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Produce Grown Here project connects farm, grocer, consumer

The Progress Fund announces first regional effort to put fresh, local food on the table.

Greensburg, PA – June 23, 2008 – Embracing a national movement toward eating fresh, locally grown food, the Produce Grown Here project, or PGH, will bring the wares of Southwestern Pennsylvania farmers to stores, restaurants, and the plates of area families.

“Local food travels less, often ensuring freshness and quality when handled properly, and lowering transportation costs,” said Project Manager David Eson of The Progress Fund, which announced the PGH project today. “The result is a healthier economy, community and population.”

PGH is stoking a local food revolution that is the subject of books like Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, and media attention that spans Pittsburgh’s *Table* magazine and the *Wall Street Journal*. The effort will bridge the gaps between farmers, retailers and consumers that have limited the growth of the local food economy.

PGH aims to ensure a predictable flow of local produce to retailers like Giant Eagle and restaurateurs like Eat’n Park, both of which want to further their efforts to connect with area farmers. Beginning this summer, various Pennsylvania and West Virginia farmers will join together under the PGH banner to sell tomatoes, apples, corn and potatoes.

PGH will also provide marketing muscle to farmers, expanding their reach while allowing them to focus on growing. It will provide recognizable brands and images that will appear on in-store signs and in out-of-store outreach efforts so that consumers can

find fresher, fairer, earth-friendlier produce. Participating farms can maintain their own identities while benefiting from united branding and marketing.

“The Progress Fund has long realized the complex and critical relationship between agriculture and rural economic development,” said David Kahley, President & CEO of The Progress Fund, a not-for-profit community development organization focused on improving the rural and small-town economy. “Produce Grown Here is a natural outgrowth of our work with growers’ cooperatives, agricultural supply businesses, tourism-oriented farms and other pillars of the new rural economy.”

A study commissioned by The Progress Fund found that just 3 percent of the \$500 million in produce consumed in Southwestern Pennsylvania is grown here. There is ample reason to believe that figure can improve.

- Giant Eagle’s banners, including its Giant Eagle and Market District stores, offer a variety of quality local produce when available in season.
- Eat’n Park Hospitality Group has committed to buying 20 percent of its food in season from local farmers.

Initial funding for PGH was provided by the Richard King Mellon Foundation. “The Richard King Mellon Foundation has long supported regional economic development and we view the advancement of these agricultural initiatives as being important, particularly in the more rural areas of the region,” said foundation Director Scott Izzo.

Project Manager David Eson is the former Regional Director for the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture. He has also served as the Coordinator for the Washington State University Cooperative Extension, Green Harvest Resource Coordinator for the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, and a Volunteer in Service to America for Rural Action in Athens, Ohio. A product of a small family farm, he earned his bachelors degree in public administration at Miami University of Ohio and his masters in public administration from Ohio University.

For further information, call The Progress Fund at (724) 216-9160, or visit www.progressfund.org.

The Progress Fund is a vigorous non-profit loan fund that creates jobs and improves communities by providing entrepreneurial coaching and capital to small businesses in the travel & tourism industry. The Progress Fund serves 39 counties in Pennsylvania, Appalachian Ohio and West Virginia. The Progress Fund was founded in 1997, and has made 255 loans totaling more than \$23.5 million to 164 enterprises, creating or preserving more than 1,816 jobs.

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