



NATIONAL  
FARM to SCHOOL  
NETWORK



NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURE COALITION

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**Contacts:**

Anna Mullen  
National Farm to School Network  
[anna@farmtoschool.org](mailto:anna@farmtoschool.org) / (515) 210-2483

Wes King  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
[press@sustainableagriculture.net](mailto:press@sustainableagriculture.net)

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

*National Farm to School Network and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition welcome this legislation, which will make it easier for school meal programs to purchase from local farmers and producers*

Washington, DC, April 28, 2021 – Today, a bipartisan group of congressional leaders took an important step towards making it easier for schools to source locally grown, locally raised, and locally caught food and farm products for school meals. The [\*Kids Eat Local Act\*](#), introduced by Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representatives Chellie Pingree (D-ME), Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), Josh Harder (D-CA), and Alma Adams (D-NC), would help break down barriers between school food purchasers and family farmers and food producers by simplifying local purchasing guidelines for school meal programs.

“For years, we have heard from our school partners that they are eager and ready to prioritize incorporating more local food in school meals. The *Kids Eat Local Act* directly addresses schools' need for greater flexibility to purchase local foods from the farmers right in their own communities,” said **Karen Spangler, Policy Director with National Farm to School Network**. “This flexibility is especially crucial right now, as schools, farmers and local economies build back from the pandemic. The *Kids Eat Local Act* is a common-sense change toward ensuring fresh, healthy food for students, providing new market opportunities for farmers, and strengthening local economies.”

“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. 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,” said **Wes King, Senior Policy Specialist with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition**. “This legislation will be welcome news to farmers across the country, as they work to recover from the pandemic and rebuild markets.”

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.

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