

PRESTON

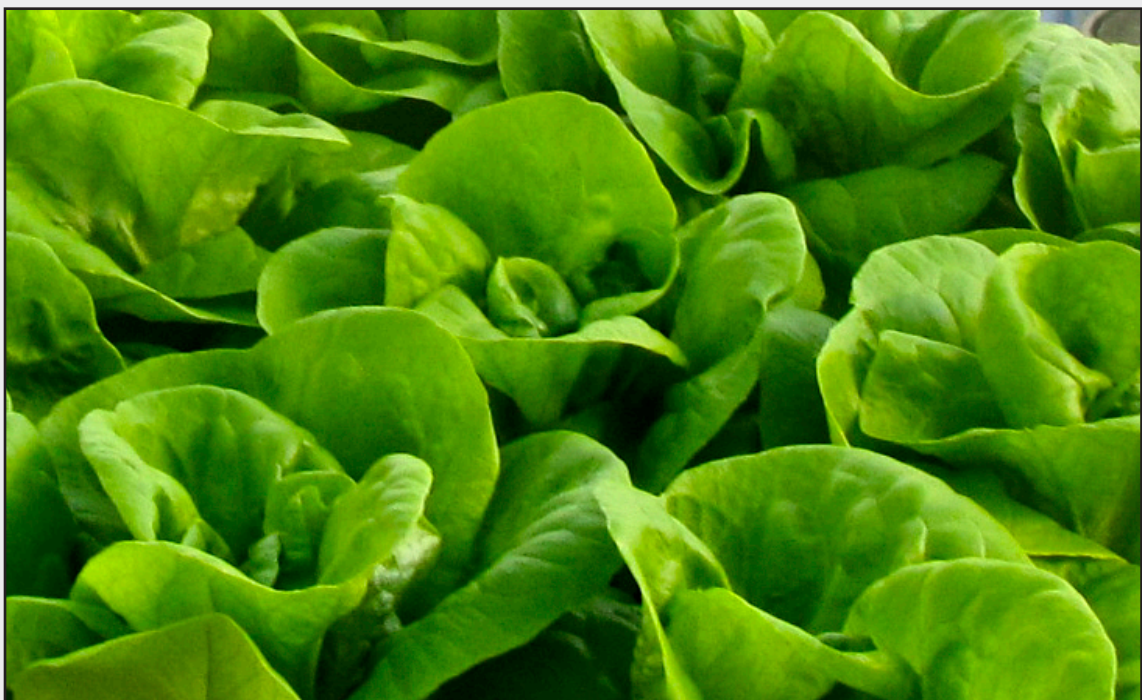
THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT ACT SUCCESS STORIES

No.
287



When Franklin Farms Mushrooms left Connecticut in 1996, it was a tough blow for the workers who were employed at the farm. It was also a blow for **Maple Lane Farms** in Preston, which had provided Franklin Farms with oyster mushrooms for over 25 years. The good news was that Maple Lane had planned ahead and was already on the road to figuring out how to replace the lost revenue.

Since 1978, Maple Lane had created a successful business model of not only providing mushrooms, but also extensive pick-your-own berries and apples, cut-your-own Christmas trees, and black currants. In fact, Maple Lane has become the largest grower of black currants in North America and bottles the juice on-farm under the “Currant Affair”



label which is sold in most retail stores in New England and the Mid-Atlantic. The loss of mushrooms presented a challenge that farm owner Allyn Brown was ready to tackle.

When the mushroom facility was originally constructed in the 1980s, it was built with the idea that it could be converted into a greenhouse if needed. Through a \$32,500 grant from the **CT Dept. of Agriculture’s Agriculture Viability Grant Program**, which is funded by the **Community Investment Act (CIA)**, Maple Lane Farms was able to offset the \$90,000 cost of converting its old mushroom facilities into a hydroponic greenhouse for the growing of lettuce. Within a few months of receiving the grant in 2010, Maple Lane was able to finish the conversion and now grows lettuce year round which is sold directly to Stop & Shop.

The vital grant made possible by the CIA not only allowed Maple Lane Farms to transition its business, it has helped **create jobs**. In the past, Maple Lane employed only a seasonal workforce, but now the farm also employs four people throughout the year, with plans to add more.

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The Community Investment Act, enacted in 2005, stimulates private investment to protect our natural, agricultural, and historic resources, and to assist affordable housing. CIA funds come from a surcharge on real estate document recording fees. They are then invested in agriculture viability, dairy farm support, historic preservation, open space, farmland, affordable housing, Local Capital Improvement Projects and Town Clerk records management.