



May 22, 2020

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski
 Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee on Resources, Environmental Protection, Energy and Transportation
 State Capitol, Room 4085
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted via electronic mail

RE: Maintaining Farm to School Grant Program Funding for School Food in Budget - SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Wieckowski,

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis when millions are out of work, food can be scarce, and people are hurting financially — the fresh California produce that could feed our communities is being destroyed¹ in huge quantities. California farmers and ranchers are no longer able to sell to some of their biggest clients — restaurants, schools, and hotels — with the pandemic-induced shelter in place orders necessary to curtail the spread of the virus. The pandemic has exposed the fragility of our food system supply chain. **Our coalition respectfully requests your support for the \$10 million in funding for the Farm to School Grant Program**

¹ <https://www.agriland.co.uk/farming-news/millions-of-dollars-worth-of-crops-being-destroyed-in-california/>

and the Office of Farm to Fork, as proposed in the Governor’s May budget revision. This critical funding will increase the resiliency of local communities’ food supply chains and provide fresh, healthy food to California students.

Lack of access to healthy food is exacerbated by socio-economic status and most prevalent in low-income communities of color.² On a fundamental level, the Farm to School program can help promote equity across the racial and ethnic disparities that exist in our food system. It expands educational opportunities that support life-long habits that lead to healthier lives, which should not be contingent upon the wealth of a child’s family. Increased investment in local foods could benefit farmers most in need of assistance, including California’s smaller-sized and disadvantaged farmers, who often are farmers of color. Reliable purchases from schools will be even more important for California farmers as our economy begins to recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

Weaving together the three core elements of Farm to School; (1) increased local food procurement; (2) education in classrooms and cafeterias; and (3) experiential learning in school gardens, agriculture programs, and culinary programs; this multifaceted grant program can be used to establish and expand programs that help all students experience and understand how food affects their health, the health of their communities, and the health of the environment. Programs like this are essential in providing students with high-quality nutritious foods that they are eager to consume. Research has found that it takes 35-50 hours of nutrition education to create long-term behavioral changes such as consuming more fruits and vegetables; yet most children receive only 3.4 hours a year – less than a tenth of the recommended amount.³ By creating and implementing learning and education programs, the Farm to School program can transform students’ lives and help address the public health crises of food insecurity and obesity.

The Farm to School Grant program and the resulting increased purchases of California-grown school food will create many benefits for California kids, schools, farmers, and our economy during these critical times including:

- Strengthening local economies and supporting California farmers when schools buy more California-grown food. School food in California is a \$2.4 billion dollar industry, and school cafeterias can often be the largest “restaurant” in town. By directing more of this investment to local farmers, schools can help support thriving local economies and food producers with every dollar they invest generating between \$1.03-\$2.40 of economic activity.⁴
- Preparing students to succeed academically, whether they are learning from home or in the classroom. Students consume 35-50% of their daily calories at school,^{5,6} and studies have shown that kids who eat healthy food are better prepared to succeed academically.⁷

2 http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf

3 Shafter, L. 2018. Let It Grow: The long-lasting benefits of a school garden — supporting health and wellness, encouraging students to choose nutritious foods. *Harvard Graduate School of Education: Usable Knowledge*. Available at: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/07/let-it-grow>

4 Christensen, L., Jablonski, B.B.R., Stephens, L., and Joshi, A. 2018. Evaluating the economic impacts of farm-to-school procurement: An approach for primary and secondary financial data collection of producers selling to schools. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 8(3): 73-94. Available at: <https://www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj/article/view/656>

5 Briefel, R.R. et al (2009). “School Food Environments and Practices Affect Dietary Behaviors of US School Children.” *Journal of the American Dietary Association*, 109 (2 Suppl.), pp. 91–107

6 Action for Healthy Kids (2012). *The Learning Connection: What You Need to Know to Ensure Your Kids Are Healthy and Ready to Learn*, p. 8. www.actionforhealthykids.org/storage/documents/pdfs/afhk_thelearningconnection_digitaledition.pdf

7 Center for Ecoliteracy. 2014. *Making the Case for Healthy, Freshly Prepared School Meals*. Available at: <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/download/making-case-healthy-freshly-prepared-school-meals>

- Reducing food waste. With disruptions in the supply chain, these local purchases can make the difference between the food being put to good use and going to waste. Students also respond well to food that is fresh,⁸ reducing food waste.
- Increasing attendance-based revenue for schools as healthy students are absent less often.⁹

We appreciate this budget language in the Governor’s May revision, which reinforces the importance of procuring more California-grown food, and we urge the budget subcommittees to do the same.

This coalition has seen first hand the benefits that the California Department of Food and Agriculture Office of Farm to Fork can provide and its untapped potential to support school districts across the state. We have heard from many school food stakeholders about their appreciation for the Office of Farm to Fork and the value of engagements such as the Farm to School Conference, gatherings, and procurement support. For instance, the Office of Farm to Fork has been forging partnerships that will capture excess foods from the local supply chain and direct them toward institutional markets that need them most right now (food banks, schools, restaurants) at the lowest possible cost. We would encourage the legislature to approve the Governor’s recommendation for \$1.5 million in funding to establish and expand this office and California’s leading role in the farm to school movement.

Respectfully,



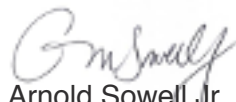
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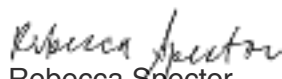
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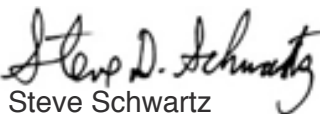
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8 Q. Moore, H.L. Hulse, and M. Ponza (2009). “Factors Associated with School Meal Participation and the Relationship between Different Participation Measures.” Contractor and Cooperator Report 53 (Washington, DC: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Cited in Food Research and Action Center (2010). “How Improving Federal Nutrition Program Access and Quality Work Together to Reduce Hunger and Promote Healthy Eating,” p. 4. www.frac.org/pdf/CNR01_qualityandaccess.pdf

9 Food Research and Action Center (2010). “How Improving Federal Nutrition Program Access and Quality Work Together to Reduce Hunger and Promote Healthy Eating,” p. 4. www.frac.org/pdf/CNR01_qualityandaccess.pdf

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