World PEAS is a program of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project.

Our mission is to improve our local and regional food systems by training the next generation of farmers to produce food that is sustainable, nutritious, and culturally-appropriate and making this food accessible to individuals regardless of age, mobility, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. In doing this work, we provide critical training, career development, and economic opportunity to new farmers.

www.nesfp.org
The World PEAS Food Hub

The World PEAS Food Hub is a program of New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Founded in 2005, the World PEAS Food Hub is a multi-farmer aggregation and distribution local food hub that serves beginning farmers in eastern Massachusetts. The World PEAS Food Hub was developed to connect beginning farmers who often face barriers to accessing diversified markets (such as limited English language skills, limited production capacity, limited access to farmland, and lack of transportation) with local consumers interested in purchasing fresh locally grown fruits and vegetables. The World PEAS Food Hub provides technical assistance and training to beginning farmers by assisting them with establishing crop production schedules, providing crop planning assistance, offering feedback and training around crop quality, and by offering guaranteed marketing outlets to support them in the early years of launching their small farm businesses. The World PEAS Food Hub purchases produce from approximately 20 beginning farmers—all are graduates of New Entry's Farm Business Planning Course—as well as an additional 10 regional independent farms. The primary market channels for distribution through the World PEAS Food Hub include a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, a Food Access program serving low-income individuals, families, and senior citizens, and an Institutional Market program.

Program Area Overview

The World PEAS Food Hub has three primary program areas, or market channels. These include the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, the Food Access program, and the Institutional Market program. In 2016, the World PEAS Food Hub generated a total of $251,059 in sales through our three distribution channels, which represents a 13% decline in sales from 2015, mostly due to a reduction in CSA subscriptions. New Entry is currently engaged in reviewing the World PEAS Food Hub business model, goals, and objectives to strategize around improvements and changes for the upcoming 2017 season.
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program
The World PEAS Food Hub was originally founded primarily as a CSA program. The CSA market is suitable for beginning farmers who often grow a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in varying quantities, which are packaged into a diverse boxed farm share. Consumers enjoy the opportunity to receive a weekly box of fresh, locally grown produce delivered to a convenient location where they live or work.

Food Access Program
The World PEAS Food Hub also works to address food insecurity in our region by partnering with local community organizations through our Food Access Program, which provides fresh, locally grown food to low-income and underserved communities. We work with local senior centers, childcare organizations, a homeless shelter, and a WIC (Women, Infants and Children) office.

Institutional Market Program
The World PEAS Food Hub’s Institutional Market Program, distributes locally grown produce to several area institutions mainly comprised of university and corporate dining services companies.

Infrastructure

The World PEAS Food Hub operates out of a 2,000-square foot warehouse near downtown Lowell. The space contains two walk in coolers, a loading dock, and packing/distribution infrastructure. We also own and operate two refrigerated delivery trucks.

This year the Food Hub also made careful use of the infrastructure improvement funding received from Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources through the Urban Agriculture Grant Program. In June, staff installed a new 10’x15’ indoor walk-in cooler inside the warehouse space, providing much needed additional cooler space for storing fresh produce. The cooler is being utilized to store produce overflow from the outdoor cooler which is accessible to farmers at all
times. The Food Hub also revolutionized its packing methodology by investing in a roller-table to facilitate stream-lined share packing. Staff report fewer mistakes in packing shares and a more efficient system overall. Finally, the Food Hub upgraded a reefer unit on its 14’ box truck, greatly improving the delivery vehicle’s ability to keep produce cool in the hot summer weather. Staff are confident that these infrastructure improvements will continue to enable the operation to run more efficiently in upcoming seasons, increasing time available to staff for improving the quality of training and services provided to New Entry’s beginning farmers.

Farmer Training & Earnings

Since the World PEAS Food Hub was founded in 2005, we have been proud to offer New Entry farmers 79% of every dollar earned through sales revenues, with the Food Hub retaining 21% of each sale. This 79% to 21% ratio allows us to pay farmers a living wage, which supports them in the early stages of their farm business.

