

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**CITY OF GARDNER AND GROWING PLACES CELEBRATES GRAND
OPENING OF WATERFORD STREET REGIONAL FOOD CENTER**

Video Recording of Live Remarks and Event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jabeu2fscD8>

Gardner, MA – October 24, 2025 — Growing Places, in partnership with the City of Gardner, hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony today to celebrate the grand opening of the new Waterford Street Regional Food Center, located at 62 Waterford Street, Gardner, MA.

The ceremony featured remarks from Representative Jonathan Zlotnik, Mayor Mike Nicholson of Gardner, Steve Adams, President of the North Central Massachusetts Community Foundation, Farmer John Gove, and Ayn Yeagle, Executive Director of Growing Places. Together, they marked this significant milestone in strengthening the regional food system, supporting local farmers, and expanding equitable food access across North Central Massachusetts. All speakers emphasized the project's importance for Gardner and the North Central MA's region's economic and community health.

“This center is more than a facility—it’s a bridge,” said Ayn Yeagle during her remarks. “A bridge between our farms, families, and providers that feed our community - between opportunity and equity - between health and economic growth. It strengthens our regional food system, a hidden gem of North Central MA, and ensures that the food grown here in North Central Massachusetts feeds the people who live here.”

“This has really been a labor of love on the part of Growing Places but a labor of love for the people of our region,” said Gardner Mayor Mike Nicholson. “Growing Places providing the food for several of our students in the schools, expanding their programming now with our after-school program about different ways that food can be prepared. This really is something that’s very positive for this region, positive for the city and I’m very excited to see the great work that’s happening.”

“Just about three years ago exactly, the mayor, Ayn and I stood in the corner just over there and announced what our vision was for repurposing the former Waterford Street School,” remarked State Representative Jon Zlotnik recalling the steps taken to get to the opening of the new Food Center. “Then last year at the other end of this room, we signed a lease with Growing Places to really kick off this adventure in earnest and now that the processing center for Growing Places is fully operational, we are so proud to be here celebrating another milestone and cutting a ribbon. This is a major benefit to our residents and our region as a whole, and I am glad that we were all able to work together to get us to this point today to connect our local agriculture economy directly to people’s tables right here in Gardner.”

--About the Regional Food Center--

The Waterford Street Regional Food Center was developed through the Local Food Works Coalition, coordinated by Growing Places, with support from local farmers, the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), and numerous community partners and funders.

Designed to address barriers that have historically limited small and underserved local farmers and community members from fully benefiting from the region’s agricultural potential, the new center purchases produce at fair prices from farmers and provide light processing such as peeling, chopping, freezing, and dehydrating local fruits, vegetables, and herbs.

Food from the center is distributed to community members across the region’s 27 cities and towns through Growing Places’ home delivery program, as well as to schools, colleges, hospitals, restaurants, and grocery stores across the state. The center currently supports 30+ farmers through purchasing programs that ensure fair compensation and consistent demand.

--About Growing Places--

About Growing Places Established in 2001, Growing Places is a regional nonprofit food system organization based in North Central Massachusetts, serving 27 cities and towns that are home to over 180 small and underserved farms and more than 275,000 residents. Our mission is to actively engage in the North Central MA regional food system and strengthen community capacity to transform that system into one that promotes equity,

fosters collective well-being, nurtures economic resilience, and sustains the environment.

For more information, visit www.growingplaces.org or contact Ayn Yeagle at ayn@growingplaces.org

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