


May 26, 2023

The Honorable Toni Atkins
President pro Tempore
California State Senate

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker of the Assembly
California State Assembly

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
California State Senate

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
California State Assembly

The Honorable Josh Becker
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee #2
California State Senate

The Honorable Steve Bennett
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #3
California State Assembly

**RE: Maintaining Farm to School Grant Program Funding in Budget – SUPPORT**

Dear Legislative and Budget leaders,

The California Department of Food and Agriculture's Farm to School Incubator Grant program helps realize the full potential of School Meals for All with freshly-prepared, locally-grown, and sustainably produced school meals that prepare students to learn and succeed. Farm to school increases purchases from California's $4 billion school food industry that go to local farmers and communities. **Our coalition respectfully requests your support for maintaining $60 million in funding for the Farm to School Incubator Grant Program from the 2022-23 budget, instead of cutting the program as proposed in the Assembly budget.** We appreciate that the Assembly Budget Plan includes funding for many essential programs that advance healthy, sustainable, and equitable food systems, including School Meals for All, organic transition, and community food hubs. Together with Farm to School, these programs ensure each individual initiative's success.

Funding for Farm to School will increase the resiliency of local food supply chains and provide fresh, healthy food to California students. Lack of access to healthy food is exacerbated by socio-economic

status and is most prevalent in low-income communities of color.[i] On a fundamental level, the Farm to School program can counter racial and ethnic disparities that exist in our food system. It expands educational opportunities that support lifelong habits that lead to healthier lives, which should not be contingent upon the economic status of a child's family. Increased investment in local and sustainably produced foods could benefit farmers most in need of assistance, including California's smaller-sized and disadvantaged farmers, who often are farmers of color.

The Farm to School Incubator Grant program: increases local food procurement, especially from California's organic and historically underserved producers; (2) educates students in classrooms and cafeterias; and (3) provides experiential learning in school gardens, agriculture programs, and culinary programs. By creating and implementing learning and education programs, the Farm to School program can transform students' lives and help address the public health crises of food insecurity and obesity.

The Farm to School Incubator Grant program also:

**Strengthens local economies and supports California farmers, providing a significant return on investment**: School food in California is a $4 billion dollar industry, and school cafeterias can often be the largest "restaurant" in town. By directing more of this investment to local farmers, schools can help support thriving local economies and food producers with every dollar they invest generating between $1.03-$2.40 of economic activity.[ii]

**Prepares students to succeed academically**: Students consume 35-50% of their daily calories at school[iii,iv] and studies have shown that kids who eat healthy food are better prepared to succeed academically.[v]

**Reduces food waste**: With ongoing disruptions in the supply chain, these local purchases can make the difference between the food being put to good use and going to waste. Students also respond well to food that is fresh,[vi] reducing food waste.

We urge you to reconsider cuts to this important program and maintain the full $60 million that was allocated in last year's budget.

Respectfully,

Kat Taylor
Co-Founder, **TomKat Ranch**
Principal, **Office of Kat Taylor**

Alexa Norstad
Executive Director, **Center for Ecoliteracy**



Arnold Sowell Jr.
Executive Director, **NextGen California**



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Rebecca Ward
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Samuel Greenlee
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National Farm to School Network

Laetitia Benador
California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)

Lena Brook
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

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California Wheat Commission

Michelle Oppen
Oakland Unified School District

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Anna Knight
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Diana Carrillo
Central School District

Jean Aitken
Pajaro Valley Unified School District

Mara Fleishman
Chef Ann Foundation

Lacey Piper
Rio School District

Daniel Cappello
Desert Sands Unified School District

Emily Cowdrey
Riverbank High School

Ashley Rouse
Edible Schoolyard Project

Erin Primer
San Luis Coastal Unified School District

Amy Haessly
Fallbrook Union Elementary School District

Lauren Thomas
San Miguel Joint Union School District

Nora Stewart
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Moises Plascencia
Santa Ana Unified School District

Amy Hedrick-Farr
Santa Cruz City Schools

Karen Cowe
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Miriam Limov
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Christopher LeBoa
UC Berkeley Health Students for Climate Action

Claire Tuohey-Mote
Slow Money San Luis Obispo

Ksenia Glenn
Upland Unified School District

Kat Soltanmorad
Tahoe Truckee Unified School District

Cc:

Jennifer Siebel Newsom, First Partner of the State of California

The Honorable Karen Ross, California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary

Members of the Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee

Members of the Assembly Committee on Budget

Christine Aurre, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom

Joe Shea, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom

Joe Stephenshaw, Director, California Department of Finance

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[i] http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf

[ii] Christensen, L., Jablonski, B.B.R., Stephens, L., and Joshi, A. 2018. Evaluating the economic impacts of farm-to-school procurement: An approach for primary and secondary financial data collection of producers selling to schools. Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development 8(3): 73-94. Available at: https://www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj/article/view/656

[iii] Briefel, R.R. et al (2009). "School Food Environments and Practices Affect Dietary Behaviors of US School Children." Journal of the American Dietary Association, 109 (2 Suppl.), pp. 91–107

[iv] Action for Healthy Kids (2012). The Learning Connection: What You Need to Know to Ensure Your Kids Are Healthy and Ready to Learn, p. 8. www.actionforhealthykids.org/storage/documents/pdfs/afhk_thelearningconnection_digitaledition.pdf.

[v] Center for Ecoliteracy. 2014. Making the Case for Healthy, Freshly Prepared School Meals. Available at: https://www.ecoliteracy.org/download/making-case-healthy-freshly-prepared-school-meals

[vi] Q. Moore, H.L. Hulsey, and M. Ponza (2009). "Factors Associated with School Meal Participation and the Relationship between Different Participation Measures." Contractor and Cooperator Report 53 (Washington, DC: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Cited in Food Research and Action Center (2010). "How Improving Federal Nutrition Program Access and Quality Work Together to Reduce Hunger and Promote Healthy Eating," p. 4. www.frac.org/pdf/CNR01_qualityandaccess.pdf.