The Essential Newsletter

Capital Roots’ Response to an Unprecedented Health Crisis
In the hard times and the good, we grow, educate, and provide.

From the opening of its first gardens in 1975, to the dynamic and multifacted organization of today, Capital Roots has worked to reduce the impact of poor nutrition on public health in the Capital Region. We organize community gardens, improve access to healthy food, offer nutrition and horticulture education for all ages and coordinate urban greening programs in Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady and southern Saratoga counties.

From Our Food Hub

By Amy Klein, Chief Executive Officer

It has been a long six months since we have mailed you an update. With good reason. Our world was turned upside down responding to COVID-19. And as much as we tried to stay in touch through email or Facebook, that isn’t the same as reading on paper what Capital Roots has been doing in our communities thanks to your support.

These past several months have been both challenging and inspiring. When COVID hit the Capital Region and New York State went on Pause, Capital Roots did NOT Pause. We refocused ALL of our efforts and staff on our essential food access work.

Staff who normally work on education programs, finance, fundraising and more, were re-directed to work on the front line with our Veggie Mobile®, Healthy Stores, On-Line Market, Food Hub, Urban Farm, Community Gardens and the Market at the Urban Grow Center.

As you’ll read in the pages of this newsletter, Capital Roots has seen an explosive increase in the use of our fresh food access services since March 2020. These increases speak to the importance of these programs in difficult times and every day.

During COVID, our food access services provided a safe space for everyone to get quality food without risking their health. And, as always, this top quality fresh food is available at the lowest cost. So instead of receiving a pre-packaged box of whatever is available, families and seniors are able to make their own food choices. Providing our services with dignity and respect is always a hallmark of our work.

During COVID, our food access services provided a safe space for everyon
By the numbers:

- 500% increase in sales in the March through May period from the same time last year.
- 95% increase in EBT/SNAP sales in this three month period from the same time last year.
- 320% increase in number of transactions from March 2020 to May 2020.
- In addition to local produce, eggs, value-added goods (like granola, pickles, and spices), meat, and vegan sausages, the market brought in an array of local products in April to meet the increased customer demand for the staples they love and could not access elsewhere.

The impact:

- Healthy, affordable retail access in downtown Troy serving Capital Region residents with high safety protocols with window orders and the option to phone ahead.
- A thriving retail market for local farmers and food producers, many of whom lost their farmers markets outlets when New York went on ‘pause’.

“It was my first time shopping at the Urban Grow Center Market during COVID-19. I was able to get beautiful local produce you don’t find at a grocery store and even freshly picked strawberries. They have an amazing selection, great prices, and the nicest staff. It is a blessing to have Capital Roots in our community.”

*Juliann, Market Customer*
“Capital Roots provides wonderful produce at affordable prices. I absolutely love local options and veggies grown by the Produce Project. During the pandemic having the Veggie Mobile pull up around the corner from my house has helped limit my exposure and provide me with healthy food every week.”

Nadine, Rensselaer Veggie Mobile® Customer

By the numbers:
- 40% increase in sales from March through May compared to the same time last year.
- 54% increase in EBT/SNAP sales in this three month period from the same time last year.
- 112% increase in EBT/SNAP sales in May 2020 from March 2020.

The impact:
- Healthy, affordable retail access delivered to urban neighborhoods and senior housing.
- Safe access for vulnerable residents thanks to our increased staffing and food handling protocols.
- Customers can phone ahead to place their order, reducing wait times and contact at the stop.

“Helping out on the Mobile Markets during the pandemic gave me a better insight into the importance of our work. The residents we serve are always excited to hear what is fresh from the farm and share a story or a recipe that they love to make. You can see and feel the impact almost immediately.”

Mike, Capital Roots Staff
Toni, Capital Roots Online Markets Coordinator helps bring cases of apples into the Food Hub for inspection and distribution to our community partners.

“Partnering with the dedicated staff of Capital Roots has been a wonderful experience. Their passion for breaking down barriers to provide farm-fresh produce to the community is contagious! The feedback we’ve received from our consumers is that in making the produce so much more available to them on a regular basis, they’re able to eat more nutritious meals and have even begun trying new recipes to incorporate the fruits and veggies received. We couldn’t ask for a better outcome and look forward to future collaboration!”

Elizabeth, HUD Specialist, Unity House of Troy

By the numbers:
- 35,542 pounds of produce distributed to individuals and institutional customers March through May.
- 113 orders filled serving food institutions around the Capital Region.
- 200% increase in number of Individual orders in this three month period from the same time last year.

The impact:
- For the Individual program, this online marketplace allows for minimum contact pickup of food orders and offers a full array of produce, eggs, meat, and specialty foods, allowing people to support local businesses and shop safely during COVID-19.
- For the Institutional program, this online marketplace allows for wholesale ordering and delivery to small institutions and community organizations who are serving low-income and vulnerable populations. Many of these organizations lack access to regional distributors for this service due to their size or location.

By sourcing locally, Capital Roots provides some of the freshest produce in the Capital Region.
During COVID-19 and year round, neighborhood stores like Uncle Sam’s Healthy Foods in Troy provide alternative options for residents to access fresh produce.

By the numbers:
- 27% increase in store orders in the March through May period from the same time last year.
- 6,700 pounds of produce distributed to small retail outlets in the Capital Region.
- 50% increase in average store order size in April 2020 from the same time last year.

The impact:
- Without this program, corner store owners would not have access to produce distribution services or sales support, putting the burden on the store owner to source and manage their own produce stock; most stores would not be able to carry affordable produce.
- Healthy, affordable food options available in neighborhoods with low-supermarket access. This is especially important during COVID-19, when taking public transit to supermarkets can be risky.
- Because many of our stores are increasing their order size, we know that more residents are turning to their neighborhood store for retail food access, and because of our program, they are able to source healthy food.

