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FOR: Immediate Release, 8/15/2011

Times Union Hope Fund Awards \$5,000 to Capital District Community Gardens' Produce Project

A \$5,000 grant from the Times Union Hope Fund of The Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region will help employ 24 at-risk students from Troy High School at The Produce Project, a year-round urban farm and youth training program launched by Capital District Community Gardens in 2010.

Harvesting crops and then marketing them to the Governor's Mansion, area restaurants and at local farmer's markets, the students develop entrepreneurial skills that will be invaluable as they enter the job market.

"Besides having a successful harvest, it is our mission to have a positive influence on the interactions the teens have outside the farm fence," says Brian Bender, Produce Project Coordinator. "There are direct consequences in gardening that teach the teens how to cope with the challenges and losses they face in everyday life. If the weeding doesn't get done, there are crop shortages to deal with. Taking the harvest to the farmer's market and gaging customer perception allows our student employees to see the benefits or shortcomings of their labor."

Introducing the teens to different produce varieties and sending students home with a stipend and a share of the harvest for their families, the program trains the youth to develop healthy lifestyles.

"My whole family eats healthier now that I bring home vegetables," says Marc Perry, a senior at Troy High. "When the Produce Project opened I used to walk by every day and knew I wanted to be a part of it. After graduation, I want to continue to study agriculture in college."

Fresh, organic fruits and vegetables can be purchased from the Produce Project every Saturday at the Delmar Farmer's Market located at Bethlehem Middle School or at several local restaurants.

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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, The Healthy Convenience Store Initiative, The Produce Project, Squash Hunger, The Taste Good Series and Street Tree Planting.
