total of \$1,157.75 in advertising revenue was received.
3. Average open rate of 39% with a total of 64,126 opens, an increase of 25%
4. Average click rate of 4.8% with a total of 7,894 clicks



2024 Goals & Initiatives

- Increase advertising revenue by 5%
- Increase subscribers by 5%
- Increase the average open rate by 3%
- Increase the average click rate by 1%
- Assess the current format for ADA compliance, and develop protocols to maintain that compliance



CONNECTICUT WEEKLY AGRICULTURAL REPORT

The latest news and updates in Connecticut agriculture

Brought to you by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture
Version en español disponible en línea en CTGrown.gov

In This Report

June 9, 2023; Vol. F, No. 23

[Growing Farm Business Resource](#)

[Child Care Options](#)

[CT Ag In the News](#)

[Crop Loss Reporting](#)

[Organic Producer Feedback](#)

[Farmers' Market Trends](#)

[Shell Recycling Survey](#)

[Movement Workshops](#)


[Ag Market Pricing](#)

[Advertisements](#)



Connecticut Commissioner of Agriculture Bryan P. Hurlburt attended the Northeast Association of State Departments of Agriculture regional meeting hosted by New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food this week. The meeting included a visit with U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt.

The table of contents from 2023's most clicked edition with 491 clicks.



CONNECTICUT WEEKLY AGRICULTURAL REPORT

The latest news and updates in Connecticut agriculture

Brought to you by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture
Version en español disponible en línea en CTGrown.gov

In This Report

March 31, 2023; Vol. F, No. 12

[\\$7M Investment in Climate Smart](#)

[Shell Recycling Initiative](#)

[CT Ag In the News](#)

[Farm Viability Grants Open](#)

[Farm Stress Resources](#)

[CT Movement Workshops](#)


[NECAFS Survey](#)

[Existing Dairy Processor Expansion Grant](#)

[Ag Market Pricing](#)

[Advertisements](#)

[Upcoming Events](#)



Agriculture Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt (far left) visited Arethusa Dairy in Bantam last Friday to celebrate their award-winning aged gouda cheese, Europa, which was 2023 United States Champion Cheese out of more than 2,300 entries. Also pictured are Arethusa Farm owner Tony Yurgaitis, cheesemaker Chris Casiello, and representatives from two of the Connecticut dairy farms, Birch Mill Farm and Meadow Ridge Farm, who supply the milk.

The table of contents from 2023's most opened edition with 2,914 opens.

OUTCOME 4 - CTGROWN.GOV & CTGROWNMAP.COM



Overview

CT.gov/DoAg and CTGrown.gov: CTGrown.gov and CT.gov/DoAg are domains assigned to the Department of Agriculture's online homepage. Information cataloged here includes every facet of the department from the Commissioner and legislation, to regulatory and licensing, as well as grant and program administration. A new website administrator was identified to take over website maintenance and develop a navigation and information flow, new design for information access that will be more easily navigated by our audience.

CTGrownMap.com and CTGrown.org: As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, DoAg partnered with the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut (NOFA) in 2020 to improve accessibility of CT Grown farm products and expand the list of farms, farmers' markets, and farm stands beyond the current CT NOFA membership - free of charge and online - with the domain redirect CTGrownMap.com integrated into the CTGrown.org website, a standalone consumer-facing site.

2023 Accomplishments

CTGrown.gov: In 2023 DoAg updated or created over 350 pages and had more than 568,000 page visits on CTGrown.gov. The top three visited pages included Animal Population Control (46,639 views), Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (26,680), and Animal and Animal Health (22,261 views). State funding spent on this initiative in 2023 was limited to staff time.

DoAg created a [Disaster Relief Resources](#) page for farmers to utilize following the late-spring freeze and summer flooding. Resources on this page included farm loans, livestock assistance, the [CT Farm Stress Relief](#) website and helpline, crop loss reports, and USDA resources.

Additionally, staff worked to revive the Farmer Bucket List which had previously been hosted elsewhere and typically shared as a print copy. The newly revamped page, **Growing Your Farm Business**, was made in collaboration with the University of Connecticut, Connecticut Farm Bureau, New Connecticut Farmer Alliance, CT NOFA, USDA Farm Service Agency, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services. Since the page launch in June of 2023, there have been **7,621 page visits with over 133 hours** spent on the overview and subpages. The pages include resources from starting a farm business to food safety, to taxes, insurance, and more. To view this page visit <https://portal.ct.gov/doaggrow>

The **reorganization of the website** is in progress and will continue to evolve as the needs are identified along the way. **Website accessibility has been made a priority** for an enhanced audience experience on the website and will continue to improve. All new pages created include alternative text for the vision impaired and as pages are revised accessibility is reviewed and updated. Templates for grants, boards, and program-specific information have been used to reorganize and prioritize resources available to create easier navigation across the website.

