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Community Compact Report
Best Practices: Promotion of Local Agriculture

Goal: Looking to expand our opportunities for agricultural locally and state wide

In 2017, our former Economic Development Director and Mayor Mazzarella met with a representative of the Department of Agriculture. We discussed ways to further promote agriculture in our community including Sholan Farms, our Farmer's Market and our new FRESH kitchen idea.

Sholan Farms: In 2001, the City purchased 167 acres that was about to be developed into a 180 house subdivision. It is the last pick your own orchard in the home of Johnny Appleseed. Since that time, the City, along with 300 volunteers, has worked to sustain and grow the orchard. In 2017, Sholan Farms received a grant from the Community Foundation of North Central Mass to complete a Master Plan for the farm. The group is now seeking private donors to contribute to the expansion which includes a kitchen, bathrooms, meeting space and an amphitheater.

With respect to the grant, the farm has enjoyed additional state promotion since our meeting. Sholan connects to our 26 miles of trail inventory and is now featured as part of the state wide trail inventory. In addition, Sholan is featured in the statewide "Things to do by region" as well as the Farm and Market report. The additional promotion has given them quite a boost in activity.

Farmer's Market: As suggested, we looked for a local partner to run our Farmer's Market. We rebranded, changing the name to Leominster Marketplace, and partnered with a regional healthy eating organization called Growing Places. Growing Places is involved throughout the country in promoting healthy eating and living. Our market is weekly during the spring, summer and fall on the Common downtown and monthly during the winter inside City Hall. It has become a huge success, particularly with the low-moderate income residents and improving their healthy eating habits. They are looking to expand this summer by going to the neighborhoods.

FRESH: Fresh is a new concept in conjunction with our Emergency Management facility. The Department of Agriculture representative did hook us up with some other communities, but the idea has not taken off the way we had hoped. The concept is to provide a certified kitchen for local residents to prepare and sell their products. The City did upgrade the oven at the facility, but residents have been slow to capitalize on the concept. However, Sholan Farm now uses it to produce all of their apple crisp!