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For Immediate Release

LEAP/Virginia Fresh Match Receives \$1.8 Million Grant Through USDA's Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grant Program

Roanoke, Virginia: Today, Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP), celebrates United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Sonny Perdue's announcement of \$21 million granted through the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program (FINI). LEAP, on behalf of the statewide Virginia Fresh Match network, received a \$1.8 million FINI grant to support Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) incentives throughout the Commonwealth.

Virginia Fresh Match doubles the value of SNAP benefits spent at participating farmers markets. For example, a SNAP shopper uses \$20 in SNAP benefits and gets an additional \$20 to spend on fruits and vegetables.

The 3-year federal FINI grant will support the continued development and growth of Virginia Fresh Match. This network brings together organizations ranging from small farmers markets to large local food nonprofits. The network capitalizes on the expertise of community leaders and builds collaborations between farmers markets, retail grocery outlets, service providers, farmers, SNAP consumers, and community partners.

"Agriculture is Virginia's leading industry yet many families struggle to afford fresh fruits and vegetables needed for a healthy lifestyle. Applied as a food security strategy in many communities, accepting and doubling SNAP at farmers markets make fresh food more equitable and affordable. The FINI grant will support Virginia Fresh Match at participating farmers markets, expand incentives to additional markets, and provide opportunities to work with grocery retailers on incentive pilots," said Maureen Best, LEAP Executive Director.

LEAP will serve as the fiscal agent and Virginia Community Food Connections (VCFC), a Fredericksburg-based local food organization, will serve as the state co-lead and program coordinator. "This FINI award is the culmination of years of work by Virginia market leaders working collaboratively to build the Virginia Fresh Match network," said VCFC Executive Director Elizabeth Borst. "Virginia Fresh Match significantly impacts the community by connecting SNAP families with available local produce, building income for local farmers, and attracting new shoppers to thriving farmers markets. With

FINI support, we can further integrate SNAP incentives as an effective food security solution for Virginia families.”

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Virginia Fresh Match is a robust community of innovation and learning, linking farmers market-based incentive programs through uniform data collection and evaluation to support capacity and expansion of SNAP incentives since 2015. The Virginia Fresh Match network is co-led by two regional organizations: Local Environmental Agriculture Project Inc. and Virginia Community Food Connections.

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