In an effort to address the World PEAS Food Hub’s falling revenues, staff spent time in 2016 assessing the World PEAS Food Hub business plan. The pricing structure was identified as an area for investigation and potential change. In order to better understand how the World PEAS Food Hub prices compare to market prices in the region, New Entry staff conducted detailed pricing research. The results showed that in many cases, our prices needed adjusting to reflect market rates. Additionally, staff inquired about the effect of the fixed margin structure currently employed on the overall revenue of the operation. Research illuminated that this fixed structure was prohibiting pricing flexibility and leading to static, outdated prices for farmers and consumers.

In preparation for the 2017 season the World PEAS Food Hub adjusted the prices we paid to our farmers, as well as adjusting our retail prices (in some cases upwards and in other cases downwards) to better reflect actual fair market prices in the region. The updated pricing structure continues to ensure fair prices that are advantageous to the farmers and support their ability to launch and expand successful farm businesses. In addition, the new price schedule prepares the farmers for real markets, while allowing World PEAS operations to become more self-sustaining as the Food Hub’s work continues.
In 2016, the World PEAS Food Hub purchased a total of $173,000 of produce from participating farmers compared to $191,250 in 2015. As in previous years, the World PEAS Food Hub supplemented purchases from New Entry program graduate farmers with produce from established farms in the region to ensure an adequate amount and variety of produce was available to customers. In 2016, 63% of produce was purchased from beginning farmers and 37% of produce was purchased from established independent farmers. The decrease in total farmer earnings can be attributed to the overall decrease in sales for the World PEAS Food Hub in 2016. The decrease in overall sales through the Food Hub is a result of fewer CSA members and little growth in the Institutional Market channel. Additionally, in 2016 farmers faced extreme drought in Massachusetts, which impacted their ability to harvest and deliver fresh produce. It should be highlighted that 2016 did show an uptick in average New Entry program farmer earnings compared to last year (see figures 1 and 2 below). In 2015, the average New Entry farmer earned $4,928 while in 2016 the average New Entry program farmer earned $5,666. This can be attributed to an increase in purchasing from New Entry program farmers versus independent farmers in 2016.

While the earnings through the World PEAS Food Hub are insufficient to constitute a farmer’s only source of income, these earnings are an essential component of household income for many New Entry program farmers. Most New Entry farmers are among the 80% of American farmers who have an off-farm job. Total earnings by farmers over the course of several years, shown on the graphs below, are significant.

**Figure 1: Average sales to World PEAS Food Hub made by New Entry program farmers (farmers who have gone through New Entry’s Farm Business Planning Course and/or Incubator Program).**
Review of 2016

CSA Program
In recent years, we have seen World PEAS Food Hub sales in the CSA market decrease. From 2015 to 2016, CSA share sales fell by about 7% with the total number of CSA shareholders decreasing from 382 to 317 – a difference of sixty-five individual shareholders. Before 2014, we saw consistent growth in CSA shareholder numbers, but the overall growth trend seemed to plateau in 2014 and has declined the past two years, despite similar levels of outreach to the greater Boston area consumer base. We expect this pressure on CSA sales is due to increased competition from other Massachusetts-based CSA programs as well as an increase in prevalence of farmers’ markets, availability of local food at other retail establishments, and new meal delivery services focusing on local sourcing. Customers are demanding more flexibility in payment options, share types, and delivery locations. In 2016, the World PEAS Food Hub offered a new share type called the “Specialty Share” in an effort to provide more options to CSA members. The Specialty Share offers multicultural vegetables grown by New Entry’s immigrant farmers to consumers interested in eating a wider variety of fruits and vegetables. This is one example of the steps New Entry staff are taking to address these revenue concerns, in addition to reviewing our business plan and making other adjustments for next year.

The CSA continues to generate the most sales for the World PEAS Food Hub, making up 64% of total sales. Though CSA membership has slightly decreased by about 7% since
In 2016, the World PEAS Food Hub sold 236 Small Shares, 27 Large Shares, 45 Fall Shares, 10 Specialty Shares, 52 Egg Shares, and 10 SNAP CSA Shares. The Specialty Share was new this season and featured a wide variety of multicultural produce grown by New Entry’s Cambodian and African farmers. The items included in this share were grown organically and locally, unlike the majority of multicultural produce sold in Asian and African grocers. This new share offering elicited mixed feedback from customers. Some CSA members loved the share and appreciated the opportunity to try new produce items that were not included in the Small Share. Others felt that the Small Share and the Specialty Share were too similar in contents each week, which did not justify the price difference. Staff are taking this feedback into consideration as we refine both the share contents and the price for the Specialty Share in 2017.