CTGrownMap.com: In 2023, the domain www.CTGrownMap.com was renewed to continue directing consumers to the CT NOFA Local Farm and Food Guide. DoAg continued to maintain a Google form to collect additional farms, farmers' markets, and farm stores to be added to CTGrownMap.com map. **The map**

remains integrated into the CTGrown.org consumer-facing website to provide additional exposure for those listed on the map and make it even easier for consumers to find CT Grown farm products. Through the partnership with CT NOFA updates to the map included expanded search functionality and identification of various programs including SNAP, EBT, and Benefit Doubling to showcase alternative payment methods accepted by producers.

In 2023, the CTGrownMap.com received **102,194 pageviews** and **27,789 new individual users**. CTGrown.org had **95,452 user sessions** with 90,275 of them being new users with a 42.6% engagement rate resulting in a total of **152,773 page views**.

2024 Goals & Initiatives

CTGrown.gov: Producer and industry information will continue to be maintained on the CTGrown.gov platform while the CTGrown.org continues to provide consumer-based information. The new website administrator along with BITS is working to develop a user-friendly format to allow for information to be accessible to everyone in an easier fashion. The design will be carefully thought out and discussed with the various bureaus before the new formatting is released. The agency website is transitioning to the new formatting provided by Sitecore in the coming months. Featured links are continuing to be changed as different programs become available to producers and seasons change. Protocols and templates are being used to create consistency across the entire department website.

CTGrownMap.com: The CT Department of Agriculture has begun researching other map/farm finder options through outreach to other state departments of agriculture. At present, we have added a new filter integration on the website as a preliminary step to educate consumers about the various CT Grown products available as we conduct further analysis of options and determine funding availability. The goal is to expand the number of resources listed, improve the accuracy of each listing, and consider translation options to better serve a more diverse audience. Directing consumers to the map shall continue to be through CTGrown.org, the agency's consumer-facing website. The map is the primary source of information on how to find CT Grown farm products on CTGrown.org.

Statutory Deliverable: Efforts to Promote Interaction and Business Relationships between Farmers and Potential Institutional/Wholesale Purchasers of Connecticut Grown Farm Products:

OUTCOME 1 - FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAM

FARM TO SCHOOL



Overview

The Farm-to-School Program (FTS) is a statewide marketing initiative designed to encourage Connecticut public schools to use Connecticut Grown fresh fruits and vegetables, proteins, and milk products in their cafeteria meals and snacks. The program helps develop new markets for Connecticut farm businesses and helps increase Connecticut Grown foods in the state's school meal programs, thereby increasing the long-term viability of the Connecticut farms growing/producing those items.

[Statute: Sec 22-38d](#)

[Farm to School Program and Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Week](#)

The FTS Program includes the following components:

- Encouraging **Connecticut farmers to sell their products** to educational institutions.
- Developing and regularly updating a **database of farmers interested in selling their products to Connecticut educational institutions**, including the types and amounts of products the farmers wants to sell and the time periods during which the farmers want to sell.
- **Facilitating purchases from local farmers** by such interested educational institutions.
- Providing **outreach and guidance to farmers** concerning the value of and procedure for selling their products to such interested educational institutions.
- **Bridging the gap between school food service directors and Connecticut farm businesses** to increase the use of Connecticut Grown products in Connecticut educational institutions.



Our program partners include the State Department of Education, Department of Administrative Services, University of Connecticut's Cooperative Extension System, the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut, FoodCorps Connecticut, school food service directors, and Connecticut

DoAg's CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program was appropriated \$1 million each for FY24 and FY25 plus an additional \$2 million for a shipping container growing grant.

farmers. DoAg is a partner in the [Connecticut Farm to School Collaborative](#)- a formal network and working group which is co-led by UConn Extension and FoodCorps and attended by CSDE, DPH, school food directors, producers, non-profits, and many others. Additionally, DoAg collaborates with Farm to Institution New England.

[CT Grown for Kids Grant Program](#)



2023 was the second year funds were awarded through the ARPA funded state Farm to School grant pilot under, [P.A. 21-0002, S. 364](#): CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program. The annual report for FY22 and FY23 is available on our [grant webpage](#). In the 2023 legislative session, the amount of funding for this program was increased to \$1 million annually for FY24 and FY25.

Additionally, CT DoAg received a one-time appropriation in the 2023 legislative session to run a shipping container growing grant for projects to directly benefit students through increasing the amount of local product incorporated in the cafeteria and through creating educational opportunities.

The third round of the program closed for applications on December 14, 2023 and received a total of 109 applications (including 16 for the shipping container program). Funding will be awarded in early 2024.

