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

Providence Farm Collective, Western New York Land Conservancy Announce Joint \$2.3 Million Capital Campaign

Providence Farm Collective (PFC) and the Western New York Land Conservancy are announcing a joint \$2.3 million capital campaign to “Plant the Future of Farming” at PFC’s 37-acre farm it leases in Orchard Park. Once the goal is met, Providence Farm Collective will purchase the farm, protect it forever, add needed facilities, and sustain it into the future. They need members of the community to donate to the campaign by December 31, 2022.

Providence Farm Collective (PFC) supports Black, immigrant, refugee, and low-income farmers in Western New York who cannot otherwise access farmland. The farmers grow fresh, nutritious produce with cultural significance for their families and communities. Unfortunately, the farmers do not have a permanent farm they can call their own, and every year more of our region’s best farmland is paved over to make way for strip malls and subdivisions. The farmers at Providence Farm Collective need the peace of mind of having their own permanent land.

“Whether you’re from a refugee community or not, food insecurity impacts us all,” says Kristin Heltman-Weiss, board president of Providence Farm Collective. “By empowering our farmers to grow and sell their own food, we’re suggesting a way forward that is sustainable, resilient, and equitable. This capital campaign is a milestone for us in our effort to provide access to food and farmland to under-resourced communities, one we hope will become a model across our region and state.”

To Mark Poloncarz, the Erie County Executive, this joint capital campaign also addresses some critical needs in the Buffalo Niagara region. “We’re losing prime farm soils to development,” he says, “and many of our region’s farmers are aging out of the profession, with no one to take over their farms. This campaign helps showcase how our community will meet these challenges—by developing a new generation of farmers, who will spur economic growth while supplying our region with the fresh fruits and vegetables we need to address food scarcity here in Western New York.”

“Rich, fertile soil is key to growing healthy food for our families,” says Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Land Conservancy. “It is crucial that we protect the best agricultural soils in our region before they are paved. Securing these funds is a step towards ensuring all Western New Yorkers can have access to fresh, local food—now and for future generations. We’re thrilled to be part of a project that will positively impact so many lives.”

Providence Farm Collective is rooted in the Somali Bantu Community Farm, a three-year pilot project that explored the challenges and opportunities of addressing fresh food insecurity and farmland inequity. It is committed to fostering a just and equitable food system created through opportunity, empowerment, education, collaboration, and mentorship through its three programs. PFC’s 3-year incubator Farm Program provides farmers the opportunity to start their own farm and develop a business; its Community Organization Plot Program provides community organizations with one-acre plots of prepared farmland; and it operates a demonstration farm plot to train farmers and supplement program income. In this past season, 182 PFC farmers harvested more than 22,000 pounds of fresh produce, utilizing 27 varieties of crops, and 90 immigrant and refugee students participated in summer youth programs.

What PFC Farmers say:

Mahamud: “The benefits have been tremendous: getting fresh vegetables for our community; earning money to support the Somali Bantu’s afterschool program. The health benefits have been important for our community. Many of our elders work at the farm. They do not stay home but now spend time outside farming. Everyone is eating fresh vegetables that are important to our traditions. In addition, our teenagers are learning our farming traditions and culture, which is very important to their parents and grandparents.”

Dao: “Farming at PFC gave us a sense of meaning and ownership and feeling that we can do this on our own and be successful.... I was most proud to see I have a piece of land and see my crops, like I used to grow at home. I was so proud that I could start something from the beginning and see it growing well. And I can produce something to put food on my table.... We want to be with PFC for the long term. We want to have a permanent place.”

Nurta: “I cannot get the food that I want. For example, organic food is very expensive at the market. The African corn or maize I eat back home is not available. At the farm, I can grow these foods and help my family and my community.... I want to be self-sufficient, that is my future goal for farming. What I need is more information about farming; that is why I wanted to join PFC.”

Oro: “When you have seeds, you can be self-sufficient. When you farm, you can grow your own food. When you have your own food, you don’t have to ask other people or the government, social services, for food.”

Providence Farm Collective needs donations of all sizes to purchase the farm and protect it forever. For larger donations, naming opportunities include:

- One donor of \$500,000 or more will be recognized on the pavilion
- One donor of \$300,000 or more will be recognized on the barn
- One donor of \$150,000 or more will be recognized on the children’s play area

- One donor of \$100,000 or more will be recognized on the market stand
- Donors of \$50,000 or more will be recognized on a shade and tool shelter
- Donors of \$30,000 or more will have a picnic table named in their honor
- Donors of \$20,000 or more will have a garden bench named in their honor
- Donors of \$10,000 or more will have their name on a quilt square made by Stitch Buffalo on display in the pavilion
- Donors of \$2,000 or more will be recognized in the Land Conservancy newsletter and Providence Farm Collective's Annual Report

If you would like to donate to support the capital campaign, you can donate online at wnylc.org/donate or providencefarmcollective.org, or you can send a check with Providence Farm Collective in the memo line made payable to "the Western New York Land Conservancy" to P.O. Box 471, East Aurora, NY 14052. Please call or email if you have questions: (716) 687-1225 or info@wnylc.org.

The Western New York Land Conservancy is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York for current and future generations. The Land Conservancy envisions a future in which open spaces, working lands, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is one of 1000+ land trusts nationwide, including 87 in New York State. Land trusts have protected over 56 million acres of land. To learn more about the Land Conservancy, visit wnylc.org.

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