



March 2024 Newsletter

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: Pittsfield Farmers Market, a Program of Roots Rising

Market Match Means 'Beautiful Local Food'—for Everyone

The [Pittsfield Farmers Market](#) is for everyone. Operated by local nonprofit [Roots Rising](#), the market doubles SNAP dollars and other food assistance benefits to give all shoppers “meaningful options for purchasing beautiful local food,” according to Lauren Piotrowski, Roots Rising’s farm manager.

Until recently, however, the Pittsfield market had to cap its SNAP match. The market was limited by the funds it could raise for its SNAP matching program, and the cap helped stretch those dollars over the season. “When we did have a cap, there would be a morning rush. People would be afraid of missing the match,” Piotrowski explained.

Last year, that turned around. Thanks to support from Berkshire Agricultural Venture’s [Market Match Fund](#), the Pittsfield market was able to cover the full cost of matching SNAP dollars all day long for low-income shoppers—a one-to-one match up to \$30. Shoppers gained more peace of mind and more purchasing power, and local farmers saw a boost in customers and sales. And Roots Rising was able to focus its fundraising on other areas of need.

“This is such an essential program,” affirmed Jess Vecchia, Roots Rising’s co-founder and executive director. She explained that before BAV’s Market Match Fund existed, market managers in the Berkshires sought limited funding from the same local sources—or, as volunteers, lacked the time and expertise for fundraising. “To have a ‘universal’ program like the one BAV has developed is really impactful—not just for us, but for all farmers markets,” Vecchia said.

BAV’s Ciana Barnaba knows this first hand. Prior to joining BAV, Barnaba was a market manager in New York City. “I could still process SNAP transactions in my sleep,” she laughed. Barnaba and others saw a need for a centralized fund for consistent SNAP matching in the Berkshires. Conversations with market managers and other food system partners confirmed this need. In the spring of 2022, BAV piloted a Market Match Fund with corporate and foundation support. The fund widened last year with a community fundraising campaign, and continues its growth this year with a fundraising campaign that starts April 1.

“I want to see everyone in our community eat the food that our farmers produce. And I want to see farmers make a profit,” reflected Barnaba, now BAV’s Community Relations & Resource Development Manager. “It’s very full circle.”

Full circle is a shared value with the Pittsfield Farmers Market and Roots Rising. Now in its twelfth year, the Pittsfield market serves as a community hub, business incubator, source of fresh local food, and place for teens to build valuable skills. As a program of Roots Rising, a nonprofit focused on empowering youth and building community through food and farming, the Pittsfield market employs youth crews in all aspects of its operation. “We’re the area’s first teen-powered market,” Vecchia said.

The heart of the market is fresh food: fruits and vegetables, eggs, locally raised meats, cheeses, baked goods, artisanal products, and more. And its soul lies in community. Roots Rising refers to the market as a “third place” outside of home and the workplace for neighbors to get to know each other. “It’s such a vibrant community space. Farmers really value the time to connect with each other and with customers,” Piotrowski said. In addition, local food startups use the market as a “testing ground,” seeking to create “buzz” and meet customers.

The outdoor market operates weekly mid-May through October at the Pittsfield Common, while the indoor market is open monthly November through April at Zion Lutheran Church in Pittsfield. SNAP matching is available year-round. The market also matches WIC and senior coupons, and is HIP-authorized, a Massachusetts program that gives SNAP shoppers additional benefits if they purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from farmers. “Customers rely on our match and love our match. It’s an essential part of how they feed their families with fresh local food,” Piotrowski said.

Roots Rising is always on the lookout for new ways to support the local food system. “We’re proud of our work, but we’re always thinking—what else can we be doing?” Vecchia said. The nonprofit has started a BIPOC vendor fund to uplift BIPOC farmers and entrepreneurs, part of its wider commitment to being inclusive and affordable for shoppers and vendors. It is also exploring a market coupon program for shoppers who aren’t eligible for SNAP because of their immigration status. And Roots Rising is putting down roots. The organization has purchased land in Pittsfield to establish its own working farm and a home base.

Meanwhile, the Pittsfield Farmers Market is gearing up for another outdoor season, including keeping a hopeful eye on the progress of this year’s Market Match Fund. “BAV has been an incredible partner,” Vecchia said. “We’ve appreciated how BAV has asked us and other markets, ‘What kind of support do you need?’—and really listened.” Thanks to good listening and community generosity, the Market Match Fund is poised to bring another year of consistent SNAP matching to shoppers and farmers. And more market joy.