2023 Accomplishments

In 2023 the following was accomplished:

- Continued to hold a leadership position in the CT Farm to School Collaborative, a statewide networking group for Farm to School activities by serving as co-chair of the steering committee and as the co-lead for the Values Based Sourcing and Purchasing Team which focuses on facilitating local procurement efforts in schools and working with school food program leads/producers to identify and overcome barriers.
- CT DoAg in partnership with UConn Extension hosted and facilitated a USDA designed Farm to School producer training on February 24, 2023. The event was held at AuerFarm in Bloomfield, CT and saw over 30 producers in attendance plus several school food service directors.
- Participated with partners (Put Local on Your Tray, FoodCorps CT, CT State Department of Education and others) to create materials, promote events, and activity lists for [2023 CT Grown for CT Kids Week](#), October 2-6, 2023.
- Helped develop, print, and distribute promotional materials to districts including banners, posters, and stickers. Concluded work on the \$82,000 in funding through the USDA Farm to School grant program in collaboration with UConn Extension, Connecticut Department of Education, and FoodCorps CT. Through this funding, DoAg contracted with the UConn Zwick Center to conduct [research on current CT Grown purchasing amounts](#) in schools and work with UConn Put Local on Your Tray to lead in depth procurement-based work with districts, and to create equity focused educational promotion campaigns.
- Administered the second round of the CT Grown for CT Kids grant program, passed in the 2023 legislative session, a statewide grant for schools, early childcare providers, boards of education, and



partner organizations to provide financial support to create and further farm to school initiatives. DoAg received a total of **72** complete applications, **totaling \$1,022,284.91** for FY 23. 32 Projects were awarded for a total of \$452,268 in grant funding.

2024 Goals & Initiatives

1. **Utilize data** collected by UConn Zwick funded by the USDA Farm to School grant to help guide creation of effective resources and technical assistance to increase CT Grown purchasing;
2. **Create an agency Farm to School strategic plan;**
3. Continue to **provide support to producers and school food directors in utilizing purchasing dollars** through the CSDE administered Local Food for Schools program;
4. In coordination with CSDE, **design and administer the recently passed state level Farm to School purchasing incentive program;**
5. Collaborate with UConn Extension Put Local on Your Tray to **host another producer training;**
6. Focus on **culturally relevant crops in school meals** and the importance of celebrating those foods;
7. Work on **increasing connections with BIPOC farmers** to schools, particularly those involved in urban agriculture in close proximity to low-income schools and who can benefit greatly from revenue that schools can provide;
8. Work with UConn Extension to **improve and expand the user-friendly online database** that allows schools and producers to connect and identify products for purchase or develop an alternative;
9. **Award the FY 24 round of CT Grown for CT Kids Grant program;**
10. **Provide technical support** to successful and unsuccessful applicants from the FY 23 and FY 24 CT Grown for CT Kids Grant;

OUTCOME 2 - FARM-TO-CHEF PROGRAM



Overview

The Farm-to-Chef Program helps connect Connecticut chefs and food service providers with growers, producers, and distributors of Connecticut Grown products. It also helps the public locate restaurants, institutions, and other dining facilities that serve foods prepared with Connecticut Grown ingredients. More information can be found on the program's website: <http://www.ctfarmtochef.com/>





The program enables increased awareness of CT Grown farm products for consumers at participating venues. Farmers benefit from increased demand for and sales of Connecticut Grown products enabling those farmers to grow their businesses.

2023 Accomplishments

Miranda Creative, the marketing firm contracted for CT Grown campaign, visited several restaurants that work closely with CT farmers to capture high quality photos and conduct interviews.

- Developed a listing for Farm to Chef week 2023 of CT restaurants who regularly purchase from CT producers. The

list currently has 69 restaurants and 6 food trucks on it and is available on our website. The list was also published by the CT Office of Tourism and by Governor Ned Lamont on social media.

- Additionally, the Farm to Chef program promoted six Farm to Table dinners held during the week in Connecticut at Massaro Community Farm, SubEdge Farm, Killam & Bassette, and White Gate Farm.
- A kickoff event was held at the newly reinstated Old State House Farmers Market in Hartford on Friday September 8, 2023.
- DoAg promoted Farm-to-Chef Week through social media, statewide listservs, our weekly ag report, and a press release. Additionally Miranda Creative included information about the week in the consumer facing newsletter and CT Grown ambassador Amanda Stanton released a promotion video.
- DoAg, with Skyline Studios, continues to maintain the CTFarmToChef website featuring participating locations and sponsors.



2024 Goals & Initiatives

- **Continue to expand inclusion of shellfish** and other aquaculture products in Farm-to-Chef promotions, a CT Grown product frequently purchased by the restaurant industry.
- **Coordinate networking events for shellfish producers and restaurant chefs/buyers** through collaboration with DoAg's Bureau of Aquaculture and UConn SeaGrant, as well as networking events for other specialty crop producers. Further, continue to work with SeaGrant and CT Restaurant Association to create a Chef to Farm shell recycling program.
- **Emphasize culturally relevant crops** and connecting farmers to restaurants who desire to incorporate those crops/already do in their menus.
- Continue to promote the farm map produced with CT NOFA to restaurants to build awareness and facilitate connections and identify products for purchase.
- **Expand Farm-to-Chef promotional events** beyond Farm to Chef Week. Form a Farm to Chef working group comprised of farmers, chefs, and community-based food entrepreneur programs.
- Strategically **evaluate successes and weaknesses** in Farm to Chef marketing and audience engaged.
- **Create a stronger connection to the large CT Grown marketing campaign** through leveraging local chefs to share recipes and create recipe video content.
- **Engage DECD Office of Tourism** to help promote CT Restaurants who source CT Grown.

