



NATIONAL
FARM to SCHOOL
NETWORK



NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE COALITION

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Farm to School Act of 2021 Will Support Child Nutrition Programs and Local Food Systems In Rebuilding 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., April 22, 2021 – Today, a bipartisan group of Senate leaders introduced the *Farm to School Act of 2021* which will support our nation's schools, farmers and communities in building back equitably from the Covid-19 pandemic. The bill, sponsored by Senators [Patrick Leahy \(D-VT\)](#), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), and Susan Collins (R-ME), 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. A similar bill (H.R. 1768) was [introduced in the House](#) by Representatives Stacey Plaskett (D-VI), Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) and Alma Adams (D-NC) in March.

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.

"The *Farm to School Act of 2021* couldn't come at a more necessary time. 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, while helping our country build a more resilient and equitable food system," said **Karen Spangler, Policy Director with National Farm to School Network**.

"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, as introduced in the Senate, will also: increase the maximum grant award to \$500,000; 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.

National Farm to School Network and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition 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>.