“I love the wonderful work that Capital Roots does and the fresh produce they provide for me and my customers. They do a great service to the area.”

Abdul, Owner, Uncle Sam’s Healthy Foods

James, Capital Roots Healthy Stores Coordinator, delivers hundreds of pounds of produce to stores around the Capital Region each week.
“I’m at my garden five times a week, I absolutely love it. My garden is my therapist now, it’s such a good place to be. So many people pass by and say “Hello!” while I’m working. I give away veggies to the people who are curious and tell them to stop by if they need more. I’ve met a lot of nice people that way.”

Bill, Troy Community Gardener

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Bill, Troy Community Gardener

“After my first season as a gardener I see what a great choice it was to join Capital Roots! I’ve still got vegetables in my freezer and in some fermentations that we grew last summer, so the health and economic benefits are outstanding. The organization is supportive of everyone and they offer great resources for gardeners to be successful.”

Emily, Albany Community Gardener

By the numbers:
- Registered 280 new gardeners and orientated them to the program over group phone calls.
- 99% garden plot occupancy in 2020.
- 13.3 cumulative acres of community garden space managed by our program.

The impact:
- Nothing is more empowering than growing your own food. For 45 years, Capital Roots has provided access to green spaces in our region’s cities so residents can access land and resources to be successful community gardeners. People can grow more than $1,500 worth of organic vegetables each season!
- Community Gardens serve as safe havens where residents can be outside, exercise, and still maintain social distancing.
- Without our gardener orientation meetings, Community Garden’s coordinators were at the phones for hours at a time informing new and returning members about safety procedures and precautions.
“We love sharing fresh produce from Capital Roots with the children and families. Since the start of COVID pandemic, families have had an even more difficult time accessing affordable, healthy food. Having the opportunity to deliver delicious, healthy produce from local farms thanks to Capital Roots is a true gift, and a gift that will keep on giving as the children grow. Thank you Capital Roots and all who support this amazing agency. We look forward to our order each week and love delivering fresh produce to our families!”

Tracie, Director, South End Childrens Cafe

By the numbers:

- 36% increase in produce distributions to emergency feeding providers, like food pantries and shelters
- Supported more than 50 food assistance programs served in six counties.
- 1,000% increase in donations from wholesale produce partners in the March through May period from the same time last year.

The Impact

- Food assistance programs in the Capital Region are able to supply constituents with fresh, healthy food.
- Food surplus that would otherwise be wasted is diverted to regional food assistance programs.

Squash Hunger Coordinator, Lena, and Education Director, Sharon, stand next to a massive delivery of carrots destined for emergency feeding centers around the Capital Region.
PRODUCE PROJECT
Youth-Powered Urban Farm

During COVID-19 schools across the country shut down for their spring semester. For the safety of our students we operated the Urban Farm and tended to the seedlings they planted by rotating our staff. We sent produce care packages to their homes during the pandemic to keep the students connected to what they grew and offer thanks for their work. All the while preparing our curriculum in a slightly different way.

While we missed the students dearly, we are happy to announce their return to the farm this month! This summer’s cohort has been split into two groups, working at different parts of the day, giving us the opportunity to maintain adequate social distancing and safety precautions without jeopardizing the integrity of the curriculum.

The students will not be on traditional field trips this summer, but other key aspects of our programming will remain, such as culinary classes, resume help, and other topical lessons that fall outside what they are accomplishing on the farm. This has always and will continue to be a critical aspect of our programming, providing a 360 degree curriculum that students can take with them in whatever their next steps are, be it college or the workforce.

“This program has kept pushing my comfort zone and helped me get out of my shell. Now I’m not afraid to walk up to people and engage them in conversation. In preparation for the summer session I have been helping to conduct new student interviews over Zoom, which have made me feel more confident about my leadership skills and will look really good on my resume.”

Bailey, Produce Project Student, Troy High School

Taking place on our 2-acre urban farm in Troy, this Capital Roots’ program for Troy High teens uses agriculture as a tool to teach job readiness and life skills.

HONORING OUR CLASS OF 2020 GRADUATES
Our essential food services and our support of local producers are only possible with help from our donors. Make one-time donation today or consider providing sustaining support by becoming a Harvest Helper with a recurring contribution.

“In the years I’ve been with Capital Roots, I’ve realized that our weekly Veggie Mobile stops provide nourishment way beyond access to healthy food. This is why I became a Harvest Helper. If everyone was a Harvest Helper, the organization would have a much easier time with financial planning.”

Jane, a long time volunteer and Harvest Helper

“Seeing the shutdowns progress and the unemployment numbers grow made me recognize that the services Capital Roots provides were going to be needed more than ever. It’s worth it to rearrange my budget a little to make sure that someone else is being taken care of. This is why I became a Harvest Helper.”

Steve, a 2020 Harvest Helper and community gardener since 2012

SUPPORT CAPITAL ROOTS’ COVID RESPONSE WITH A DONATION TODAY!

Name: ___________________________ E-Mail: ________________________________

Phone: __________________ Address: ________________________________

☐ I’d like to support Capital Roots’ fresh food access programming with a donation of $ __________

☐ $35 Friend ☐ $600 Cultivator
☐ $60 Farmer ☐ $1200 Student Sponsor
☐ $120 Supporter ☐ $2400 Essential Sponsor
☐ $300 Benefactor

☐ In honor of
☐ In memory of

☐ I’d like to get involved...

☐ Delivering produce for Squash Hunger. ☐ Working with the Produce Project. ☐ At the Community Gardens.

MAKE ME A HARVEST HELPER FOR $ _______ A MONTH.