



NATIONAL
FARM to SCHOOL
NETWORK



NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE COALITION

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Farm to School Act of 2021 Would Strengthen Support For Local Food Systems And Child Nutrition Programs As Communities Rebuild From Pandemic

National Farm to School Network and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition urge support for the Act, emphasizing farm to school's proven impacts for children, farmers, and local economies

Washington, D.C., March 11, 2021 – Yesterday, a bipartisan group of Congressional leaders introduced the *Farm to School Act of 2021* (H.R. 1768) which will support our nation's schools, farmers and communities in building back equitably from the Covid-19 pandemic. The bill, sponsored by Representative Stacey Plaskett (D-VI), Representative Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) and Representative Alma Adams (D-NC), will expand funding for and programmatic scope of the highly successful [USDA Farm to School Grant Program](#), while also ensuring that more communities – specifically those serving racially diverse and high-need student populations, as well as engaging with beginning, veteran and socially disadvantaged farmers – have a competitive opportunity to benefit from this valuable program.

Farm to school activities – including procurement of local food for school meals, school gardens, and food and agriculture education – are proven to help students develop healthy eating habits and support family farmers by expanding market opportunities. According to the latest USDA Farm to School Census, more than 42% of schools across the country have engaged in one or more farm to school activity, collectively investing nearly \$800 million annually in local communities.

“When the pandemic began, school nutrition professionals, educators and local food producers – the people who make farm to school work – were some of the very first community members to step up and ensure the ongoing care and support of children and families. The measures included in the Farm to School Act will give them much-needed resources to continue their work as we emerge from the pandemic,” said **Karen Spangler, Policy Director with National Farm to School Network**.

“Furthermore, the bill's emphasis on ensuring equitable access to this important grant program will help those most impacted by the pandemic, including Native and tribal communities, racially diverse communities, and early care and education sites. There has never been a better time to build on the successes of this program.”

“Food is fundamental to our very existence, and learning about food – where it comes from, who grows it, and how it feeds our bodies and minds – should be a fundamental part of all students' educational experience. Over the last 15 years, farm to school programs in the U.S. have helped thousands of schools to connect their students with real, healthy foods. These programs have also served as powerful economic drivers, generating hundreds of millions of dollars of revenue for family farmers each year, according to the most recent USDA Farm to School Census,” said **Wes King, Senior Policy Specialist with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition**. “The Farm to School Act is the cornerstone of a series of proposals supported by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition that, if included in the next

Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization, would help improve health outcomes for our children and economic outcomes for family farmers across the country.”

The USDA Farm to School Grant Program provides funds on a competitive basis to schools, farmers, nonprofits, and local, state and tribal government entities to help schools procure local foods for school meals and to support activities like school gardens, hands-on science lessons, and new food taste tests. The program was originally funded as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 and includes \$5 million in annual mandatory funding.

Since the program’s inception in 2013, USDA has awarded over \$52 million through Farm to School Grants, funding a total of 719 projects across all 50 States, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Puerto Rico, reaching almost 21 million students in 47,000 schools. In recent years, the program has benefited from temporary funding boosts through annual appropriations. The *Farm to School Act of 2021* would increase annual mandatory funding to \$15 million to permanently allow more of these impactful projects to be realized. The proposed legislation will also: increase the maximum grant award to \$250,000; prioritize grant proposals that engage beginning, veteran and socially disadvantaged farmers and serve high-need schools; fully include early care and education sites, summer food service sites and after school programs; and, increase access among Native and tribal schools to traditional foods, especially from tribal producers.

NFSN and NSAC applaud the bipartisan efforts of the bill sponsors to strengthen farm to school efforts and support local food systems and child nutrition programs during this critical time. The organizations together urge Members of Congress to show their commitment to the well-being of our nation’s kids, family farmers, and food-producing communities by fully supporting the *Farm to School Act of 2021*.

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About National Farm to School Network (NFSN)

National Farm to School Network is the leading voice for the U.S. farm to school and farm to early care and education movement, working as an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities to bring local food sourcing, gardens, and food and agriculture education into schools and early care and education settings. Learn more at: <http://farmtoschool.org>.

About the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC)

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is a grassroots alliance that advocates for federal policy reform supporting the long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and rural communities. Learn more and get involved at: <http://sustainableagriculture.net>.

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Quotes from Bill Sponsors

Rep. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI): “Millions of students are eating healthier and engaged in food and agriculture education because of the Farm to School Program. It is a commonsense program that benefits children and their families while providing economic opportunities to our farmers. The increased demand for Farm to School programming tells us that more people are beginning to understand the connection between local foods and healthy young minds. I’m proud to introduce this legislation in support of our nation’s schools and local farmers who help improve classroom diets and local economies.”

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Food and Drug Administration (FDA): “The Farm to School program feeds kids, teaches kids, inspires kids. What an impactful, nutritious way to connect the farm to the family, enhance regional economic benefit, and promote good health. I am happy to lead the development of the program.”

Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC), Vice Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture: “The Farm to School Grant Program supports healthy students and strengthens our local food systems. The Farm to School

Act of 2021 expands participation in this critical program and increases its funding, which is more important than ever as our students, schools and farmers face difficult challenges due to the global pandemic. Teachers, parents, and farmers all know that healthy students are successful students, so I am proud to support the introduction this important legislation.”

Support for the Farm to School Act of 2021

Sommer Sibilly, Founder and Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition. “There are many organizations like ours across the nation that need support to effectively develop and sustain farm to school programs for their communities. For the U.S. territories, access to this funding is critical. In 2015, we received a USDA Farm to School Grant to host our first Farm to School Conference in the Virgin Islands and it felt like an auspicious start. However, due to lack of resources, we have been unable to host another. While USDA has done a phenomenal job awarding existing grants, limited funding and the program structure do not ensure equity. In my experience, a community's success with implementing farm to school is predicated on readiness and infrastructure. To date, there are many communities across the country struggling with food security and access for whom farm to school is imperative, but they do not have access to resources and capacity necessary to move efforts forward. The reality is many of those communities are communities of color. It is my hope that through the passage of legislation like the *Farm to School Act of 2021*, which will increase funding and change the grant language structure to foster collaboration and prioritize equity, the USDA Farm to School Program will have significant potential to move the needle toward a more equitable and just food system for all.”

Nathan Beacom, Food Policy Associate for the Center for Rural Affairs: “Farm to school programs have seen a great deal of growth in the last decade because they're good for farmers, for rural economies, and for the health and wellbeing of students. Now is the perfect time to take advantage of that momentum and dedicate more resources to connecting farmers with schools, especially schools that have a harder time getting access to healthy, fresh foods. We applaud Rep. Fortenberry for co-sponsoring the Farm to School Act, which will help to create stable farm to school relationships that will benefit kids, farmers, and communities alike for years to come.”

Justin Carter, coordinator of the Nebraska Food Council: “Farm to school is a growing area of opportunity for our state. It has advanced the health of our students, markets for farmers, and the economic strength of our communities. Farm to school programs have increased in Nebraska because nearly all folks agree it's a benefit, Congressman Fortenberry is right to capitalize on this momentum now. We thank him for co-sponsoring this legislation and his continued support of local food programs.”

Morgan Wittman Gramann, Executive Director of the North Carolina Alliance for Health. “Farm to school programs are essential to ensuring that our students have access to healthy, local food. The Farm to School Act will nourish our kids and benefit local farmers. We are grateful for Congresswoman Adams' leadership in filing this critical legislation.”