In 2016, CSA members raised a total of $3,750 through our Fair Share and Share-a-Share programs, which contributed to purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables for low-income and underserved community members through our Food Access program.

CSA shares were delivered to 17 locations throughout the greater Boston and Middlesex County regions. Two CSA pick up locations were cancelled in 2016 (American Science & Engineering and Cambridge Naturals) due to lack of interest. The World PEAS Food Hub also added a new CSA pick up location at Night Shift Brewing in Everett, MA. Finally, the Lowell pick up location was moved from Market St. Market to Mill No. 5 in order to have more space for the distribution, and to cultivate a partnership with Mill No. 5 as a community hub.

New Entry staff worked together in 2016 to provide quality feedback and additional training support to New Entry program farmers concerning crop production. As a result of the improved training, 90% of shareholders reported that crop quality was either consistently good or generally good. A similar proportion of shareholders also enjoyed the context and recipes of our newsletter and produce preview, and 84% of shareholders gauged the value of the produce in their share as at or above the price of the share. The World PEAS Food Hub and New Entry staff members provided farmers with a significant amount of assistance in crop planning, allowing farmers to plan their harvests in alignment with the needs of the Food Hub.

In the World PEAS Food Hub Annual CSA Member Survey, CSA members provided valuable feedback about the program. Below find several selected testimonials from 2016 CSA members.
CSA shareholder testimonials:

“I would highly recommend World PEAS. The produce is so fresh and it’s so nice to know that it is grown in a way that is good for the earth, the farmer, and the customer.”

"It was so wonderful and convenient to receive a box of delicious local produce right at work. The World PEAS CSA made it much easier to eat healthy food all summer long!"

“World PEAS is a wonderful opportunity to help others help themselves, and even though we don’t typically look for something in return, it was wonderful to receive a myriad of fresh and diverse fruits and vegetables each week, many of which we would never have selected on our own. World P[EAS] opens your eyes to the variety the world has to offer. It was a great pleasure to be a CSA member. We look forward to next year.”

“I’ve benefited from the sliding scale option, which [has] made the difference between being able to afford fresh, local, and healthy food or not. It’s meant so much that we were able to afford the CSA. Thank you so much for your generosity.”

“The box was always ready on time and I was consistently impressed at the freshness of the produce, despite being in [a holding] area that was somewhat warm. Thanks for all your hard work.”

“My Tuesdays are much less exciting now that I actually have to think up my own recipes! World P[EAS] gave so many fantastic recipe suggestions I felt like a farm-to-table chef every week.”

Food Access Program

In 2016, the World PEAS Food Hub’s Food Access sales shrank 2.2% from last year. **We partnered with 11 community organizations to deliver $86,535 worth of fresh produce, of which $19,246 was provided to consumers free of charge thanks to fundraising through New Entry’s Fair Share program, as well as funding from private foundations.** The majority of produce distributed through the Food Access Program is also provided free of charge to consumers, thanks to funding leveraged by our partner organizations. Our partner organizations graciously distribute World PEAS Food Hub produce to their clients through farmers’ markets, produce featured in meals cooked on-site, homebound senior CSA deliveries, and other delivery methods.
In 2016, we established a new partnership with the Cameron Senior Center in Westford, MA in addition to expanding relationships with existing partners. The World PEAS Food Hub also partnered with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to launch a more streamlined Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) CSA program. Through this partnership, we offered SNAP beneficiaries the opportunity to purchase a CSA share using their SNAP benefits. With the support of the DTA, SNAP CSA members were able to enroll for automatic EBT card debiting, enabling them to pick up a share at any of our 17 pickup locations and removing any stigma or inconvenience associated with swiping a card at the pickup location. **We had 10 SNAP CSA members enroll this season and we look forward to expanding the program in 2017.**