OUTCOME 3 - FARM-TO-WHOLESALE PROGRAM

Overview

The Farm-to-Wholesale Program helps connect Connecticut farmers and producers with wholesale distributors, grocery stores, and retailers offering Connecticut Grown agricultural goods.

The program increases demand for and sales of Connecticut Grown products enabling farmers to grow their businesses and improve accessibility of Connecticut Grown products at local food suppliers, restaurants to grocery stores.

2023 Accomplishments

DoAg maintained membership with the New England Produce Council and the Eastern Produce Council. These organizations hold regional produce trade shows to connect producers with buyers from local, regional, and national markets. DoAg attends these events with Connecticut producers to promote wholesale sales of Connecticut Grown products. Connecticut attended the New England Produce Council EXPO with a wholesale greenhouse producer, making connections with grocery store buyers as well as wholesale vegetable companies. Follow up connections were made with two wholesalers looking for Connecticut grown produce.

DoAg continued to aid producers in finding new markets as traditional outlets closed due to COVID. Through the CTGrownMap.com, partnerships with UCONN Put Local on Your Tray, and grocery and retail outlets, producers were able to continue product sales despite closings or breakdown of the traditional supply chain.

In 2023, DoAg continued to monitor the \$6,725,130 million awarded to eight organizations through October 2025 from the USDA for the Local Food Purchase Agreement program to purchase locally grown products and distribute it to underserved communities. For farm purchasing through this program, DoAg required that at least 80% of the products purchased are CT Grown. Grant recipients are largely organizations who are connecting producers to wholesale opportunities and will be able to provide sustainable markets for producers beyond the lifetime of the LFPA program. In 2023, over \$1.7 million was spent on purchasing local food products, almost all of which was CT Grown.



2024 Goals & Initiatives

1. **Create a more user-friendly online database** that allows wholesalers and producers to connect and identify products for purchase
2. **Increase collaboration** with the Northwest Connecticut Food Hub, Brass City Harvest Food Hub, and other local aggregation organizations
3. **Organize buyer networking events** to introduce buyers from distributors, grocery and retail to meet with Connecticut producers

4. Work with DoAg's Regulatory Unit to **provide general education on food safety** and other opportunities that would increase producer's abilities to sell to wholesale outlets
5. **Explore increased engagement with the health care sector**, particularly focused on elderly and other vulnerable populations
6. **Continue to administer the LFPA program** utilizing the existing grant awardees to expand purchasing of CT Grown farm products through 2025, with a focus on small and socially disadvantaged farmers to distribute to underserved communities, continue the requirement of sourcing at least 80% CT Grown.

OUTCOME 4 - FOOD EXPORT NORTHEAST

Overview

The Department of Agriculture is a member of [Food Export Northeast](#), a State Regional Trade Group (SRTG), which works to promote agricultural and food products produced in the Northeast. In addition to offering educational resources, DoAg works closely with Food Export Northeast to organize trade shows both domestically and internationally to promote CT Grown products. Farmers and food producers benefit from increased demand for and sales of CT Grown products enabling those farmers to expand their businesses domestically and into international markets.

2023 Accomplishments

- The Food Export program assisted eleven CT companies participate in 46 export related activities and services in 2023. Activities included virtual webinars on export essentials, virtual Trade Missions, Market Builder research assistance, and utilization of the Export Advisor and Food Export Helpline programs.
- On Wednesday, September 20th, Connecticut hosted an inbound shellfish mission where northeast shellfisherman had the opportunity to meet one-on-one in Boston with ten vetted shellfish buyers from The Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Latvia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.
- Assisted nine (9) CT food businesses with participation in the Food Export Branded Program, a cost-share reimbursement program. These companies received allocations of \$636,900, with \$85,173.00 in reimbursements to date. Claims are still being processed from Food Export NE. The top expenses reimbursed included advertisements, expenses for Food and Beverage trade shows to promote CT Grown and made products, and in-store promotion. The top international markets for companies were Canada, China, and Taiwan, with top products being sauces, pet food, and snacks.

Connecticut participants in the Branded Program reported over \$9.4 million in actual sales since 2020.

A success story of a CT company can be found in Appendix A.

