News
From Capital Roots

10 Years of Healthy Stores
The Future of Food Access: Building a Sustainable Marketplace
Expanding Our Mobile Markets

www.capitalroots.org
We grow, educate and provide.

From the opening of its first gardens in 1975, to the dynamic and multifaceted 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.

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FROM OUR FOOD HUB

Dear Friends,

The end of 2021 was marked by another round of unpredictability and distress caused by the Omicron variant. Our staff was implementing expanded COVID precautions to help protect ourselves and safely provide services to our senior and at-risk constituents. Amongst the societal uncertainty, I saw something at the Urban Grow Center that was truly remarkable - smiling eyes and excitement. The team we have now has been through hard times together and continues to serve like nothing can stop them. A new “fun squad” has formed that plans for treats and outings that has brought us closer than ever. A staff that willingly hangs out after hours to play games together is a sign of something special and creates a workday atmosphere that is cheerful, vibrant and hopeful. This in turn helps us provide more and grow like never before.

And grow we have. This December officially marked the groundbreaking ceremony for our long-awaited Urban Grow Center expansion project. On a winter day where the sun decided to join us for the occasion, dignitaries, supporters, friends and family came out to see the start of a massive project that has been years in the making. Not only will the new facility bring an expanded food hub that will allow us to serve more Capital Region residents, but it will provide innovative ways to build for lasting change. An incubator kitchen sets the stage for entrepreneurs to create New York State inspired products and businesses. Our new “Good Food Market,” sponsored by our wonderful friends at CDPHP will become a regional farm-forward space where seasonal and sustainable products are available and accessible to all.

The start of 2022 is an exciting time for Capital Roots. Staff watch with eagerness from the window as the once vacant lot next door is being transformed. The grow-lights that line our office walls are filled with seedlings that will soon be transplanted onto our Produce Project’s Urban Farm. New schools and food access locations join the already long list of our service network. We created a new position of Policy Director to create even more lasting change for true food security and community building at the state and local levels.

We are expanding in every direction and driving the organization to new heights. But we are humbled. Our new volunteers share the load with those that have given their time for years - donors are realizing the impact of their contributions and doubting down - even as our whole community is reconsidering where and how they source their food. We are here for those that need a hand up and grateful for those who outreach theirs. This will be a year of coming together, sharing a meal and looking forward to a better tomorrow.

We do nothing alone and we are grateful to have you by our side.

Amy Klein

Chief Executive Officer
Healthy Stores
Celebrating 10 years of innovative food access

Capital Roots’ Healthy Stores program, sponsored by MVP, gives fresh, affordable produce a daily presence in convenience stores throughout Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady counties. Since 2011, Capital Roots has developed partnerships with local small-business owners to provide families with fresh alternatives to the canned and processed goods that typically fill convenience store shelves. Today, we reach thousands of families and provide an opportunity and more importantly a choice to eat healthy. These stores played an especially important role during the pandemic as the access and safety of traditional grocery was limited. And while it may not serve as a total replacement for traditional food stores, having these staples in areas with limited access to healthy food has a lasting impact. In the past year, we have observed record numbers in pounds of produce delivered and our new Healthy Stores Coordinator, Isaiah, is finding exciting ways to connect with shop owners. With more stores on the horizon in 2022, this is one program our organization and our community love to see grow.

Matt Schueler, the Director of Learning and Job Development sat down with Isaiah Brown, recently promoted to the role of Healthy Stores Coordinator. Isaiah first started at Capital Roots as a student in the Produce Project in the summer of 2017.

What do you remember about your first day in the Produce Project?

It was hot as hell! It wasn’t really what I expected from a farm. I thought there would be animals.

...And about that summer?

I just remember wanting to finish it through and come back. I was enjoying who I worked with and was working for. I knew I wanted to be a Leader.

Isaiah’s Student Leader this summer was Siquel Downs and he was the kind of person “you don’t meet every day.” Isaiah saw in Siquel someone he wanted to emulate. But over the months of the fall and winter trimesters, some of the shine came off the apple.

So what kept you going during the school year?

Do you want me to be honest?

Yes.

It was the money that kept me going.

Students earn a stipend in the program and can work before they are old enough for other jobs. Especially for youth who enter the program as freshman, the program’s pay is a game changer. Isaiah stayed on and applied to be a Student Leader, just like Siquel. I asked him if he remembered his Student Leader interview.

Yes. You asked me how I would weigh a plane.

What did you answer?

I said I would use a really big scale.

