

## **The Food and Farm Bill: What's in it for Farm to School? by Steph Larsen**

Harvest season is upon us, and in addition to pumpkins and apple cider, this fall brings an opportunity to speak up about a piece of legislation that is moving through Congress. It's called the Farm Bill, though there are many who think a more appropriate name for the legislation is the Food and Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill affects everyone who eats in America by influencing what crops are grown, who gets to farm, and who has access to the healthy food we all need to live active, full lives. It's about health and fairness, innovation and entrepreneurship, and great food and strong communities. **Your voice is needed to ensure that these values are reflected in this Farm Bill.**

While Farm to School is not directly addressed in the Farm Bill, there are policy changes that could greatly increase how many schools benefit from closer connections to local farmers. One of them is a no-cost language change that clarifies language put forward in the 2002 Farm Bill so there would be no question that schools are allowed to preference food from a particular geographic region when purchasing for school lunch. This language would remove a significant barrier for starting a Farm to School Program, and would also help farmers by insuring a reliable market for their products. Schools should have the ability to support their communities with their purchasing decisions, and this language is a step in the right direction.

Another extremely popular and successful program within the Farm Bill is called the Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program, and it has helped to fund numerous Farm to School projects. The purpose of this program is to provide resources to non-profit organizations working in partnerships with other groups and businesses to identify problems and find solutions within communities related to food security. Community Food Projects is a different kind of federal program because instead of dictating the changes that must be made, it empowers people to solve problems in the ways that best fit the community. When people feel empowered, they can be inspired to create a difference. When people have a voice in the changes that directly help their families, they become invested in the process and positive results continue to grow and succeed. This is why Community Food Projects has been so successful. We're asking Congress to increase the funding for this program to as close to \$30 million in **mandatory** money as they can.

One more connection that needs to be made in order to increase links between schools and farmers is processing. There are often steps that must be taken between the farm and the cafeteria, and many of the small processing facilities that have existed across the country have been closed as agriculture has become more concentrated. In the 2007 Farm Bill, Congress should support the Healthy Food Enterprise Development program, which would provide resources to entrepreneurs that want to start small-scale processing facilities.

Your efforts right now can make a big difference to get these important programs the support they need.

ALL Senators are important to contact, but if one of your Senators is on the Agriculture Committee, they ESPECIALLY need to hear from you. To see if your Senator is on the Agriculture Committee, go to the Senate Agriculture Committee page at <http://agriculture.senate.gov/>. Your Senators' contact information can be found by calling the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121.

These quick phone calls will take only a few minutes of your time, but could make a huge impact on whether Farm to School programs benefit from the 2007 Farm Bill. Thank you for making your voice heard!

Steph Larsen is the Policy Organizer for the Community Food Security Coalition. To learn more about what you can do, visit <http://www.foodsecurity.org/policy.html>.