

Testimony to USDA
CNR Listening Session
Boston 6/10/08
Amy Winston - Northeast Farm to School Network

Hello. My name is Dr. Amy Winston. I serve as economic development director for Lincoln County Maine, where I co-founded Focus on Agriculture in Rural Maine Schools (FARMS) as an educational economic development strategy. I am privileged to be here today to represent the Northeast Farm to School Network.

The Northeast Farm to School Network recommends the following *primary* changes to the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act. Additional Changes will be submitted with our written comments (forthcoming).

1) Mandatory funding for Section 122 to increase access to fresh local foods in school meal programs and support for school gardens

- This will support staff time and training, equipment for kitchens and school garden construction.

2) Increased reimbursement rates for school meals, with schools participating in farm to school receiving additional reimbursement.

- This will improve financial viability and quality of school meal programs.

3) Increased funding and buy-local language for procurement training in Section 115 and Technology Management & Information Systems in Section 125.

- This will help support farm to table safety education for foodservice staff and directors and help develop relationships with farms to ensure the best quality product.

4) Funding for school foodservice equipment, including automated point of service programs

- to serve kids equally and efficiently. I saw firsthand the importance of this improvement and innovation to our schools in Lincoln County, Maine, this past school year.

5) Expand the rural pilot and access of rural communities to CNR programs to enable rural schools in working communities to receive cash for local product in lieu of commodities.

- Our communities are struggling to hold on to their middle class. This change reflects the economic and health importance and dependability of school meal programs. The Northeast contains NYC, Boston, and a whole host of densely populated Metro areas, but this region is still dominated by its small, rural towns and traditions. Our farmers and fishermen are struggling to stay viable – these businesses are the bedrock of our communities’ – and families’ – physical and economic health. I have seen firsthand the benefits to our local farms that participate in farm to school. They are measurable in thousands of dollars. Foodservice staff takes pride in their work, and their enthusiasm for buying from these producers is contagious. We advocate changes that develop further recognition for our hardworking staff. We would like to see school foodservice treated as an essential service that is tied to the general fund.

6) Finally, *overall*, please incorporate language in existing CNR feeding programs to include and promote more local food. Specifically, in the:

- 1. Commodity Distribution Program (Section 117)
- 2. Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (Section 120)
- 3. Summer Feeding Programs (Section 116)
- 4. Child and Adult Care Feeding Programs (Section 119)
- 5. Nutrition Promotion (Section 101)

In conclusion, we see CNR as a win-win opportunity to support, sustain, expand and institutionalize farm to school, and farm to school as an *exceptional* and integrated approach that advances and fulfills school meal program objectives in a distinct way. This unique, comprehensive community health and economic development strategy supports local business and economic development, improves community health, and teaches all of us sustainable behavior, beginning with youth.

The message is in the medium.

Who doesn't want to feed children well? Isn't that why we are here today? We submit to you that Farm to School is an effective way to work together to achieve this goal/our shared objectives. Thank you for considering our comments and for the opportunity to be here today to share them with you.