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Press Release

For Immediate Release:

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### **Multi-Industry Lehigh Valley Partners Join to Develop Local Food System**

Seven local organizations from varying industries are coming together to support the development of a strong local food system in the Lehigh Valley that will provide balanced, healthy food to the region's ever-growing population.

The companies and organizations joining forces in support of a stronger local food system include the Bethlehem Area School District, Kellyn Foundation, Lehigh Valley Health Network, Penn State Extension, Rodale Institute, Bethlehem Food Co-Op and Second Harvest Food Bank. Their goal is to help build locally grown food production through the development of an established local food infrastructure.

"The Bethlehem Area School District is excited to support this initiative," says Dr. Jack Silva, Superintendent. "The overall health of our students and families is a very high priority for us, and having a strong Lehigh Valley Food System helps provide local healthy food now and in the future."

"Having a strong local food system means greater food security for everyone living in our region. We can't do that without deep commitment from all sectors to build the infrastructure and capacity to take our local food system to the next level," states Allison Czapp, Associate Executive Director of Second Harvest Food Bank.

According to Eric J. Ruth, CEO and Co-Founder of the Kellyn Foundation, this would include farmers, manufacturers, processors, distribution, institutional buyers, neighborhoods and individual consumers, along with the support of governmental, non-profit and for-profit entities. Ruth says a food system supports entrepreneurial growth, creates jobs, champions overall health, supports the environment, reduces food insecurity and demands equity.

"It will take many partners and many years to accomplish this goal, but we are determined to start the journey today," Ruth said. "Nothing will grow until a seed is planted."

The partners in the local food system initiative pledge the following:

1. Transform from a current focus on hunger to a broader focus of individual health for all;
2. Develop a fair and equitable process with our local farmers to expand their wholesale production, matching supply and planned demand;
3. Identify and share entrepreneurial opportunities that will be needed to build the local system;
4. Include and embrace additional partners; and
5. Maintain a transparent and open strategy throughout the process.

"Lehigh Valley Health Network for a long time has stressed that the health of the overall community is only as good as the least healthy segments of our community," says Kathy Reznik, Administrator of Food and Nutrition Services at LVHN. "Ensuring everyone has access to nutritious, fresh, healthy food every

day is one of those core necessities that can make a difference in the global health of an entire community.”

Brian Moyer, Penn State Extension, states, “Having commitments from key community partners goes a long way to achieving a sustainable food system in the Lehigh Valley.”

“To build and maintain a diverse community with healthful and affordable food, a local, sustainable, food system needs to exist,” says Carol Ritter, Chair of the Bethlehem Food Co-Op.



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