2024 Goals & Initiatives

- **Increase participation** by Connecticut companies in Food Export activities by 15%
- **Increase participation** in the Food Export Branded Program by 20%

The Food Export Program assisted 11 CT food companies participating in 46 export related activities, providing over \$85,000 in reimbursements

Statutory Deliverable: Grant In-Aid:

OUTCOME 1 – FARM TRANSITION GRANTS

Overview

[The Farm Transition Grant](#) (FTG) provides matching funds to Connecticut farmers and agricultural cooperatives for the diversification of existing farm operations, transitioning to value-added agricultural production and sales, and other venues in which a majority of products sold are grown in the state.

Funding for the Farm Transition Grant is provided through [C.G.S. Sec. 22-26k](#).

**\$534,600 in grant funds were awarded
to 30 CT farm operations in 2023.**

2023 Accomplishments

- Utilized industry feedback gained from the 2020 virtual focus group with agricultural producers to maintain the improved structure to the 2023 Farm Transition Grant Program.
- Applicants have the option of applying for one of four grant categories within the Farm Transition Grant Program: New Farmer Micro Grant, Infrastructure Investment Grant, Research and Development Grant, Innovation and Diversification Grant.
 - Each category has a unique maximum award amount and cash match requirement.
- The 2023 Transition Grant Program received a total of 55 applications.
 - 25 applied to the Infrastructure Investment category.
 - 12 applied to the Innovation and Diversification category.
 - 13 applied to the New Farmer Micro Grant category.
 - 1 applied to the Research and Development category.
- Awarded over \$534,000 in grant funds to support 30 CT farm operations. Projects support a wide variety of agricultural production industries such as cut flower production, nursery and greenhouse growers, dairy, livestock, hard cider, maple syrup, aquaculture, hay, fiber, and fruit and vegetable production.
 - The 30 grant awards were distributed among 28 towns across seven counties.
 - 46.7% of grant funds were awarded to support five Innovation and Diversification projects
 - Awardees in this category received an average of \$49,969.20.
 - 44.1% of grant funds were awarded to support 15 Infrastructure Investment projects
 - Awardees in this category received an average of \$15,703.33.
 - 9.2% of grant funds were awarded to support ten New Farmer Micro Grant projects
 - Awardees in this category received an average of \$4,925.00.

2024 Goals & Initiatives

Initiatives:

- To utilize the new structure of the Farm Transition Grant to **better support a variety of projects** that will assist new farmers as they establish themselves in the agricultural industry in CT, expand existing farm operations to better serve their communities and allow all producers to develop and market new products utilizing CT Grown components.
- To **increase grant outreach** through all available networks to ensure that the applicant pool for the Farm Transition Grant is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.
- To **improve the availability of livestock processing facilities** available in Connecticut.

- To **promote the use of sustainable agricultural practices**, regenerative agriculture, and conservation methods.

Goals:

- **Award 10% of grant funds to New Farmer Micro Grant projects.**
 - Better support new farmers with 1-3 years of production history.
 - Adding question(s) to the grant narrative that asks for a summary of the agricultural/farm experience new farmers had prior to starting their own businesses.
- **Increase the number of applicants and awards to new/beginning, BIPOC, and veteran producers.**
 - Need to utilize Cognito to its fullest potential by capturing data on applicants.
- **Encourage CT farmers to be innovative** and conduct research on or develop new value-added products through the Research and Development and Innovation and Diversification Grant awards.
- **Continue to publish and promote previous grant awardees Success Stories in the Weekly Ag Report** and on the Transition Grant page of the DoAg website to highlight the impact and outcomes of completed projects.
- **Implement recommendations brought forward by the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Working Group**

