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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Apply Now for Farmers Market Access Project Funds

REYNOLDSBURG, Ohio (April 7, 2010) – In an effort to make fresh produce more available to all Ohioans, the Ohio Department of Agriculture is providing grants to farmers markets through the Farmers Market Access Project to help fund new infrastructure to accept Electronic Benefits Transfer.

This would allow the electronic processing of food assistance through the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services' Direction Card. All funding will be used to promote Ohio agriculture and to advance the long-term economic viability and sustainability of Ohio's specialty crop industry while promoting food security for nutrition assistance recipients at Ohio farmers markets.

“This program is one more effort by the state to increase access to healthy food for all Ohioans,” said Department of Agriculture Director Robert Boggs. “The department continues work to further strengthen the logistical supply line between the state's farmers who grow nutritious local foods and its consumers, which is underscored by Gov. Strickland's Ohio Neighborhood Harvest initiative.”

The Ohio Neighborhood Harvest initiative is a statewide effort to ensure that Ohioans in every neighborhood have access to locally grown, affordable and healthy food.

Funds for the Farmers Market Access Project were made available by congressional appropriation, with \$26,000 available for 2010. Grants will be awarded on a first-come-first-serve basis and are subject to available funding. Awarded grants will range from \$500 to \$1,000.

The goals of the Farmers Market Access Project, as well as the Ohio Neighborhood Harvest, are to increase healthy food choices for all Ohioans and to promote the sale of Ohio foods, which will benefit Ohio farmers and the state economy. There are approximately 180 farmers markets in the state that may be eligible to accept food assistance benefits through this program. The U.S. Department of Agriculture research estimates that for every dollar in food assistance benefits that is dispersed, \$1.84 is generated in economic activity.

A farmers market is a location where several producers congregate to offer fruits, vegetables, flowers, plants and other agricultural products. These markets are often located in a public parking lot or at a local fairground. During the harvest season, most markets are open once or twice a week. For a listing of Ohio's farmers markets, visit www.ohioproud.org.

For more information about the Farmers Market Access Project, or to apply, visit www.agri.ohio.gov.

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