

Grassroots Grocery Launches Campaign to Offer Healthy, Affordable, Locally Grown Food

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Alton, IL - Local volunteers and entrepreneurs have joined forces to offer healthy, locally grown



and organic foods in a USDA designated "food desert" in Alton. The US Department of Agriculture defines a food desert as "a census tract with a substantial share of residents who live in low-income areas that have low levels of access to a grocery store or a healthy, affordable food retail outlet."

Grassroots Grocery will be operated as a cooperative, and will source its products from inside a 50-mile radius whenever possible. Those involved hope that this strategy will strengthen the network of local farmers, engage a diverse community in improving health and self-sufficiency, and contribute to a sustainable local economy.

The store, located at 415 Ridge Street in Alton, is set to open this summer with the exact date to be determined by public response to the membership campaign. Founders aim to open the doors 30 days after successfully raising \$50,000 to cover start-up costs and inventory.

Visit www.GrassrootsGrocery.org to review the different levels of donations, each with different perks depending on the contribution amount. A basic membership to the grocery costs \$100 per household, which entitles the family to a 10% discount at the store. If a family spends \$100 of its existing monthly food budget at Grassroots Grocery, then the membership will more than pay for itself over the course of a year. A compelling short video can be found on the website, in which those involved explain the need for such an endeavor and the benefits it will have in our community.

"Grassroots Grocery will give folks the opportunity to buy fresh, healthy food from people who are their neighbors. Instead of sending local money to giant multi-national corporations in far away

places, we have the opportunity to provide people with affordable nourishment, while keeping that money circulating in the local economy where it can do the most good," said Christine Favilla, Co-Founder of the grocery, and Vice President of the Community Cultivators. "The donations will be tax-deductible because of our non-profit status."

The store aims to serve neighbors who live in the food desert and therefore need access to fresh healthy food, as well as residents in surrounding areas who will now be able to save the 70-mile round trip to West County in order to shop at chain stores. Some of the farmers and producers that will have their goods at the store include: Liveprings Farms, Three Rivers Community Farm, La Vista CSA Farm, and Riverbend Roots Farm, among many others.

"Neighbors will save money and have access to healthy food choices that are currently not available in the neighborhood," said Dr. Jackie Burns of Principia College. "We are pursuing \$100 cooperative memberships in order to drive the unit price of the product down so that people in the neighborhood can afford to shop there. Growing the economy and bringing people to the neighborhood will foster additional economic growth and job creation."

"Suppliers of Grassroots Grocery products will include many area farmers that attend the Alton Farmers' & Artisans' Market," said Sara McGibany, Executive Director of Alton Main Street, who coordinates the Market. "We'll also have natural household products, such as all-natural shampoo and recycled-content paper products, and free range eggs, hormone-free meats, and artisan cheeses."

Grassroots Grocery is a project of the Community Cultivators, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization started in 2002 that is known for their Jaime Hines Discovery Garden, one-acre organic teaching garden at La Vista Park in Godfrey, IL. Favilla, McGibany, and Dr. Burns are co-founders who have been working with dozens of dedicated volunteers on 6 subcommittees in order to bring the project to life. "Public response has been overwhelmingly positive," said McGibany; "the Grocery's Facebook page reached 1,200 likes overnight and a significant amount of donations have been pledged, so we see that as a positive indicator that the Alton community is ready to support this type of social enterprise."

In addition to offering non-toxic products and sustainably grown food, the endeavor will also include a strong outreach component to educate the local populace about the importance of fresh foods and how to work with and prepare them. Workshops are being planned on the following subjects:

- . Eating Seasonally
- . Healthy Shopping
- . Simple Dinners with fresh ingredients
- . Household Composting
- . Cooking with Fresh Herbs
- . Bees as Pollinators of Our Food
- . Storage - canning, freezing, dehydrating

A parallel effort to create a "Food Hub" is being launched under the same roof by the Alton Area Business Development Association. In the back of 415 Ridge Street, large quantities of products from the same local growers will be available to wholesale buyers such as restaurants, caterers and institutions such as Senior Services Plus's Meals on Wheels program.

To make your donation and become a member, please visit www.GrassrootsGrocery.org.

To stay up-to-date on store news, please like Grassroots Grocery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GrassrootsGrocery. For more information, please contact Christine Favilla at 618-401-7870 or christine@grassrootsgrocery.org or Sara McGibany at sara@altonmainstreet.org or 618-463-1016.

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