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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **South Kingstown Winter Farmers Market Now Accepting WIC and SNAP Benefits**

Peace Dale, RI (October 30, 2014) – Thundermist Health Center is pleased to announce that on Saturday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 the South Kingstown Winter Farmers Market will begin accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits, and credit cards. This is the first Farmers Market in Washington County to accept SNAP, and the first season that this market will accept WIC. All SNAP and WIC users will receive a 40% incentive on SNAP and WIC spending, called Bonus Bucks. Bonus Bucks can be used on fruits and vegetables at the market. Thundermist is the first agency in Rhode Island to expand the Bonus Bucks model to WIC.

Thundermist's Food Access Assistant Erika Shubert, a nutrition and culinary arts graduate of Johnson and Wales University, will coordinate the program and attend each weekly market. She will process SNAP/WIC payments, distribute incentive coins and orient recipients to the market, many of whom have never shopped at a farmers market before. Additionally, she will provide tips on stretching your dollar at the market, storing fruits and vegetables to prevent spoilage and preserve taste, and offer cooking tips on market produce.

Chuck Jones, President/CEO of Thundermist Health Center recently said, "We are thrilled to have the opportunity to offer this new program. We are dedicated to improving the health of all South County residents, and with nearly 3,000 SNAP recipients in South Kingstown and Narragansett, accepting SNAP and WIC at the Winter Farmers Market is a logical step. The program will increase low income community members' access to fresh vegetables and fruit, support local business, and improve health outcomes."

South County Hospital has generously provided funding for this program, and will work with Thundermist to promote the program in the community. "We are very pleased to be able to support Thundermist in this important initiative," Lou Giancola, president and CEO of South County Hospital said. "This program will help low-income families in our community improve their nutrition and enjoy access to the fresh, high quality foods available at the farmers' market."

Steve Gardiner, owner of S & P Farm and Manager of the Winter Farmers Market added, "The farmers at this market are committed to making it accessible and inclusive for all Rhode Islanders, including low income residents who receive SNAP and/or WIC."

Dr. Kathleen Gorman, director of the URI Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America, which manages the state's SNAP Outreach program, says that because SNAP increases the household food budget of low-income families, it also increases the likelihood that they will be able to purchase healthy foods. "We have worked for many years to increase access to and participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program throughout the state of Rhode Island," Gorman says. "We are thrilled that the South Kingstown Farmers Market is now increasing opportunities for all of our neighbors to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables, which both strengthens our local food system and has the potential to improve health and well-being."

*Thundermist Health Center is a non-profit community health center providing primary health care services. Services include pediatrics, ob/gyn, internal medicine, dental, pharmacy, school-based health centers and nutritional services, including the Women, Infant & Children (WIC) program. Additionally, the health center offers social services and behavioral health counseling to its patients. Thundermist has three locations, Woonsocket, South County, and West Warwick, and serves clients with and without health insurance. In 2013, Thundermist served more than 42,000 patients. It is a Level 3 Patient-Centered Medical Home, the highest level of accreditation from the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).*

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