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## **Capital District Community Gardens Launches 'Virtual Veggie Mobile'**

### ***Online Marketplace connects Capital Region Residents and Businesses with Local Farms***

Capital District Community Gardens, a non-profit that has produced and distributed local food in the Capital Region for 39 years, is launching an online farmer's market. Farms, spanning north to Washington, south to Ulster, east to Rensselaer and west to Schoharie counties will have their produce, dairy, meat and value-added products listed on the new website and distributed by CDCG. Daycare centers, schools, group homes, hospitals, restaurants, convenience stores and other wholesale consumers will be able to browse the site daily and purchase local products. In the near future, low-income families will also be able to use the site to purchase.

"There's a delicate balance for farmers who need to grow farm fresh products and also market them to consumers," says State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball. "This new, Virtual Veggie Mobile will allow them to do both in a way that saves time and money. The Virtual Veggie Mobile will make it easier for farmers to better connect with existing facilities while also helping them open up new markets."

Local farmers often struggle to market their products to chefs and other wholesale consumers, with whom their schedules conflict. The Virtual Veggie Mobile provides a way for consumers to communicate with farmers and shop local markets when it is convenient for them. The site gives farmers the advance notice they need to produce only what is in demand, eliminating the risk of food waste. CDCG will take on the responsibility of delivering orders, enabling farmers to spend less time away from their crops.

"When people are able to obtain food that was grown by their friends and neighbors, everyone wins," says Peter Ten Eyck, Owner of Indian Ladder Farm. "This new service enables us to distribute as much locally grown food as possible within our own communities."

CDCG is already partnering with local farms and produce businesses to provide more than 100,000 residents with 162 tons of fresh fruits and veggies each year. CDCG's Veggie Mobile, Veggie Mobile Sprout and Healthy Convenience Store Initiative make fresh food accessible to low-income neighborhoods, senior residences and childcare centers.

"Without Capital District Community Gardens, the children and families of the Parsons Early Learning Center simply wouldn't have access to the fresh, local produce that serves as the cornerstone of the healthy diet that all young children need, in particular, children living in poverty," says Wendy Hopkinson, Senior Director of Early Childhood Services, Parsons Early Head Start Program. "The Virtual Veggie Mobile will provide even more access for nutritious options and help make eating healthy a habit our kids will keep throughout their lives."

With the launch of The Virtual Veggie Mobile, CDCG projects to double the number of people their food access programs serve and triple the amount of fresh food they are distributing in the Capital Region. Continuing their effort to increase the presence of farmer's market quality food in low-income neighborhoods, CDCG is identifying potential partners, such as the Schenectady Community Action Program, who can serve as Virtual Veggie Mobile drop off locations in urban areas where markets have been difficult to establish and maintain.

"Until now, it has only been possible for us to focus on produce distribution," says CDCG's Executive Director, Amy Klein. "Next year we are opening our Urban Grow Center, a new headquarters with loading bays and 3,000 square feet of storage areas. It is this future infrastructure and a long history of strong, community relationships that give us confidence to embark on a new holistic approach to regional fresh food distribution."

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*Capital District Community Gardens is a 39-year-old nonprofit organization that nourishes healthy communities with nearly 50 Community Gardens, The Veggie Mobile, The Healthy Convenience Store Initiative, The Produce Project, Squash Hunger and more.*

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