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## **Whole Foods Market® Offers Low-Interest Loans for Local Farmers Midwest Region Announces Major Commitment to Local Food at FamilyFarmed.org EXPO**

**(Chicago) March 23, 2007** – Whole Foods Market is providing up to \$10 million in low-interest loans to local farmers to promote local agriculture in areas where it has stores. The Company will announce the Local Producer Loan Program at the FamilyFarmed.org EXPO with the release of a request for proposals from Midwest regional farmers and artisanal food producers.

“Whole Foods Market’s intention is to support local agriculture,” says Patrick Bradley, Midwest regional president. “We are going to ‘walk our talk’ with financial support for farmers and artisanal producers in close proximity to our stores. We believe this financial assistance can make a very significant difference in helping local agriculture grow and flourish in the communities we serve and will contribute to significant economic development in the region.”

With interest rates of five to nine percent, the Whole Foods Market’s pilot program offers rates lower than what those small agricultural producers would generally receive from a bank. In addition, the program has other attributes geared to small producers: minimization of loan application paperwork, with administrative fees ranging from \$0 to \$65; no penalties for early payment; and loan life may range from a few months to ten years.

The Local Producer Loan Program is part of Whole Foods Market’s ongoing commitment to local agriculture. This includes hosting farmers markets at stand-alone stores, highlighting locally produced products, and hiring regional staff focused specifically on sourcing local products. In the Midwest, Whole Foods Market has teamed up with Sustain and FamilyFarmed.org to promote and administer the loan program. This is part of a strategic philanthropic commitment from the region to support Sustain’s efforts to build a local food system. “This partnership with Whole Foods Market is a model public/private partnership to source and promote local and organic food production,” says Sustain president, Jim Slama. “They are also supporting farmer training and development programs and were the founding retail partner of the FamilyFarmed.org EXPO.”

In addition to the Local Producer Loan Program announcement, Whole Foods Market Midwest will communicate its commitment to local growers and producers by way of an on-site booth at the FamilyFarmed.org EXPO and a guest presentation by Patrick Bradley. Bradley will join other notable national and regional leaders in an opening symposium at the EXPO. The purpose of the symposium is to discuss the future of organic farming, policy, commerce, the environment, and more. Whole Foods Market buyers will also meet with regional producers in a “Meet the Buyers” session.

“We’re extremely excited to be a partner with Sustain and FamilyFarmed.org,” says Bradley. “We have a true belief in the importance of supporting our local producers and growers. Our participation at FamilyFarmed.org is just the beginning of our commitment to support local purveyors.”

Interested producers can learn more about the Local Producer Loan Program at the Whole Foods Market Web site, <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/products/locallygrown/lplp/index.html>.

### **About Whole Foods Market®**

Founded in 1980 in Austin, Texas, Whole Foods Market (www.wholefoodsmarket.com) is the world’s leading natural and organic foods supermarket and America’s first national certified organic grocer. In fiscal year 2006, the company had sales of \$5.6 billion and currently has more than 190 stores in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The Whole Foods Market motto, “Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet”™ captures the company’s mission to find success in customer satisfaction and wellness, employee excellence and happiness, enhanced shareholder value, community support and environmental improvement. Whole Foods Market, Harry’s Farmers Market®, and Fresh & Wild® are trademarks owned by Whole Foods Market IP, LP. Whole Foods Market employs more than 41,500 team members and has been ranked for ten consecutive years as one of the “100 Best Companies to Work For” in America by *FORTUNE* magazine.

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**About Sustain and FamilyFarmed.org**

FamilyFarmed.org is a project of Sustain that encourages local and organic farming by connecting regional farmers with trade buyers and consumers. Sustain also encourages public policy that supports sustainable farming, local economic development, and job creation through local and organic food production.

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