



For Immediate Release:
January 27, 2022

CONTACT:
Kyle Semmel
Communications Manager
(716) 687-1225 ext. 112
ksemmel@wnylc.org

Providence Farm Collective Awarded Major Grant to Develop Farmers' Market on Buffalo's West Side

Providence Farm Collective (PFC) is pleased to announce that it has received a \$477,000 Farmers Market Promotion Program grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). With this funding, PFC will create a farmers' market on Grant Street, in the heart of Buffalo's west side where many of their farmers live. The market will be open from the end of June to October 2022, and it will serve the Black community and refugees from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Liberia.

Providence Farm Collective, a nonprofit that supports Black, immigrant, refugee, and low-income farmers in Western New York who cannot otherwise access farmland, started in 2017 as a grassroots effort by the Somali Bantu community to get back to their farming roots and grow fresh food. It has now grown to encompass refugees from multiple nations and members of the Black community. With its incubator farms and summer youth employment programs, it not only provides Western New York's refugee communities with a place to grow their own food; it also allows them to earn extra money doing something they love, while at the same time teaching cultural farming traditions to future generations.

As part of the grant, PFC will promote Hamadi Ali of the Somali Bantu community to full-time Markets Manager. Ali, who spent a decade at Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya before emigrating to Buffalo, where he would earn degrees at ECC and Buffalo State before getting his Master's in Economics from UB, will lead the effort to scale PFC's produce development for food banks and non-profit organizations that directly serve low-income, food insecure communities. "PFC reconnects refugees and immigrant communities with access to farmland

as they build their new life in the United States,” Ali said. “This grant will enable PFC to grow relationships with wholesalers, partner non-profits, and local food pantries. The result will be a source of income for PFC’s farmers and improved access to healthy, culturally-relevant, and affordable foods for community members facing food insecurity.”

PFC farmers grow their produce at the 37-acre farm PFC leases in Orchard Park. This year, Providence Farm Collective and the Western New York Land Conservancy are collaborating on a joint \$2.3 million capital campaign to “Plant the Future of Farming.” Once the goal is met, Providence Farm Collective will purchase the farm, add needed facilities, and sustain it into the future. The Land Conservancy will place a conservation easement on the farm, protecting it forever. The deadline for the campaign is December 31, 2022.

The west side farmers market will provide a location for PFC farmers to sell their niche, traditional crops—including African maize, amaranth, roselle, hot peppers, African and Asian eggplants—well after the campaign is concluded and the communities have a permanent place to grow their crops. During the course of the summer, PFC farmers will receive training and technical assistance to promote and sell their produce to historically under-resourced communities in Western New York.

This training involves a “learn, do, teach” approach. PFC farmers will develop the skills required to successfully market their produce directly to consumers. The farmers’ market will support a more robust food system that promotes health and equity by improving food and nutrition, expanding access to healthy and affordable foods, increasing access to culturally relevant foods, and supporting BIPOC farmers in serving local “low income/low access” communities.

The farmers’ market is being entirely driven by community needs.

“Last season,” PFC Executive Director Kristin Heltman-Weiss said, “PFC’s farmers expressed a desire to have a farmers market that would allow each of the Collective’s 16+ farms to sell fresh food directly to their community. This grant is a step toward the realization of that dream. Although the focus for 2022 is on establishing the market, in future years we hope to welcome other nonprofits as vendors and incorporate cultural activities and celebrations. As a grassroots organization that values the leadership of our farmers, their direction and input on this will define next steps.”

The Western New York Land Conservancy is a regional, non-profit land trust that has protected more than 7,000 acres of land with significant conservation value in Western New York for the benefit of future generations. We envision a future in which forests, farms, meadows, and waterways are connected, cherished, and protected in Western New York. Our clean air, clean water, and fertile soils will equitably support the health and wellbeing of future generations of every living thing. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. For more information on upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, or the mission of the Western New York Land Conservancy, please call (716) 687-1225 or visit wnylc.org.

Providence Farm Collective is a non-profit that believes in empowering Just and Equitable Access to Food and Farmland. It cultivates farmer-led and community-rooted agriculture and food systems to actualize the rights of under-resourced peoples. Providence Farm Collective (PFC) has its roots in the Somali Bantu Community Farm, a three-year pilot project. The pilot explored the challenges and opportunities of addressing fresh food insecurity and farmland inequity. PFC supports under-resourced farmers in Western New York needing access to clean, rural farmland, farming and business education, technical assistance, access to markets and the opportunity to farm for income. PFC also offers youth education and employment programs. Website: providencefarmcollective.org.

###