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A nonprofit independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association

Foodlink's Lexington Avenue farm continues to grow

Garden Party celebrates improvements made at farm, 2018 growing season

ROCHESTER – The Lexington Avenue Community Farm, the largest urban agriculture site in Rochester, celebrated the growing season and its recent landscaping improvements Thursday during its annual Garden Party with local residents.

The farm, in operation since 2012, serves a dual purpose on 1.3 acres of land in northwest Rochester. Half of the site allows neighborhood residents – including dozens of refugees – to grow a wide variety of food for their families. The other half of the farm allows Foodlink to grow fresh produce for multiple programs, such as the Curbside Market and Foodlink Community Kitchen.

Each fall, Foodlink celebrates the annual harvest – more than 6,000 pounds, typically – with a party for gardeners, volunteers, staff and other supporters. Excellus BlueCross BlueShield partnered with Foodlink to provide support for this year's party, when Foodlink also showcased some of the improvements it has made to the property that surrounds the farm, and plans for additional initiatives in the coming years.

“Good nutrition and activities like playing outside are important keys to good health,” said Jim Redmond, Excellus BlueCross BlueShield's vice-president of Communications and Community Investments. “Too many people in our communities don't have access to affordable fruits and vegetables and too many kids don't have a safe place to play outside.”

Foodlink's recent beautification and expansion efforts include transforming the vacant area surrounding the farm – a makeshift, gravel parking lot – into a more welcoming community space with increased play opportunities for children. More pronounced signage, a new pathway, trees, landscaping improvements and a front lawn now greet community members

who approach the farm. Children will have access to a nature play space and “play library.” On Thursday, PlayROCs – a Healthi Kids initiative connected to Common Ground Health – was on hand to provide more games and activities for local children.

“Foodlink wants the Lexington Avenue Community Farm to be a welcoming space that serves not only our devoted gardeners, but the entire neighborhood,” said Nathaniel Mich, Foodlink’s Edible Education & Urban Farming Specialist. “We’re hoping this site continues to grow into a community space of which gardeners and neighbors can be proud.”

Many of the 60 refugee families who rent raised beds at the farm attended the party. The food was prepared by the Foodlink Community Kitchen, with ingredients harvested from the garden earlier in the week, such as eggplant, cucumber and basil.

The farm received a Community Health grant from Excellus in 2017, and additional support through a grant from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, donations raised by Midtown Athletic Club, and public support through an online giving campaign.

A \$25,000 “Community Growers” grant award announced last month by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets will pave the way for Foodlink’s next round of improvements, which include increased nutrition education workshop opportunities, and infrastructure improvements that will allow for increased production at the farm.

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About Foodlink

Foodlink is a community food resource center and the Feeding America food bank serving Allegany, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties. We leverage the power of food to transform lives, end hunger and build healthier communities. Through good stewardship, innovation and collaboration, Foodlink mobilizes a diverse network of partners and stakeholders to eradicate both the symptoms and root causes of hunger.

Our suite of food access programs provides new access points to nutritious and affordable food in underserved communities. Our team of nutrition educators empowers people at risk of diet-related illness with the skills and knowledge to make healthy choices. Our food banking operations distribute millions of pounds of food to a network of hundreds of human service agencies throughout our service area. The Foodlink Community Kitchen prepares and delivers thousands of meals daily for Rochester children, supports our regional agricultural economy by slicing locally grown apples, and hosts a one-of-a-kind career empowerment program to train individuals with barriers to employment for careers in the regional food industry. Learn more about how we are creating healthy futures for every community we serve at www.foodlinkny.org, or follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram at @foodlinkny.

About Excellus BlueCross BlueShield

[Excellus BlueCross BlueShield](#), a nonprofit independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, is part of a family of companies that finances and delivers vital health care services to about 1.5 million people across upstate New York. Excellus BlueCross BlueShield provides access to high-quality, affordable health coverage, including valuable health-related resources that our members use every day, such as cost-saving prescription drug discounts and wellness tracking tools. To learn more, visit [ExcellusBCBS.com](#).

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