

# Just Roots, Quabbin Harvest have top enrollment in state for healthy food assistance

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GREENFIELD — The two organizations with the most sites participating in a new food assistance program are based in Franklin County.

Just Roots in Greenfield and Quabbin Harvest in Orange carry the highest enrollments for the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which aims to give low-income residents greater access to healthy and locally-grown fruits and vegetables, according to the state Department of Transitional Assistance, which manages the program.

HIP provides a dollar-for-dollar match for local fruit and vegetable purchases by customers using SNAP benefits, formerly known as food stamps. Customers receive an instant credit on their electronic benefit cards for each purchase, with a monthly cap based on family size.

There are more than 50 participating sites — including farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and community-supported agriculture farmshare programs — across Massachusetts.

Just Roots and Quabbin Harvest offer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs that provide customers with a weekly box of healthy produce. Since HIP began in April, Just Roots has signed up about 80 families and Quabbin Harvest has more than 50.

“Price is the first barrier that most people encounter,” said Jessica Van Steensburg, Just Roots’ executive director. Just Roots is a nonprofit founded in 2008. It was also part of the pilot phase for HIP.

Van Steensburg said HIP is a way for people to maximize their SNAP benefits and help them pick healthier options for themselves and their families.

“Low-income communities, when given the opportunity, will make healthy choices,” she said.

Quabbin Harvest is located at 12 North Main St., the former Workers’ Credit Union building, in Orange. Amy Borezo, a founder of the North Quabbin Community Cooperative, which runs Quabbin Harvest, HIP will funnel a significant amount of income toward area farmers over its three-year lifespan.

“In my opinion this is exactly what we should be doing with SNAP dollars,” she said. “In addition to supporting small local businesses, it shows that the old stereotype about people on public assistance only buying junk food is just wrong. Many people do want to buy healthier local foods. They just need some help to afford it.”

Quabbin Harvest’s Borezo also praised HIP for helping make direct connections between local eaters and farmers.

More information about HIP, including how to enroll, is available at [www.mass.gov/hip](http://www.mass.gov/hip).

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