### Population Served

In 2016, produce from the World PEAS Food Hub reached the tables of approximately 2,300 low-income people through farmers’ market style distributions, meals cooked on-site, and homebound CSA deliveries. Approximately 1,300 of the people reached were local senior citizens receiving produce through free farmers’ markets at their neighborhood senior center or through deliveries via their Meals-on-Wheels program. Senior citizens in the following municipalities were served through the program: Westford, Somerville, Cambridge, Dorchester, Waltham, Burlington, Arlington, and Medford. At these distributions participants picked up or were delivered between $15 and $25 worth of fresh, seasonal produce along with a newsletter featuring storage instructions, recipes, senior focused nutrition information, and news from the farmers.Seniors participating in a weekly farmers’ market self-reported that they ate more fresh
vegetables due to the market and will continue to do so in the future. The remaining 1,000 individuals were children, mothers, and homeless individuals in the City of Lowell who either received fresh produce to cook at home or were served meals using fresh produce.

With over half of the participants in the Food Access program being senior citizens, staff measured the impacts of the programs on this population utilizing a paper survey tool. Surveys are collected at the start of the program and at the end of the program in order to assess the impact of the fruit and vegetable distribution on their health, quality of life, and food security. In 2016, World PEAS Food Hub staff partnered with a Master of Public Health student at Tufts University to conduct research on appropriate survey tools for senior citizens to improve the quality and quantity of data collected. With the graduate student, staff re-vamped the 2016 survey tools that will be used in 2017 to better assess impacts of the program on seniors.

Analysis of the 2016 survey results displayed that 41% of senior citizens from 6 separate partner organizations participated in the survey, revealing interesting outcomes around increased access to fresh produce, improved health and wellness, and connection to the community. These results demonstrate the critical need to continue to promote Food Access programming, especially for underserved and vulnerable senior citizen populations.

Impacts on Healthy Eating
Survey respondents reported that the World PEAS Food Hub Food Access program had a major impact on their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. For example, 88% of senior citizens reported that they ate a wider variety of produce as a result of the program. 75% reported that they eat out less often at restaurants and fast food chains and ate less processed foods. 87% also reported eating more fruits and vegetables overall.

Impacts on Health and Wellness
Senior citizen participants also reported that the program had positive impacts on their overall health and wellness. As a result of participation in the program, 79.5% agreed that they had eaten better quality produce; 78.1% agreed that they feel more connected to where their food comes from; 81.4% agreed that they feel more connected to their community; 56.5% agreed that they feel less lonely because they shared meals and recipes with others in the program; and 76% agreed that they are now better able to cook and prepare fresh produce. These results demonstrate both the overall benefit of eating fresh fruits and vegetables for senior citizens, as well as the important social benefit of creating a sense of community and connection through the weekly distributions. Senior citizens also self-reported on specific health improvements as a
result of participation in the program. These included 38.1% reporting that they had lost weight; 22.6% reporting that their cholesterol had lowered; 29.8% reporting that their blood pressure had lowered and 60.7% reported that they have more energy.

**Barriers of Accessing Fresh Foods**

Senior citizens also reported through the survey tool that they face a number of barriers to accessing fresh produce, which the World PEAS Food Hub Food Access program works to mitigate. Respondents cited many barriers that prevented them from eating more fresh fruits and vegetables, with the largest being physical disabilities, but also including lack of access to transportation and cost (Figure 4).

**Trends**

The impact assessment data exposes trends that can be relevant for future decisions regarding food access work. Most importantly, the data suggest that clients would be consuming more fresh produce on a regular basis if barriers to access were decreased. Specifically, access to fresh foods, as well as cost are major barriers for respondents. Lack of knowledge around preparing fresh vegetables was also identified as a barrier. Overall, clients overwhelmingly felt that the fresh produce program allowed them eat more vegetables and clients will continue to eat more fresh items even after the distribution ends. The data also shows that for the participants, eating more fresh vegetables led to improved overall health and wellbeing, including the social aspect of building community and connection with peers through weekly gatherings at the distribution site. Through this analysis, it is clear that this programming is beneficial to the participants.
Food Access Participant Testimonials

"I would like...to continue the Farmers Market. I enjoyed coming almost every week. I thoroughly enjoyed everything you have given me. Thank you for all that you do to give us this Farmers’ Market."