OUTCOME 2 - FARM VIABILITY GRANTS

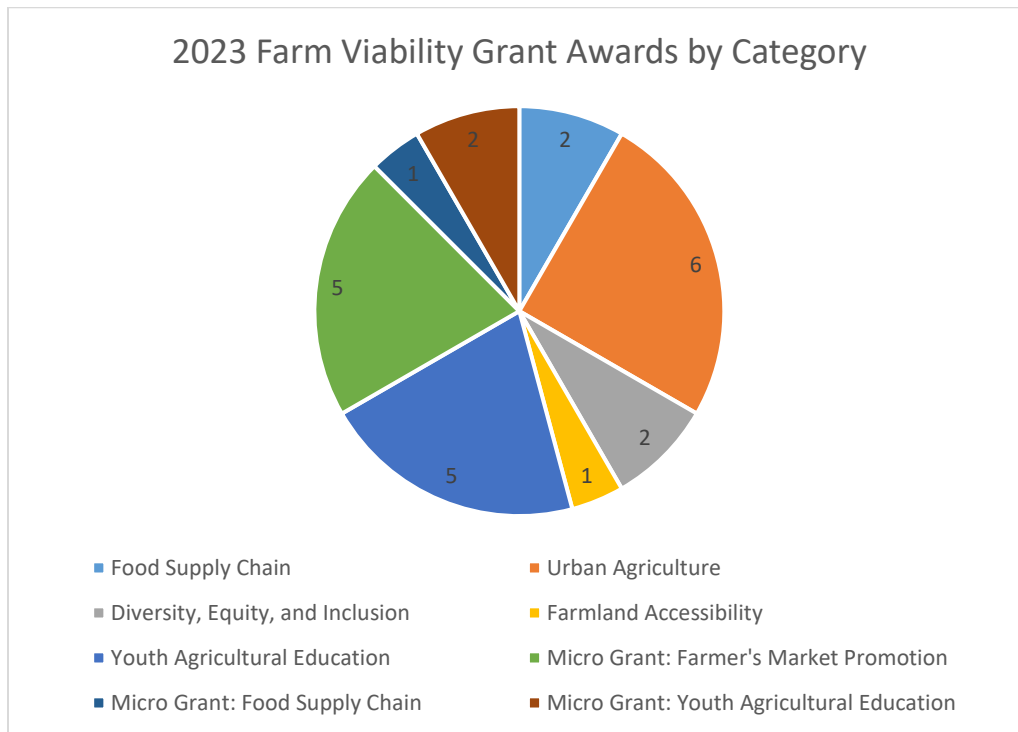
Overview

[The Farm Viability Grant](#) provides matching funds to Connecticut municipalities, groups of municipalities, regional councils of governments, and/or agricultural non-profit organizations for projects that directly impact and/or foster agricultural viability. Projects advance farming and agriculture as defined by Connecticut General Statutes Section 1-1(q).

2023 Accomplishments

- Utilized feedback gained during a 2020 virtual focus group with agricultural non-profits and municipalities to implement needed updates to the 2023 Farm Viability Grant Program.
- The five areas of focus for which applicants could apply for included: Youth Agricultural Education, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); Food Supply Chain; Farmland Accessibility; and Urban Agriculture.
- New for the 2023 round, micro grants for awards up to \$5,000 were also available for each area of focus.
- Additional micro grant opportunities were included for Farmer's Market Promotion and Municipal Farm Maps.
- There were 29 applications for the 2023 Farm Viability Grant.
- Awarded just under \$700,000 in grant funds to 14 agricultural non-profits, six municipalities, three fair associations, and one council of government. Projects included developing infrastructure on urban farms, construction of improved agricultural facilities to promote the efficacy of agricultural education, enhancement of existing farm facilities in urban areas, and improvement of existing infrastructure on Town farmland to allow for BIPOC farmers to lease facilities. .
 - The 24 grant awards were distributed among 18 towns in six counties.
 - \$63,900 supported two Food Supply Chain projects.
 - \$85,499 supported two DEI projects.
 - \$49,999 supported one Farmland Accessibility project.
 - \$261,496 supported six Urban Agriculture projects.

- \$200, 497 supported five Youth Agricultural Education projects.
- \$7,500 supported two Youth Agricultural Education micro grant projects.
- \$22,000 supported five Farmer's Market Promotion micro grant projects.
- \$5,000 supported one Food Supply Chain micro grant project.



2024 Goals & Initiatives

Initiatives

- The Farm Viability Grant Program is constantly being **re-structured to fund projects that address ever-changing areas of need in the CT agricultural industry**. As needs of the CT agricultural industry evolve over time, the Questions of Focus used during Viability grant applications reflect those changes of need.
- To **increase grant outreach** through all available networks to ensure that the applicant pool for the Farm Viability Grant is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Goals

- **Continue to support efforts towards urban and non-traditional farming practices** as proposed in *An Act Enhancing CT Agriculture* (Sec 22-26j)
- **Implement recommendations from the Governor's Council on Climate Change Report** when available relating to building a more equitable food system through urban agriculture.
- **Implement recommendations brought forward by the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Working Group.**
- **To continue publishing and promoting previous Viability Grant awardee success stories** in the Weekly Ag Report, and on the Viability Grant page on the DoAg website

Meet the Staff Behind the Statute



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APPENDIX A: 2023 FOOD EXPORT SUCCESS STORIES

March 2023

Congressional District CT 05



NEW EXPORT MARKET FOR CONNECTICUT PET FOOD SUPPLIER

Meriden, Connecticut pet supplement supplier Kala Health Enrichment Inc. participated in Food Export-Northeast's Branded Program for the second time last year. The Connecticut company used the 50% cost reimbursement program to defer the costs associated with marketing their products international, specifically in Singapore, Indonesia, and Japan. Kala Health Enrichment used their allocated funds to complete advertising plans that included print and social media, attend international trade shows, promote their products with in-store product promotions, produce giveaway items, and create promotional materials.

This past February Kala Health Enrichment was able to report earning \$20,000 in sales to Singapore, Indonesia, and Japan with these promotions. The company also projects to complete \$85,000 more in sales over the next twelve months while also gaining 325 new foreign consumer contacts and establishing 1 new agent relationship. Their sale to Japan also marks a first-time sale to the market for the pet supplement supplier.

Participating in Food Export programs since 2021, Kala Health Enrichment Inc. has participated in the Branded Program, the Online Product Catalog, and Webinars.

