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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: August 6th 2018, 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 (FINI) program to 24 grantees. 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 the 80+ participating Virginia farmers markets, CSAs, mobile markets, and grocery retailers. For every \$1 in SNAP benefits a shopper spends, they receive an additional \$1 to spend on fruits and vegetables.

The three year federal FINI grant will support the continued development and growth of Virginia Fresh Match. The Virginia Fresh Match network brings together organizations including small farmers markets, large local food nonprofits, and key stakeholders in order to address food security, farmer viability, and affordable access to fresh produce. Virginia Fresh Match 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 the 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 makes 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 farmers market leaders working collaboratively to build the Virginia Fresh Match network," said VCFC Executive Director Elizabeth Borst. "Virginia Fresh Match connects SNAP families with

available local produce, builds income for local farmers, and attracts new shoppers to thriving farmers markets.”

Also serving as the regional lead for the Blue Ridge region, LEAP will facilitate the growth of Virginia Fresh Match at local farmers markets including the Blacksburg Farmers Market, Bedford Farmers Market, Lynchburg Community Market, Floyd Farmers Market, Salem Farmers Market, Vinton Farmers Market, The WELL, and Historic Roanoke City Market. Over the next three years, Virginia Fresh Match will bring an additional \$175,000 in SNAP incentive sales to local farms and food businesses in the Blue Ridge. Laura Reilly, Salem Farmers Market Manager, says “Locally, the FINI grant will make a huge impact on farmers markets throughout the Blue Ridge Region. The funding will build community and increase fresh food access to everyone, both key aspects of the missions of farmers market. Thanks to the dedication and efforts of LEAP and Virginia Fresh Match, markets across the Commonwealth, including in our region, will be able to focus on their core values that will enrich the market shopping experience and improve food access for all.”

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Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP) is a Roanoke-based 501c3 non-profit. Founded in 2009, LEAP’s mission is to nurture healthy communities and resilient local food systems. We work closely with local farmers, businesses, partner organizations and the broader community to meet this mission. LEAP aims to help create healthy communities that can respond and adapt to meet community needs. LEAP programs include LEAP Farmers Markets (West End and Grandin Village), LEAP Mobile Market, Healthy Food Incentive Programs (Virginia Fresh Match, Fresh Foods Rx, Medicaid Incentive), and The LEAP Kitchen.

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 building and expansion of SNAP incentives since 2015. For more information, visit www.VirginiaFreshMatch.org. For more information about NIFA, FINI, and the recent announcement, visit <https://nifa.usda.gov/announcement/usda-invests-21-million-encourage-low-income-families-buy-healthy-food-options>.

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