“Loved the recipes -- trying new foods. Favorites were mustard greens, baby bok choy and the gigantic blackberries!”

"Learning to eat new [vegetables] and loving it."

"The recipe/cooking suggestions were inspiring and helpful."

Institutional Market Program

In 2016 our primary institutional market partnership was with Tufts Dining Services where we delivered approximately $3,000 worth of produce in the fall.

Institutional sales dropped 100% from 2015 to 2016. This can mainly be attributed to a decline in sales to restaurants in 2016 based on lack of interest in former restaurant accounts combined with one restaurant closing. Our primary partner in the Institutional Market program this season was Tufts University, where the World PEAS Food Hub supplied produce to the dining hall as well as an on-campus farmers’ market.

The World PEAS Food Hub will be working with a consultant in 2017 to assess the operation’s business model to better understand how institutional market channels fit in a diverse market mix. While there is great potential in the institutional market channel, World PEAS Food Hub staff and farmers are exploring whether it is best suited to beginning farmers.
Staff, Intern, and Volunteer Experience

The World PEAS Food Hub volunteers make the operation thrive! Volunteer share packers assist the World PEAS Food Hub staff in packing CSA shares and bulk orders each morning during the season, sorting produce that will eventually feed CSA members, senior citizens, children, and other local community member in the greater Boston and Middlesex County region. Without our dedicated volunteers, our farm-fresh produce would never make it to so many plates around the region! In 2016, the World PEAS Food Hub worked with 10 committed volunteers who reported to the Food Hub several mornings each week for CSA share and produce packing. The World PEAS Food Hub also engaged an additional 35 one-time volunteers, coming to visit the Food Hub for a morning to learn about our local food aggregation and distribution operation.

The World PEAS Food Hub also relies on dedicated volunteers within the community. Volunteer “Cluster Coordinators” enable the World PEAS Food Hub to establish pick-up locations in neighborhoods across eastern Massachusetts, making fresh produce accessible and convenient for our customers. The Cluster Coordinators are responsible for coordinating each of our CSA and Food Access sites, assisting with outreach and promotion of the program, overseeing logistics at the site, and putting forth a friendly face to many of our customers.

The World PEAS Food Hub collects data about volunteer motivation, experience, and attitudes each year using a paper survey tool. In a survey distributed to all 2016 World PEAS volunteers, 25% of participants reported that learning about sustainable agriculture and food systems was a motivation for volunteering with us. At an end-of-season volunteer appreciation potluck celebration, staff and volunteers shared favorite dishes and reminisced about funny and warm moments from the season. The World PEAS Food Hub staff was very pleased to note that 100% of survey participants stated that they were either “very likely” or “extremely likely” to recommend this volunteer opportunity to friends and family.
With respect to core staff members, New Entry hired a new World PEAS Food Hub Manager in January 2016 to oversee operations and management. This was a brand-new staff position designed to manage the World PEAS Food Hub Coordinator position and lead overall operations. New Entry also re-hired a seasonal Operations Coordinator, as well as hired an Assistant Operations Coordinator to assist with warehouse operations and delivery. All of these individuals made serious improvements to the operational efficiency of the Hub in 2016.

New Entry has also benefited from involvement in the AmeriCorps VISTA program. In July 2016, New Entry said goodbye to its first round of AmeriCorps VISTAs, and welcomed three new staff members into the roles of Food Access Facilitator, Development Facilitator, and Volunteer Recruitment Facilitator. These three new staff members will be at New Entry through August 2017, and they are focused on building capacity at the organization, including setting up new systems that will improve New Entry and World PEAS Food Hub operations for years to come.

