

Media contacts: Laura Ridenour, Food & Farming Program Manager
Iridenour@sconnect.org, (360) 647.7093 x106

Caprice Teske, Bellingham Farmers Market Manager
market@bellinghamfarmers.org, (360) 647-2060

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA award benefits two Whatcom County direct market organizations

Bellingham, WA – Sustainable Connections' Eat Local First Campaign, in conjunction with the Bellingham Farmers Market, are among the 149 national awards announced for the 2011 Farmers Market Promotion Program grants, distributed across 42 states and the District of Columbia.

This two year grant – one of only two awarded in the state of Washington – will enable Sustainable Connections' Food & Farming Program to increase the collective marketing and promotion of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares in the workplace as a sustainable business practice, and will enhance the *Eat Local First* campaign promotions for direct market farmers.

The *Eat Local First* campaign is a year-round way to connect farmers with marketing support, identifying local food with a label so as to encourage food budget shifts to local food at grocery stores, restaurants and farmers markets. The funding will also pay for staff time for the Bellingham Farmers Market to work to expand tastings at farmers' booths, support Chef in the Market educational interactive events and for the Farmers Market to implement business-to-business rules that require food vendors to increase sourcing from local farmers.

Increasing fresh food access in food deserts and other low-income communities was a priority for this year's awards, as were urban projects and innovative projects, like those that create or expand community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism, and mobile markets. The 2011 national award list can be found [here](#).

The Bellingham Farmers' Market is open Saturdays through December 17, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., and more information is available on their website at www.bellinghamfarmers.org. For more information on the Eat Local First campaign or the Workplace CSA initiative, contact Laura Ridenour, Food & Farming Manager at Sustainable Connections, 360-647-7093 or visit www.eatlocalfirst.org.

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Sustainable Connections is a local non-profit membership organization of 600+ NW Washington business and community leaders working to transform and model an economy built on sustainable practices. Visit www.sustainableconnections.org for more information.

The Food & Farming Program supports new farmers, connects eaters and food buyers to local farms and fishers and is a resource for building a sustainable local food economy