

WINDHAM EDITION

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Willimantic Farmers' Market has big plans for the future

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A grant procured through GROW Windham has allowed for a paid Market Master position for the Willimantic Farmers' Market (see a profile of Market Master Stephanie Clark in a separate article in this edition of the *ReminderNews*). The grant also allows for the hiring of an assistant market manager (Kate Callahan will be profiled in next week's edition of the *ReminderNews*), and the development of a business plan for the market.

The market is working with local business consultant George Hernandez to develop a business plan. "He is also working with vendors to help them develop their own business plans," said Clark. Along with recruiting new vendors, Clark is working to promote the market through signage, word-of-mouth, and via presence at events such as the Third Thursday Street Festival.

"The EBT machine was funded through another grant," said Clark, indicating a small gadget resembling a credit card swiper. The machine allows the market to process SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) cards, allowing customers to utilize their benefits to purchase fresh, healthy, local produce. "This year we also got funding to double the value of their SNAP funding," said Clark. This means that \$10 in SNAP assistance becomes \$20 at the market. The program is a win-win, said Clark, benefiting SNAP clients and local growers equally.

Also new this year at the market will be cooking demonstrations. Callahan will prepare simple, healthy dishes for patrons to sample, utilizing produce purchased from market vendors. "We'll have the recipes available in English and Spanish," said Clark. The first cooking demonstration is planned for June 6, "and we're going to try to do it pretty consistently throughout the run of the market," said Clark.

There will also be children's activities planned for the second Saturday of every month throughout the run of the market. Activities will begin at 10 a.m. Check the market's website at <http://www.willimanticfarmersmarket.org> for a schedule of cooking demonstrations and other activities.

The CLiCK kitchen will also be appearing at the market periodically, offering samples of products. CLiCK, Inc (Commercially Licensed Cooperative Kitchen) is a 501c3 non-profit run onco-operative values, offering locals a facility in which to process products such as sauces, doughs and other foodstuffs.

Clark said that the same vendors who were regulars at the market last year will be returning, and there will be new additions to the line-up. Among the vendors at the May 30 market was Russo's Roots, from Canterbury.

Proprietor Libby Tarleton, who runs the farm with James Russo, said that this was the couple's first season at the

farm. Tarleton was already offering fresh produce such as kale, chard, and spinach. "We're able to start early because we have a greenhouse at the farm," she said. Later in the season, the farm will offer other vegetables such as tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers and snap peas. "This is our first season, our first market, so it's exciting," said Tarleton. Although the farm cannot officially certify as organic yet, Tarleton said they use no pesticides or commercial fertilizers. "We are practicing organic farming," said Tarleton.

At the booth next door, E.O. Smith student Kenzie and Windham High School student Jesus were manning a booth for the Windham Youth CORE, formed under the umbrella of GROW Windham. The CORE allows students from local high schools to develop leadership skills while promoting access to healthy food in the community. The students help care for several community gardens located throughout Windham, and participate in outreach activities promoting healthy food choices. They were selling some early-season produce at the market. "We sell some here, and the rest is donated to the soup kitchens," said Jesus.

The Willimantic Farmers' Market is the oldest market in the state, established in 1976 on a budget of \$1,500 in a pop-up tent on a town-owned parcel of land.

Among the offerings at the Willimantic Farmers' Market are seasonal fruits and vegetables, potted plants, baked goods, honey, yarn, goat's milk soap and prepared breakfast foods. The market takes place every Saturday, from 8 a.m. to noon, through Halloween. The market is held on the corner of Jackson Street and Union Street, under the pavilion.

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