BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MASSACHUSETTS COMMITS NEARLY $900,000 IN FUNDING AND PRO BONO SUPPORT TO 8 NOT-FOR-PROFITS PROMOTING FOOD JUSTICE

BOSTON, Dec. 18, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (Blue Cross) will award two-year grants to eight not-for-profit organizations focused on food justice. The Massachusetts-based organizations include family farmers, land use experts, food distributors, and workforce development leaders. Each partner will receive more than $110,000 in Blue Cross funding and pro-bono support in total over 2024 and 2025.

Blue Cross is committed to helping make sure everyone in Massachusetts can access healthy, affordable, high-quality food that supports their cultural traditions.

One in three Massachusetts households experienced hunger in 2022, according to the Greater Boston Food Bank. Through not-for-profit partnerships and accelerator grants, Blue Cross is working to address the environmental and social factors that influence food inequities, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color.

"These eight organizations are doing critical work to build sustainable food systems, and we're honored to partner with them over the next two years," said Jeff Bellows, Blue Cross' vice president of corporate citizenship and public affairs. "By addressing longstanding physical and social barriers that lead to food insecurity, we hope to help more Massachusetts community members live healthy lives."

Overall, Blue Cross has committed to providing more than $2 million in direct financial contributions and $1 million in pro bono volunteering each year to not-for-profits in the areas of environmental justice, food justice and racial justice.

The 2024 food justice partners are:

- **All Farmers**: Supports the work of over 60 refugee and immigrant farm families in Greater Springfield by providing access to farmland, training and resources. The farmers produce crops that feed more than 500 people, while sharing their cultural farming traditions in their new homes.
- **Boston Area Gleaners**: Collects excess fresh produce from 90 local farms and directs it to distributors that reach more than 2,000 food access organizations every year across Massachusetts. The organization also runs a food hub in Boston and a 25-acre farm.
- **Cape Cod Council of Churches**: Works with community organizations, churches and volunteers to provide groceries and hot meals through its food pantry and family kitchen. Meals and services are available across Cape Cod and the Islands to people of any or no religious affiliation.
- **CommonWealth Kitchen**: Operates a business incubator/commercial kitchen and manufacturing space shared by more than 200 entrepreneurs (predominantly BIPOC- and women-owned) and offers business education and valuable connections. CommonWealth Kitchen also connects regional farmers with outlets for surplus produce.
- **Grow Food Northampton**: Nurtures the local food system in western Massachusetts through its 121-acre community farm, 320-plot community garden, free mobile farmers markets for people experiencing food insecurity, and community education.
- **Marion Institute**: Connects more than 400 regional food system stakeholders — including farmers, fishermen, social service agencies, food pantry leaders, institutional buyers and other partners — to advocate for policies that improve community health in Fall River, New Bedford and across the South Coast.
- **Root**: Helps young adults build "knife and life" skills through its 14-week culinary job training program and post-graduate support. Some graduates start their careers in Root's Salem-based community catering group, which produces more than

500 meals each week for people experiencing food insecurity across the North Shore.
- **Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP)**: Connects more than 150 farms and food producers to education, hands-on workshops and business assistance resources. The organization also advocates for state policies and programs that promote local agriculture and better land access for farmers.

Another example of the company's longstanding commitment to food justice is the Blue Cross DotRx program at Codman Square Health Center in Dorchester. DotRx connects more than 150 families with free produce and affordable, healthy food options through partnerships with local food access not-for-profits.

To learn more about the company's health justice work, visit here.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (bluecrossma.org) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to the relentless pursuit of quality, affordable and equitable health care with an unparalleled consumer experience. Consistent with our promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

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