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News Release

AETNA FOUNDATION AWARDS \$195,000 IN GRANTS TO CONNECTICUT ORGANIZATIONS TO BOOST HEALTHY EATING THROUGH GARDENING, NUTRITION EDUCATION

Growing Your Own Vegetables Ticket to Increased Consumption, Healthier Lives

HARTFORD, Conn., January 12, 2012 — Residents of Connecticut's urban centers who often have difficulty accessing fresh produce will have more opportunities to improve their diet, thanks to several community gardening and nutrition education programs around the state receiving support from the Aetna Foundation.

The philanthropic arm of Aetna Inc. (NYSE: AET) has awarded grants totaling \$195,000 to seven Connecticut nonprofit organizations – five in the Greater Hartford area -- to expand their efforts to promote urban gardening, increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and promote better health, particularly for low-income families who are at higher risk of obesity and obesity-related chronic health conditions.

"A diet rich in fruits and vegetables can have a significant impact in combating weight gain and managing diabetes, hypertension and other obesity-related diseases," said Sharon Dalton, vice president of the Aetna Foundation, who manages the Foundation's regional grant-making program.

"Yet many of the state's low-income families consume far less produce than recommended because of cost, accessibility or lack of nutrition knowledge. Community gardening programs can help overcome each of those barriers and help people think about their diet in new ways, leading to better nutrition and better health," Dalton said.

A [recent study published in the American Journal of Public Health](#) found that community gardeners consumed fruits and vegetables 5.7 times a day, significantly higher than non-gardeners, who averaged 3.9 times per day, and even home gardeners, who averaged 4.6 times a day.

In Greater Hartford, organizations receiving Aetna Foundation grants are Billings Forge Community Works, Inc., Community Farm of Simsbury, Inc., Community Health Services Inc., Hartford Food System, Inc., and the Knox Parks Foundation in support of the following programs:

- \$25,000 to [Billings Forge Community Works](#) to launch a new after-school gardening and cooking program specifically for young teenagers in Hartford's low-income Frog Hollow neighborhood. Middle school students will grow vegetables, including starting seedlings indoors with grow lights and cultivating plants outside in Billings Forge's many raised garden beds and learn to cook new dishes using fresh produce from the onsite weekly farmers' market. The eight-week program will be offered four times during 2012 starting in January.
- \$75,000 to the [Community Farm of Simsbury](#) to support its hands-on, farm-based education program and evaluate its health and academic impact on 250 fourth- and fifth-grade students from Hartford Public Schools and Simsbury Public Schools who are participating in it this year. In their year-long study of food and food production, students also plant, cultivate and harvest fresh produce, which they make into nutritious meals for themselves and their families or donate to social service agencies for families in need. The program runs from September 2011 through June 2012.
- \$25,000 to [Community Health Services, Inc.](#) of Hartford, for its program Small Steps: A Healthier Life Through Better Nutrition and Activity that will offer low-income Hartford residents nutrition workshops, cooking demonstrations, pedometers and vouchers for free fresh produce from the weekly farmers' market at its headquarters at 500 Albany Avenue. Participants in the program will be encouraged to take 10,000 steps daily and will have their BMI, blood pressure and blood sugar levels recorded weekly throughout the program's duration from June to November 2012.

- \$10,000 to the [Hartford Food System](#) of Hartford to support the second phase of its Healthy Food Retailer Initiative. Begun in 2006, this program provides incentives to corner grocery store owners in the city to provide more shelf space for fresh produce and other healthful foods to help residents who rely on small neighborhood stores purchase more nutrient-dense food.
- \$25,000 to [Knox Parks Foundation](#) of Hartford to develop a new community garden at a vacant three-acre parcel at Earle and Barbour Streets in Hartford. Over the next three years, Knox Parks will establish up to 150 garden plots at the site for neighborhood families and install the necessary infrastructure, including soil enrichment, irrigation and fencing. The new Earle Street Community Garden will serve residents of the Northeast neighborhood, one of the city's poorest where 35 percent live below the poverty line.

In Fairfield County, the Aetna Foundation awarded grants to Family Centers, Inc. and the Norwalk Department of Health to support these programs:

- \$10,000 to [Family Centers](#) of Greenwich, for its program Healthy Hearts for at-risk families living in two Stamford public housing developments, Fairgate and Vidal Court. The 12-week program, scheduled to be offered twice in 2012, will provide culturally sensitive health and nutritional education, including a focus on increasing the use of the onsite community garden, demonstrating healthy cooking techniques, understanding of nutritional labels, managing stress and promoting exercise to help residents lower their risk of obesity and heart disease.
- \$25,000 to the [Norwalk Health Department](#) for its project Growing Gardens, Growing Health that will offer low-income mothers a 12-week nutrition education and community gardening project at the city's Fodor Farm. The program, launching in 2012, will feature a broad curriculum including cooking tips, nutrition lessons and gardening techniques, as well as access to the Fodor Farm farmers' market where Women, Infants and Children (WIC) vouchers can be used to purchase fresh produce.

Combating obesity in both children and adults is one of the Aetna Foundation's three program areas, along with promoting racial and ethnic equity in health and health care and

promoting integrated and well-coordinated health care. In 2011, the Aetna Foundation awarded more than \$2 million in grants for research projects on obesity, [including the impact of federal policies and programs, such as SNAP, on childhood obesity; the role of pricing and accessibility on healthful food consumption; the influence of sidewalks, public safety and green spaces on physical activity; and the effectiveness of programs designed to help low-income families buy more fresh produce and other healthful foods.](#)

About the Aetna Foundation

The Aetna Foundation, Inc. is the independent charitable and philanthropic arm of Aetna Inc. Since 1980, Aetna and the Aetna Foundation have contributed \$394 million in grants and sponsorships, including \$15.6 million in 2010. As a national health foundation, we promote wellness, health, and access to high-quality health care for everyone. This work is enhanced by the time and commitment of Aetna employees, who have volunteered more than 2.3 million hours since 2003. Our current giving is focused on addressing the rising rate of adult and childhood obesity in the U.S.; promoting racial and ethnic equity in health and health care; and advancing integrated health care. For more information, visit www.AetnaFoundation.org.