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The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts Grantee Launches Mushroom-Growing Initiative

Southeast Asian Coalition Addresses Food Insecurity, Supports Community Health

WORCESTER, Mass. (Dec. 3, 2024) – The [Southeast Asian Coalition of Central Massachusetts](#) (SEACMA), with the support of an Activation Fund grant from [The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts](#), has successfully launched an urban mushroom-growing facility inside the historic Printers Building in downtown Worcester. This project is designed to address food insecurity in the community while fostering a sustainable, nutrient-rich food source through locally grown mushrooms.

“Beyond medical care, we believe that health is influenced by access to fundamentals like nutritious food and economic opportunity,” said The Health Foundation President & CEO Amie Shei. “The Southeast Asian Coalition is addressing these core needs in a way that directly benefits the Central Massachusetts community. We are thrilled to see this mushroom-growing initiative take root and thrive.”

The mushrooms, which include varieties such as shiitake and oyster mushrooms commonly used in Asian cuisine, are currently being distributed and sold locally, with SEACMA donating a majority of its harvest to families, local shelters, temples and senior centers. The organization is selling the remaining mushrooms at farmers markets and reinvesting the profits back into the organization to expand its capacity and build a self-sustaining social enterprise.

SEACMA is also currently exploring opportunities to partner with local restaurants and grocery stores to sell its produce.

“It’s amazing to be able to transform an unused storage space into a thriving food growing space,” said Tuyet Tran, Executive Director of The Southeast Asian Coalition. “I smile every time I go into our mushroom growing room and see shelves and shelves of mushrooms in various stages of fruiting. I am so grateful to The Health Foundation for making our dream of creating organic and freshly grown food available to our community.”

SEACMA's three-person mushroom-growing team started producing their first batches a couple months ago and is already yielding hundreds of pounds a week of predominantly oyster mushrooms. Collaborating part-time with Tran is Amanda Dye, a Clark University master's program student who has extensive knowledge of fungi and sustainable food production and is a mentee of mycologist and associate biology professor David Hibbett.

The organization will be making SEACMA's mushrooms available to anyone who appreciates locally grown food and will be providing fun group educational opportunities for anyone interested in learning more about mushrooms.

The Health Foundation awarded SEACMA a \$120,000 Activation Fund grant in 2023 to purchase and install the equipment for the indoor mushroom farm. These grants are designed to support innovative, short-term projects that improve health in Central Massachusetts, and often address social determinants of health within the region. The funding empowers organizations to test new ideas and develop sustainable solutions to community health challenges.

About The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts

The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts is dedicated to improving the health of those who live or work in Central Massachusetts, with particular emphasis on vulnerable populations and unmet needs. Through its unique and impactful approach to grantmaking, The Health Foundation supports community-identified health issues, with health defined broadly to include social determinants of health and with a focus on promoting health equity. As a health conversion foundation launched in 1999 following the sale of the not-for-profit HMO Central Massachusetts Health Care Inc., The Health Foundation's grants have totaled over \$57 million to more than 230 unique organizations over its history. For more information, visit www.thfcm.org.

About Southeast Asian Coalition of Central Massachusetts

[The Southeast Asian Coalition of Central Massachusetts \(SEACMA\)](http://www.seacma.org) is a nonprofit dedicated to supporting all newly arrived and long settled immigrants and refugees and helps individuals thrive, actively participate in civic life and contribute meaningfully to Central Massachusetts while achieving their full potential. The organization's programs include food security initiatives, social services and referrals, language and skill education, small business and job assistance, healthy aging programs and youth leadership initiatives, which are all aimed at fostering community resilience and inclusivity. For more information, visit www.seacma.org.

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