

Contact Info:

Joanna Dillon
Green Mountain Farm-to-School
[P] 334-2044
[E] jdillon@gmfts.org

Lisa Viles
Area Agency on Aging of Northeastern Vermont
[P] 748-5182
[E] lviles@nevaaa.org

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**Northeast Kingdom Senior Meal Programs
buy local produce direct from local farms**

Orleans – As an appetizer before lunch in mid-February, participants at the Lake Region Senior Center sampled a delicious soup fit for the winter season: creamy potato leek. Conversation about old soup recipes and neighboring farms bubbled up while the seniors sat around large communal tables and tasted the soup. Made by chef Bernard Poginy with potatoes from Chappelle’s Potatoes in Williamstown and cream from Butterworks Farm in Westfield, the soup was part of a new initiative designed to increase the amount of local foods served at senior meal programs and support local farms.

Four senior meal programs in the Northeast Kingdom are piloting the new local food purchasing system called Green Mountain Farm Direct (GMFD), a program of Green Mountain Farm-to-School (GMFTS). Farm Direct has collaborated with the Area Agency on Aging of Northeastern Vermont to support the use of fresh local foods at senior nutrition programs in the region. GMFD provides sites with a consolidated list of local products from nearly a dozen regional farms featuring items ranging from produce to meat to dairy. GMFD staff processes the orders, coordinates the delivery to sites, and works with each senior meal program to develop new recipes and arrange special tastings featuring local foods.

GMFD seeks to enhance the nutritional quality of the meals by providing fresh, local food; increase awareness about senior nutrition programs; expand the relationships among

consumers and farmers; and benefit farmers and food producers through access to a larger share of food expenditures made by programs in this area.

“Through GMFD, we have a great opportunity to not only provide community members with fresh, nutritious foods but also support our local farms,” says Katherine Sims, Executive Director of GMFTS. “The program has sparked some great conversations at the meal sites about favorite family recipes, how Vermont agriculture has changed over time, and how our purchases directly impact our community. It’s been very exciting to see such an interest in local foods.”

Since launching in September 2009, GMFD has provided coordinated purchasing and delivery to four senior meal sites and eight schools in the Northeast Kingdom. GMFD has distributed over 550 pounds of local food to the senior meal programs totaling over \$800 of Vermont products.

Lisa Viles, Program Development Coordinator for the Agency on Aging adds, “The partnerships developed through this initiative have been inspiring. Seniors and meal site staff are sampling fresh, local foods, creating seasonal menus, raising small plots of vegetables, preserving food, and having a lot of fun. Knowing that we are supporting our local economy adds to the great taste of the meals provided, too.” Each senior meal program offers a unique dining experience. Community members are encouraged to stop in and sample the great food and conversations. Reservations are recommended. For more information call the Senior HelpLine, 1-800-642-5119.

Participants, cooks, and administrators have been excited by the freshness and quality of the local food. Elaine Cole, Administrative Assistance and Cook at the Craftsbury Community Care Center, says, “the potatoes are the best I have seen this year!” As Spring begins and GMFD expands in 2010, more institutional sites will be able to purchase fresh foods from more regional farms. This food is a building block that all parts of our community can gather around to strengthen connections with our environment and each other.

GMFD is a program of Green Mountain Farm-to-School which promotes the health and wellbeing of Vermont's children, farms, and communities by providing program to connect schools and farms through food and education. For more information about Green Mountain Farm-to-School and Green Mountain Farm Direct visit, www.greenmountainfarmtoschool.org.