Isaiah would end up interviewing three times at the Produce Project: When entering the program, when applying to be a Student Leader and when he was chosen as the first Student Leader to serve during the school year. Isaiah helped staff create and define that role for others that followed.

Obviously the program gave you a lot of experience interviewing for jobs, but what else did it give you?

I learned how to be a leader in life. To really communicate. I was way more mature than any of my peers at the fast food place. I could handle the register and knew how to encourage sales.

What made you come back to Capital Roots and take the market job the winter of 2019?

I was tired of my last job. I knew the people here. The environment. And I liked the mission.

What’s your personal vision?

I would like to be something bigger here. This place is awesome. I think sometimes people find that hard to say. I want to grow the position I’m in now. Make it huge. I remember growing up and not always being able to eat well. Days where I did not eat at all. Supplying corner stores, a lot of them, can make a huge difference. Going through high school - high schoolers especially, are getting their food from corner stores.

What’s your biggest challenge in this new position?

Communication. Lots of store owners speak a different language. I’m just trying to figure out what’s best for their stores and their customers and to get them what they need.

What kind of growth have you seen in the Produce Project since you left?

The students have better attitudes now, they’re in better moods. They seem to have a better understanding that it’s more than a paycheck. That it’s helping them figure out how to move in the real world. School hides lots of that from you.

And how have you grown?

I have slowly become an extrovert. My fear of mistakes and mishaps has gone away and I learned why food access is so important. I want to make Healthy Stores better than ever.
Building a sustainable marketplace with community in mind

Good Food Market: Sponsored by CDPHP

The public face of the Grow Center expansion will be its street-level Market, designed to better meet the needs of the surrounding area. With a broader range of products, longer hours and greater visibility than Capital Roots’ current market, this stand-alone market improves on our produce stand, letting all community members know the Grow Center and its services are there for them. The Market’s open design, accessible to people of all walks of life, will offer affordable and local fruits and vegetables all year long, as well as value-added products from our kitchen and other regional producers, in addition to local meat and dairy. The Market will also include two fitted spaces for local entrepreneurs to operate their own food-based businesses without the initial costs that are typically the downfall of many start-ups. These businesses will be nurtured in our space so they can build a customer base and eventually strike out on their own.

Incubator Kitchen:

Open 24/7 for the development and support of local food-based businesses. There, budding entrepreneurs will be connected with our network of farms and sales outlets, giving them access to both the raw materials and the markets necessary for lasting success. Beyond access to four unique commercial kitchen spaces, with its equipment, culinary support and a regional food hub across the hall, entrepreneurs will benefit from business mentoring services.

Second Food Hub:

Capital Roots will add a second regional Food Hub with the highest level of food safety necessary to serve institutional customers, especially local schools, with more local farm products. In 2017, Capital Roots became certified by the USDA for Good Handling and Good Agricultural practices. This certification, coupled with an expanded hub, will ensure all institutions from child care centers and soup kitchens to school districts and faith-based organizations are able to purchase from and support the regional farm economy. A new chilled cut and prep area will allow the transformation of local produce into diced, cubed and other product that institutions and individuals need and want.

Supporting The Dream:

The cost of the Grow Center expansion is $8.8 million. Through government grants, corporate support, and individual gifts, we have already raised more than $6 million (as of December, 2021) or 68% of our goal!! We need support from everyone in the community to complete this project.

Ask Amy how you can help.

Amy@capitalroots.org | 518-274-8685
Capital Roots’ Veggie Mobile®, sponsored by CDPHP, is a market that travels to inner-city neighborhoods throughout Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady counties. It’s been bringing a large variety of fresh, affordable and local products to residents with limited access to fresh food since 2007.

Over the years our Mobile Markets program has delivered hundreds of thousands of pounds of produce and in the past year, these deliveries became more important than ever. They served as a safe and dependable way for residents to access fresh fruits and vegetables.

The success and popularity of this program has led to the creation of four new impactful stops this past year. We are reaching more senior residents in Schenectady and Troy and working with the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants at a new stop in Albany.

Our Mobile Markets serve everyone. It’s incredible to see the diversity in patrons lining up to see what’s freshly harvested and new on the truck each week. As we look ahead to the future of this program, we are excited to find new ways to bring our “Produce Aisle on Wheels” to more residents of the Capital Region.

Volunteer With Capital Roots

As we expand our Veggie Mobile® and Veggie Mobile® Sprout network, we are always looking for new volunteers to help us at the stops. For more information or to see all of our upcoming volunteer opportunities, please reach out to our Volunteer Coordinator at volunteer@capitalroots.org.
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