

2021 MID-YEAR REPORT



community
involved in sustaining
agriculture

After a year and a half of uncertainty and loss, it's a deep relief to drive past busy farm fields or to see the overflowing booths at local farmers' markets and be reminded that the world is still turning; tomato season will come, neighbors will drop zucchini on each other's porches, and loved ones will gather over meals.

At CISA, we don't take this for granted. The farms and other businesses we work with have been through the wringer over the past year, and through it all they have demonstrated immense resilience and flexibility. But weathering a pandemic requires more than individual grit, and your support—both as a local food shopper and as a CISA donor—is an integral part of the community network that sustains local farms and keeps our local food system functioning.

Because of your financial support, CISA has helped local farms navigate the pandemic, while also assisting them with challenges from marketing and labor to expansion and generational transfer. Here's a snapshot of some of the most important lessons of the past year, along with some of the successes that your support has made possible.

Atherton Farm
Photo by Scott Strebler

The number one issue is food security. When I get something local, and I'm buying it from the person who picked it ... it feels like ... a more secure arrangement. It feels important to keep that local agricultural system strong and support it in every way possible.

– local food shopper



buylocalfood.org



Ashfield Farmers' Market
Photo by Stephanie Craig

Farms and food businesses emerge from the pandemic

Last year, farms and local food businesses responded to the pandemic and the dramatic market shifts that it brought with determination and creativity, adding online ordering and delivery while managing food and worker safety. Customer interest in local food skyrocketed as the pandemic disrupted national and global supply chains. The pandemic also revealed many of the deep inequities in our food system as hunger rates dramatically increased. Some farms had very strong (if stressful!) years, while other businesses, like restaurants, really struggled.

We wanted to understand the drivers behind some of these changes so we worked with researchers at UMass Amherst and Tufts University to conduct interviews which helped to confirm anecdotal reports about customers' high level of interest in locally grown food during the pandemic. Both research teams noted that local purchasing brought feelings of joy, security, and solidarity, with a strong sense of connection to farmers and neighbors, seasons, and place.



Forest Park Farmers' Market
Photo by Elizabeth Solaka

Some notable outcomes from the interviews:

- **Farm stores served as safe food access points** for many, including low-income people using SNAP, especially early in the pandemic.
- **Local food home delivery services developed rapidly** and created new local food access points, especially for SNAP beneficiaries, disabled people, and high-risk people.
- Rapid and innovative cross-sector collaboration among local food producers, municipalities, community-based organizations, and local food retailers **met emergency food needs quickly**, with a focus on access to fresh produce.

Part of the experience of shopping locally is interacting with the local farmers and the people who are involved in the process, and I've always really valued that about the Pioneer Valley. Just how much farming does happen here and how friendly those people are.

– local food shopper

How you can help

Keep buying local! Maybe you started shopping more at a local farm stand or got takeout from a local restaurant. You helped those businesses weather the pandemic and can continue to help them stay part of the local food system.



Recent Local Food Successes!

CISA, collaborating with partners and the western Mass legislative delegation had huge success in increasing funding for local food in the FY22 budget approved by the Governor:

- CISA's Senior FarmShare's will reach over 500 low-income elders (\$75K)
- Statewide HIP (Healthy Incentive Program) will run year-round (\$13M)
- Buy Local groups across the state will help connect local farms to their communities (\$750K)

And, CISA's support and advocacy helped 29 farmers' markets open this summer, from Brimfield to Westfield and Springfield to Greenfield. (Find yours at: buylocalfood.org/markets)

It's been really good being able to get chicken and lamb and beef and pork from the Valley, or from close by. And that's been made possible largely through the Sunderland Farm Collaborative.

- local food shopper

Food access through farmers' markets

Massachusetts' Healthy Incentives Program, or HIP, provides a rebate for SNAP recipients who purchase fruits or vegetables from participating Massachusetts farmers. It's a great program, supporting people in need and local farms. This program will bring \$13M of local food purchasing to participating farms this year! HIP is complex and sometimes hard for both farms and customers to navigate, which is where CISA comes in.

CISA staffer Zoey Sloate and our TerraCorps member, Sarah Lucia, help farms and farmers' markets access and manage HIP and publicize their participation to potential HIP customers. They've done trainings for agencies that serve SNAP recipients, like health and senior centers, so they can spread the word about HIP to their clients.

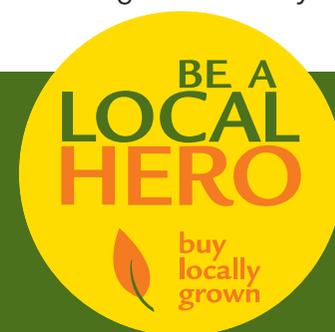
Sarah and Zoey have also created maps and materials, in use statewide, to help customers find HIP vendors and markets and farmers promote their participation in the program.

Massachusetts farmers must apply to be HIP vendors. Once accepted, they need specific equipment and software, which they must be trained to use. Customers need to know about the program, and where to find participating farmers—and that information can change seasonally as farm stands and farmers' markets open and close. CISA's work to consolidate HIP vendor information was funded in part through community donations—your support means more local food access and increased farm sales!

Farmers' Market Resources

For a searchable guide of farmers' markets and a lot more local go to: buylocalfood.org/find-it-locally

To find markets and farm stores that accept HIP you can search this map created by Sarah: buylocalfood.org/hip-map



Meet CISA's Board of Directors

CISA's Board of Directors are active members of our community, engaged in supporting local farms and local food! They're active thought partners with CISA and help set goals for the organization.

Farmers (active and former)



Glenroy Buchanan,
Pioneer Valley NE Growers Coop



Wally Czajkowski,
Plainville Farm



Amy Klippenstein,
Sidehill Yogurt



Kat Chang Laznicka,
Reed Farm



Caroline Pam,
Kitchen Garden Farm



Shawn Robinson,
Prospect Meadow Farm



Pete Solis,
Mockingbird Farm



Tessa White-Diamond,
Diamond Farm

Local Food System Supporters



Al Griggs,
retired



Helen Kahn,
Northampton Tuesday
Farmers' Market



Steve Kulik,
retired State Representative



Jenny Ladd,
retired



Myra Marcellin,
Farm Credit East



Catherine Sands,
Fertile Ground Consulting



Elizabeth Wroblicka,
Conservation Works, LLC