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Kids Eat Local Act Expands School Food Options, Opportunities for Farmers

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and National Farm to School Network welcome the introduction of this legislation, which will make it easier for schools to make institutional purchases from local farmers and ranchers

Washington, DC, June 13, 2019 – Institutional markets represent some of the most lucrative and dependable options for America’s family farmers and ranchers – unfortunately, they can also be among the most challenging to break into. The [*Kids Eat Local Act*](#) (H.R. 3220, S. 1817), introduced today by Senators [Sherrod Brown](#) (D-OH) and Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representatives [Chellie Pingree](#) (D-ME), [Josh Harder](#) (D-CA), and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), would help to break down barriers between school food purchasers and family farmers by simplifying local purchasing guidelines for school meal programs.

“Purchasing locally is a natural choice for our public schools, many of which already celebrate local and regional foods through farm to school, school gardens, and other similar programming,” said National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) Senior Policy Specialist Wes King. “The *Kids Eat Local Act* will help to facilitate connections between schools and local producers by clarifying existing procurement rules and adding ‘locale’ as an allowed product specification. This legislation will be welcome news to farmers across the country, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet during these challenging economic times.”

Although the 2002 Farm Bill included a provision, that was later strengthened in the 2008 Farm Bill, to encourage institutions participating in child nutrition programs to purchase “locally produced foods for school meal programs, to the maximum extent practicable and appropriate,” current law does not allow schools to explicitly require “local” or “regional” as a product specification in a food procurement request. Presently, the primary means by which schools can currently purchase and/or preference locally produced foods is the geographic preference option, through which they can give extra ranking points to vendors using locally procured product. Many school food service providers, however, have found the geographic preference option burdensome and confusing to implement.

By including the *Kids Eat Local Act* in the next Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization, schools would be given a new, easier to use local product specification option through which they could specify “locally grown,” “locally raised” or “locally caught” in their procurement language, and then make the award to the lowest bidder who can meet that product specification.

The addition of local product specification would substantially improve opportunities for local producers by providing more flexibility for school districts. The *Kids Eat Local Act* would also allow schools flexibility in determining the definition of “local” that best suits their needs.

“We consistently hear from schools that they’re eager and ready to serve more local foods on students’ meal trays. The *Kids Eat Local Act* directly responds to what these schools have been asking for: greater flexibility to purchase local foods from the farmers right in their own communities,” said National Farm to School Network (NFSN) Policy Specialist Chloe Marshall. “It’s a win-win-win approach to feeding our kids fresh, healthy food, supporting our local farmers and food producers, and strengthening local economies.”

NSAC and NFSN thank the bill sponsors in both the Senate and House for introducing the *Kids Eat Local Act* and paving the way for increased healthy food in schools and new economic opportunities for local farmers. We urge all members of Congress to support this simple, yet significant change and look forward to continue working with our partners and allies as this bill and the Child Nutrition Reauthorization move forward.

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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>

About the 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. National Farm to School Network works at the local, state and national levels to expand and sustain the number, quality and impact of farm to school and farm to early care and education initiatives across the country. Learn more at: <http://farmtoschool.org>.