**Plans for 2017**

New Entry and the World PEAS Food Hub spent 2016 engaged in strategic planning. The process led to the World PEAS Food Hub digging deeper into its business plan and thinking strategically about its mission to help farmers launch and sustain successful farm businesses while ensuring people in the New England region have access to fresh locally grown food. As a program of New Entry, the World PEAS Food Hub Team developed a 5-year vision, programmatic metrics, timeline, and budgets for implementation as part of the overall business plan of the organization. In December 2016, the World PEAS Food Hub was accepted to participate in the Fair Food Fund’s Business “Boot Camp.” The Camp comprised an intensive three-day “deep dive” into the organizational financials, marketing and business development strategy, and it culminated in a pitch contest offering cash prizes. The World PEAS Team earned the “audience favorite” prize and was awarded a $5,000 grant to work with a business consultant on market development and growth strategy. In spring 2017, staff will be working with one such independent consultant to seek out innovative strategies for improving the current business plan and to consider innovative improvements to the operation.

The World PEAS Food Hub is also conducting research to identify new sources of local products in preparation for adding additional local food options to our delivery service, including dairy and bread. In the 2017 season the World PEAS CSA will also make several changes to share options by introducing a Summer Share, offering 10 weeks of fresh
produce delivered between June and August. Our Fall Share will also shift from an 8-week share to a 10-week share running from August to October.

Staff have also launched a **new software system** called Member Assembler, a platform from Small Farm Central, which will update our CSA sign-up and behind-the-scenes management of the CSA. This program will also allow us to offer more flexibility with donations and “vacation holds” during the season, giving customers the ability to automatically set their own hold on their share for a given week, with the option to receive the share on another week during the season. Staff are also installing a software called Local Food Marketplace to manage the aggregation and distribution component of our operations. This software will streamline ordering, invoicing, and farmer communications. Staff is excited for the enormous increase in efficiencies that this software upgrade is expected to bring to the Food Hub!

The World PEAS Food Hub is extremely excited to partner with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) in 2017 with the launch of the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) in Massachusetts. This program will increase the benefits available to SNAP participants by increasing their purchasing power for fresh, locally grown foods. The HIP benefit will be available to all SNAP beneficiaries and may be used to purchase fresh, locally grown produce through CSA programs, farm stands, farmers’ markets, and other local food retail establishments. The World PEAS Food Hub will be offering the benefit through our SNAP CSA program. Participants will have the opportunity to pre-register for the program, enabling the DTA to debit their SNAP/EBT card once per month to pay for their share. This partnership increases efficiency, saving paper and administration time. Most importantly, this setup eliminates the significant stigma and potential inconvenience of swiping an EBT card on site in order to pick up a CSA share. **Most notably, the HIP benefit will match money spent on fresh local food, automatically reimbursing SNAP beneficiaries for local food purchases up to $40, $60, or $80 depending on family size.** The refunded money may be spent on any SNAP-eligible products (not exclusively locally grown produce). The World PEAS SNAP CSA will be offered at all 17 of our pick-up locations. We are thrilled at this opportunity and anticipate it will be highly attractive to clients.

In 2017 we will also expand and strengthen our Food Access program through partnerships with community organizations. We will launch a **brand-new partnership with the Lowell Senior Center, providing fresh fruits and vegetables for up to 225 local senior citizens.** We will continue to provide fresh produce to our partner organizations in Medford, Westford, Arlington, Burlington, Dorchester, Waltham, Cambridge, Somerville, and Lowell.

In the upcoming season, the World PEAS Food Hub team at New Entry will also be working closely with the Farmer Training team to strengthen our training curriculum and programming for beginning farmers. We will be **establishing a Direct Market Education program** for producers to diversify their own market outlets in addition to selling to the
World PEAS Food Hub. With the onset of new food safety legislation through the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), the World PEAS Food Hub will also be refining its food safety policies and working with New Entry’s farmer training team to prepare farmers to comply with new laws. Improvements to programming around crop quality, packing, and marketing will also be made in 2017.

The World PEAS Food Hub looks forward to addressing the challenges and opportunities presented in 2016. We thank all of our CSA members, community partners, institutional customers, volunteers, and farmers for a wonderful 2016 season. With your help and generosity, we look forward to a fun, engaging, and bountiful season in 2017!

Donate

If you would like to make a tax-deductible, charitable contribution to New Entry for our World PEAS food justice/low-income food access work, please visit our webpage: http://nesfp.org/worldpeas
To purchase a World PEAS CSA Share, please visit: http://worldpeasfoodhub.csasignup.com/
To learn more about New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, please visit: www.nesfp.org