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Merck Family Fund Selects First Round of “Greening Urban Communities” Grantees, Awarding \$26,000 to Capital District Community Gardens’ Produce Project

Supporting the Expansion of a Youth Training Program and Increasing Produce Variety for Local Consumers

Capital District Community Gardens is 1 of 13 organizations selected to receive the first round of grants issued by The Merck Family Fund’s new “Greening Urban Communities” initiative. The \$26,000 grant will support the expansion of CDCG’s Produce Project, a garden-to-market youth training program that employs at-risk youth from Troy High School in exchange for school credit, food shares and stipends. Grant dollars will be used to increase production and sales and to improve program support for the youth.

This year The Produce Project tripled its 2010 sales and with support from Merck the program hopes to increase revenue by another 25 percent in 2012. The NYS Small Business Development Center is currently working with CDCG staff and project youth to develop a 3-year business plan, designed to achieve financial stability for the program.

New objectives for the project include increased service to low-income consumers by distributing 1/3 of the project’s produce to CDCG’s own Veggie Mobile, direct sales through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA,) and sales increases at local restaurants and The Delmar Farmer’s Market.

To match the rise in demand, expansion plans include the development of an adjacent property and the addition of a second high tunnel. This temporary greenhouse will extend the growing season, increase produce variety during the off season and provide sheltered outdoor activity for the youth during the winter.

The Produce Project provides a safe place for at-risk youth to go after school, but CDCG hopes that the students will also apply the problem solving techniques and job skills they learn in the program to situations they encounter outside of the garden fence. CDCG has allocated some Merck dollars to improve the support services they offer the youth. Plans to increase the number of training seminars, nutrition lectures and field trips to colleges or potential employers will help to nourish and build a stronger community in Troy.

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Capital District Community Gardens is a nonprofit organization that has served the Capital Region for more than 35 years. CDCG nourishes healthy communities with nearly 50 Community Gardens, The Veggie Mobile and Sprout, The Healthy Convenience Store Initiative, The Produce Project, Squash Hunger, The Taste Good Series and Street Tree Planting.

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