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WVDA, WVDE, WVU Extension Service Partner to Expand Farm-to-School

Charleston W.Va. -- The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA), in collaboration with the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) and West Virginia University Extension Service, announced a partnership to expand market opportunities for farmers. Under a USDA Farm to School Implementation Grant, the WVDA, WVDE and WVU Extension will work together to develop a strategic plan for farm-to-school in West Virginia. The goal is to increase the availability of fresh foods in West Virginia schools, as well as new market opportunities for West Virginia farmers.

“Increasing the availability of fresh, nutritious, local food in our schools is a win on many fronts,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt. “Farm-to-school can help expand market opportunities for farmers, spur economic growth in our communities, as well as help fight back against rising health care costs. West Virginia is facing some serious problems. It is time we look for creative solutions to resolve those issues.”

A press conference and stakeholder meeting were held on Friday October 12th to kick-off the initiative and celebrate National Farm-to-School Month. In attendance were Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Steve Paine, WVU Extension Service Associate Dean Jennifer Williams and WVU Extension’s Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Director Ronnie Helmondollar.

“Fifty of our county school systems utilize farm-to-school initiatives, which includes anything from sourcing fresh produce from a local farmer to utilizing a high tunnel to teach students how food is grown. In addition, we have seen record enrollment numbers in our FFA programs,” said West Virginia Superintendent of Schools

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Dr. Steven Paine. “Farm-to-school is having a tremendous impact on the Mountain State.”

The goal of the USDA project is to strengthen stakeholder relationships to foster a unified effort for farm-to-school in West Virginia. In addition, the partnership hopes to increase awareness, market opportunities, local and WV Grown procurement and resources available to farmers, buyers and producers statewide. The USDA grant is totaled at \$91,540 over the next two years to formulate and implement a strategic plan for farm-to-school in West Virginia.

For more information, contact Cindy Bailey at cbailey@wvda.us or 304-558-2570

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works.

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