

WINDHAM EDITION

ReminderNews

Congressman Courtney helps Windham celebrate grants intended to improve food security



(L-r): Congressman Joe Courtney (D-2), GROW Windham's Sally Milius, state Rep. Susan Johnson (D-49), Windham Region Community Council Board Chair Marjorie Roach, and Windham Mayor Ernie Eldridge at an Oct. 10 event celebrating grants to further food security in the Windham area. Photo by...

By **Melanie Savage**,
Reminder News

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On Oct. 10, Congressman Joe Courtney (D-2) joined state Rep. Susan Johnson (D-49) and local administrators at the Windham Region Community Council's offices on Main Street in Willimantic to celebrate GROW Windham's two new USDA grants intended to fund the Windham Community Food Network and to expand the Willimantic Farmer's Market. "Both grants will work to promote access to healthy food throughout the community and to promote local economic development by meeting local needs using local resources," said GROW Windham's Sally Milius.

WRCC Executive Director Jeff Beadle talked about the history of the Willimantic Farmer's Market, which started in 1973 with a long tent constructed of electrical conduit arches. "That got old really quick," said Beadle. Later, the market received funding for construction of the pavilion across from Jillson Square. One of the earliest community markets in the state, the Willimantic market is now one of dozens of farmer's markets

across Connecticut. "All these years later, markets have become the thing," said Beadle. The grant, "provides an opportunity to expand and revitalize the market," said Beadle.

Milius referred to CLiCK, the Commercially Licensed Co-operative Kitchen that is beginning construction at its new home on Club Road in Windham. CLiCK's mission is education and training in the culinary arts and nutrition, and implementation of a sustainable social and economic development model by maintaining a licensed food preparation facility that will support local "farm-to-table" micro-enterprise development, educational opportunities, technical assistance and sustainability. "Mostly I want to say that it's an honor to work with these three projects," said Milius, referring to the Community Food Network, CLiCK and the farmer's market. "All of these projects together represent what I would call a movement."

Courtney said that the region has shown a large growth in the number of new farmers, particularly women and young adults, and that Eastern Connecticut is being recognized as a leader in smart food policy. "Ultimately, kudos to the team here locally," said Courtney.

Milius said the job of the Windham Community Food Network is to identify local needs and ways to meet them. The idea is to draw members of the community into the conversation, to help identify both problems and solutions. Milius offered as an example the vouchers that elderly residents receive for food. Residents at Willimantic's Ashton Towers were unable to get to the market to purchase fresh produce with their vouchers. Local students solved the problem by delivering fresh produce to the residents. "It was an economic solution for both the farmers and the residents," said Milius.

Retiring Willimantic market master Sarah Pappenheimer said that the market will use its grant to explore potential opportunities for revitalization and growth. Eventually, the market would like to expand. The grant will also enable the market to hire a paid master, which will enable expanded outreach within the community, said Pappenheimer.

The Willimantic Farmer's Market is currently held every Saturday, through Nov. 8, from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the pavilion across from Jillson Square. For more information about CLiCK, go to <http://clickwillimantic.com/>. For more information about GROW Windham, go to <http://www.growwindham.org>.

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