



GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

For Immediate Release

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Farm to School Act of 2017 Boosts Economic Opportunities For Farmers *National Farm to School Network Partners with Lawmakers to Introduce Bill to Support Family Farmers and Improve Child Health*

Washington, D.C., September 8, 2017 – This week, members of Congress took the first step toward a major win for local economies, farm families and the health of our nation’s children. Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Thad Cochran (R-MS) and Representatives Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) and Marcia Fudge (D-OH) introduced the bipartisan Farm to School Act of 2017 to expand the highly successful USDA Farm to School Grant Program.

The two identical bills, originally introduced in the last Congress, will improve access to healthy local foods in schools and experiential food and agriculture education for students while boosting economic opportunities for family farmers.

“Farm to school activities have proven to be an economic driver for local farms across the country,” said Maximilian Merrill, Policy Director of the National Farm to School Network. “In the most recent USDA Farm to School Census, schools reported purchasing nearly \$800 million in local food from farmers, ranchers, fishermen and food processors in just one school year. Every dollar spent on local food generates up to an additional \$1.60 in economic activity, indicating school districts’ local food purchases are driving over \$1 billion in local economic activity. The Farm to School Act will expand these efforts, allowing more schools to access training, resources and technical assistance to grow their farm to school activities and boost new market opportunities for farmers and local food producers.”

Administered by USDA, the Farm to School Grant Program provides funds on a competitive basis to schools, nonprofits, farmers, and local, state and tribal government entities to help schools procure local foods and to support farm to school activities in cafeterias, classrooms and communities. The program was originally funded as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

In its first five years, the program has received more than 1,600 applications totaling more than \$120 million in requests. With only \$5 million available annually, the program has only been able to fund 20 percent of requests. The bipartisan Farm to School Act of 2017 proposes to level this disproportionate ratio of demand to supply with an increase in annual mandatory program funding to \$15 million and greater support for early care and education sites, summer food service sites, after school programs, and tribal schools and producers. The proposed legislation also aims to improve program participation from beginning farmers, farmer veterans, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Learn more about the Farm to School Act of 2017 at farmtoschool.org.

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Statements from Farm to School Act of 2017 Champions:

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)

“Farm to school programs have a proven track record to help address hunger in America. Nearly half of all school districts participate in farm to school activities because this program both encourages healthier eating habits among children, and supports local farmers. It’s a natural partnership with benefits all around. Children, communities, farmers and schools all win under this formula. The Farm to School Act of 2017 will build on and extend these successes. Hungry children cannot learn. Providing security to our children goes beyond having roofs over their heads. It means making sure they don’t go hungry. It also means offering healthy choices to help form healthy lifestyles. Vermont has been a leader in forging farm-to-school partnerships, and many of the improvements in this bill are drawn from those successes.”

Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS)

“Our Farm to School legislation would make it easier for local farms to grow more food for local schools. Schoolchildren across the country can have greater access to locally-grown meat, fish, and produce, which can be particularly beneficial for students in underserved and rural areas.”

Representative Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE)

“Linking America’s farms to schools to provide local nutritious options for children is an exciting policy goal. The Farm to School program adds fresh, healthy meal choices for students and teachers, brings ag education to the classroom for the next generation of farmers and ranchers, and prioritizes food to tribal schools from tribal agricultural producers. Building upon previous efforts to connect local farmers and students, it expands market opportunities for our beginning farmers and veteran agricultural producers.”

Representative Marcia Fudge (D-OH)

“Farm to School is a win-win for our nation’s producers and school children. The increased use of locally-sourced food in schools have provided new opportunities for farmers and improved nutrition for our students. Expanding the program to reach more students is a logical next step and will help reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity and its associated health risks such as diabetes and heart disease. With the national childhood obesity rate at 17%, it is important we act quickly to improve children’s health.”

About National Farm to School Network

The National Farm to School Network is the leading voice for the U.S. farm to school movement, providing information, advocacy and networking for communities working to bring local food sourcing, school gardens and food and agriculture education into schools and early care and education settings. Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities. Learn more about our work and get involved at farmtoschool.org.

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