Food Export uses funding from the Market Access Program (MAP) to help America's small businesses increase their exports of food and agricultural products. As these exports increase, these small businesses are creating jobs and improving the strength and stability of our agricultural economy. Food Export-Midwest and Food Export-Northeast are non-profit organizations that work in collaboration with their member state departments of agriculture and

the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service. They offer a wide range of programs and services that help boost America's agricultural exports.

July 2023

Congressional District CT 03



PREMIUM U.S. CHEESE BRANDS EXPANDING SALES IN CHINA

Based in Woodbridge, Connecticut, Orange Cheese Company is an experienced and dedicated exporter of American-made artisan and specialty cheeses to retail, hospitality, and food service markets. Orange Cheese Company also promotes Western cuisines and food cultures in China and other Asian markets. Current sales for this Connecticut supplier are to China, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan and they are continuing to open markets such as Vietnam, Taiwan, Philippines, and South America.

In 2022 the Connecticut-based supplier participated in Food Export-Northeast's Branded Program for the eighth consecutive year. They focused their marketing efforts on the Chinese market as there is a continued growing demand for cheese and dairy products in the country. They used their allocated funding to promote their brands by attending four different trade shows, shipping product samples to potential buyers, conducting in-store product sampling events, sponsoring dairy industry events, producing promotional literature, and updating their website. These efforts helped Orange Cheese Company earn \$3.5M in sales to China along with gaining 65 new foreign buyer contacts, securing 6 new agent relationships, and projecting \$5M in sales over the next twelve months.

Orange Cheese Company has participated in Food Export programs since 2014, taking part in the Market Access Program (MAP) funded Branded Program, webinars, Focused Trade Missions, Buyers Missions, Food Show PLUS! events, and the Online Product Catalog.

Food Export uses funding from the Market Access Program (MAP) to help America's small businesses increase their exports of food and agricultural products. As these exports increase, these small businesses are creating jobs and improving the strength and stability of our agricultural economy. Food Export-Midwest and Food Export-Northeast are non-profit organizations that work in collaboration with their member state departments of agriculture and the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service. They offer a wide range of programs and services that help boost America's agricultural exports.

APPENDIX B: 2023 FARM TRANSITION GRANT SUCCESS STORIES

Mountain Dairy of Storrs received funds to make infrastructure improvements to their milking parlor to address and improve cow comfort, flow, efficiency, and production. These improvements included remodeling an existing wall with new wood, insulation, and larger windows for greater air flow and cow comfort.



During the past 10 years, Mountain Dairy has doubled the size of its milking herd (from 250 cows in 2019 to over 500 today) and is continually working on improving existing infrastructure in their barns, as well as evaluating factors affected milk production including stress and the temperature-humidity index.

Craig Stearns, President and CEO of Mountain Dairy, says, "Improved climate conditions in the parlor will increase milk production along with cow comfort. We are working through adjusting windows, fans, and other cooling techniques to determine the best combination for production efficient. This grant has allowed us to analyze other aspects of cow comfort, flow, and efficiency during the milking process and we will continue addressing areas and improving our operation."



Lindell Flower Farm of New Hartford received funds to construct and outfit an on-farm retail building to increase sales of fresh, sustainable, healthy cut flowers to the local community. The previous farm stand was a deteriorating cart with little room to display the many value-added products produced by the farm.



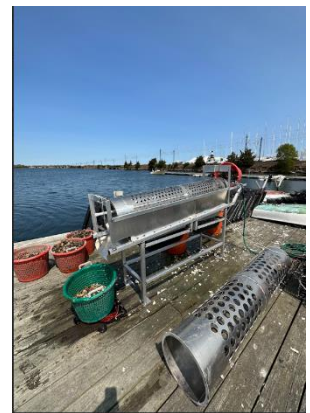


The impact of the on-farm retail building has been immediate. Debra Lindell, owner, says, “We’ve received glowing feedback from neighbors and customers—folks are creating posts and reels on social media highlighting our new building. After opening the retail building, we have sold more arrangements per week than ever before, and have already exceeded our goal of increasing sales by 100% in 2023. The building also created an outlet for value-added products including off-season dried flowers, potpourri, and products featuring our farm brand and logo.”



Sixpenny Oysters of Noank received funds to purchase essential equipment including an 80” oyster tumbler and supplies to construct 450 additional floating bags to increase their capacity for production of fresh oysters. By increasing efficiency of sorting oysters with a tumbler, rather than by hand, the farm anticipates increasing the total number of oysters farmed by 50%--to 225,000 annually.

Increased numbers of floating bags available to grow oysters will also reduce stocking densities in the floating bags by 650 oysters per bag, leading to increased room for oysters to grow, faster growing oysters, oysters with more uniform shape and lower mortality rate.



