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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station helps to alleviate hunger for Connecticut residents by donating tons of fresh produce to food banks.**

*New Crops Program gears-up for spring growing season.*

*New Haven, CT*—The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) New Crops Program evaluates specialty and “ethnic” crops not traditionally grown in Connecticut to educate farmers, greenhouse growers, and residents interested in growing their own food learn how to successfully grow new crops for the highest yields. The vegetables and fruits of this research program are donated to food banks to help alleviate hunger for Connecticut families in need of food assistance.

In these tough economic times Connecticut food banks are experiencing an unprecedented demand for food assistance. The CAES has been one of the largest sources of fresh food support to Connecticut food banks, soup kitchens, and educational centers for over 20 years, helping to feed thousands of families with children and individuals. Each year, the Experiment Station contributes approximately 20,000 pounds of fresh produce to more than 12 hunger relief organizations throughout the State, including the Connecticut Food Bank, Foodshare, St. Vincent de Paul, and local schools and community centers.

The New Crops Program is currently preparing for the 2009 growing season. The primary goal of this research is to develop tested methods for the best growing practices so that farmers and other growers do not have to take unnecessary and expensive risks with new crops they have never grown in Connecticut before. Special emphasis is given to the development of specialty and “ethnic crops” which serve the growing ethnic populations in Connecticut that want to grow their own crops, or buy them at CT Farmers’ Markets. Current research includes popular Hispanic and Asian fruits and vegetables.

Abbie Maynard, agricultural scientist of the CAES New Crops Program said, “This year we will be conducting research on ethnic and popular food crops including calabaza, sweet potatoes, vegetable amaranth, edamame, pak choi, and personal-sized watermelons. Connecticut farmers love this program because they don’t have to risk the expense of planting acres of untested crops only to see the crop fail. When our research is complete, we tell them exactly how to successfully grow these crops so they can boost their crop sales the first year.”

This year, the actual fruits of her labor will be especially welcomed. According to the Connecticut Food Bank, there are currently an estimated 280,000 people in the State at risk of hunger, including children, the elderly, individuals, and “working poor” families.

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Food banks in Connecticut, and across the nation, are reporting as much as a 30% to 50% increase in requests for emergency food, according to Feeding America (formerly America's Second Harvest), during these challenging economic times.

Fresh produce contributions of this substantial size are critically important to Connecticut food banks because they provide highly nutritious fresh food; help food banks defray costs; serve more people; and provide one of the most expensive categories of food. The CAES New Crops Program provides fresh food to help feed residents in Connecticut's poorest areas including the greater Hartford area, Waterbury, New Haven, and Bridgeport.

Laura Falanga, Procurement Assistant from Connecticut Food Bank, said of CAES food donations, "I am thankful on behalf of Connecticut Food Bank and all those that are food insecure in Connecticut and wouldn't know where their next meal came from if it weren't for farms like yours. We value your willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty to help us out."

The New Crops Program is also supported in part by The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station Research Foundation, an approved 501 c(3) organization, founded to support the research and public outreach of the Scientists at the Experiment Station, and a Specialty Crop Block Grant from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. Louis A. Magnarelli, Director at the CAES said, "We are very pleased that our agricultural research programs can assist hunger relief organizations in the state, growers, and consumers."

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