This increase in production would also allow the farm to acquire five additional restaurant accounts to increase their customer base and sales. Jason Hamilton, co-founder of Sixpenny Oysters, says, “The gear and equipment purchased by aid of this grant has resulted in an increase and more marketable product for us this year. Because of this, we have been able to sell in bulk to a wholesale seafood distributor each week. The consistency of this account provides an easy and reliable way to sell our product year-round. The outcomes of this project will have continued, positive, impacts for many years to come, as well as provide a solid foundation for our growing small business. Revenue has increased and we are already set up to be even further ahead in terms of

oysters/revenue for Spring 2024.

APPENDIX C: 2023 FARM VIABILITY GRANT SUCCESS STORIES

The Huneebee Project of New Haven utilized their Farm Viability Grant to expand their model and programming to Bridgeport, Connecticut, as well as to broaden



the current programming in New Haven. Programming included: engaging youth with child protective or foster care involvement in transferable job-skills training, installing honey bee hives and pollinator gardens in disinvested neighborhoods, and facilitating free community workshops on the importance of pollinators. Through the assistance of the Viability Grant, Huneebee hired a full-time beekeeper, onboarded 2 paid BKIR co-leaders, and onboarded a paid mentorship coordinator.

The addition of these staff and paid positions has allowed for:

1. Increased recruitment of BKIR participants through email, newsletter, distribution of flyers, phone calls, and social media postings. Referrals of BKIR youth (made by child protective workers, schools, individual therapists, mental health clinics, juvenile probation officers, family members, and mentors) increased by nearly 200% (from 10 to 28).
2. Establishment of 3 New Haven based BKIR cohorts; with 1 running March - July and the second and third running July - October.
3. Successful completion of 13 youth between the ages of 15-21 in the 15-week therapeutic, job skills training program (BKIR).



Additionally, Huneebee has added six apiaries (four in New Haven and two in Bridgeport). The total number of apiaries and garden sites operated grew from 5 to 9. The

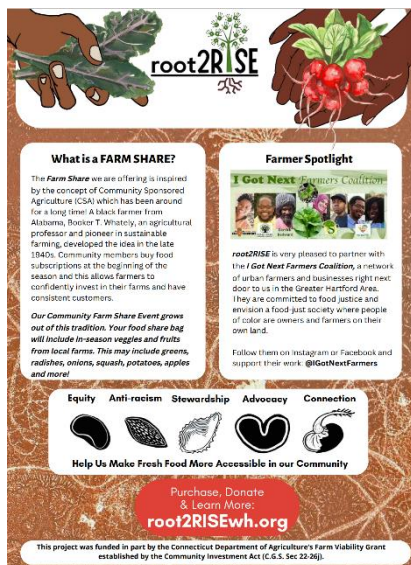


total number of honeybee hives doubled to 40. The total number of pollinator friendly garden beds increased by over 400%. A minimum of 1 native bee hotel was added to each of the 9 garden sites. Huneebee expected to double the number of child and adult community members (from 80 individuals to 190 individuals) exposed to beekeeping, pollinator-friendly practices, and environmental conservation tools in 2023. Instead, at the conclusion of the contract period, they can account for over 1,500 individuals who have participated in a Huneebee-led workshop on these topics.

Huneebee feels urgency in educating their community around the importance of pollinators, decreasing pesticide use, and planting for pollinators (amongst other ways of addressing climate change's numerous negative impacts on pollinators and exacerbation of the effects of rising temperatures and heatwaves in urban areas). And, at Huneebee Project, the bees are also a vehicle. They are a vehicle for healing and wellbeing, a vehicle for personal development, and a vehicle for transferable job skill building within urban agriculture.

root2RISE of West Hartford strives to ensure all children in their community find a sense of belonging through inclusive and meaningful outdoor learning experiences. They believe by providing accessible outdoor education, students will be able to make healthier food choices, learn the importance of a local economy and see that a direct relationship with farmers and producers will lead to a more sustainable and healthy community.

The pandemic forced root2RISE to re-evaluate, reflect, and grow. And from that experience they learned that the school Farmer's Markets (as they existed pre-pandemic) did not support their new Mission and Values centering Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. In response, root2RISE hosted its first Community Farm Share Event (CFSE), a product of our mission, values and dedication to serving the whole community.



The CFSE highlighted the role of the local farmer/producer while highlighting farmers of color right next door in Hartford and surrounding communities. root2RISE also sought to widen their audience by ensuring communications went directly to school administration, social workers as well as garden coordinators. They also created a one-time farm share model offered at reduced prices to demonstrate their commitment to equity and accessibility.

Upon receiving support from the Farm Viability Grant, root2RISE was able to increase the total number of shares by over 100-- from 158 share bags to 260 share bags. 104 of those shares were donated to school families. The CFSE resulted in

approximately \$6,200 of payments to farmers/local businesses, a \$2000 increase from the previous year.

Funding from the Viability Grant helped to support the Fall 2022 Community Farm Share Event and allowed root2RISE the opportunity to expand and grow towards creating a self-sustaining event that will greatly benefit the local community, farmer partners, and the local food system.

