

# *NEW YORK GROWN FOOD FOR NEW YORK KIDS*

November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
Executive Chamber  
State Capitol  
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Thank you for your leadership in expanding access to healthy food grown and raised in New York for K-12 schools to purchase and serve to our children. At a time when childhood obesity rates have reached new highs and farmers and rural communities are struggling economically, the commitments you made in the 2018 “No Student Goes Hungry” initiative, including creating a New York Grown Purchasing Incentive for K-12 schools and doubling the state’s investment in the Farm to School grants program, have the potential to improve our students’ health and academic performance while at the same time boosting farm income and reviving rural economies in New York State. Additionally, programs that you have championed such as New York Thursdays and New York Grown and Certified have contributed significantly to the growth and success of Farm to School programs across the State.

However, barriers remain for schools that are seeking to purchase more foods from New York farms to serve to our children. Addressing these barriers will unlock the economic development and public health potential of the New York Grown Purchasing Incentive. As a first step this year, modest investments and simple legal changes can be made to help students enjoy more farm fresh New York grown food in school cafeterias. Therefore, we respectfully recommend the following actions over the next year:

## Continue Nation Leading Program to Help K-12 Schools Purchase and Serve more Fresh, New York Grown Food to Students

The New York Grown Food Purchasing Incentive created and funded in the FY2018-19 New York state budget is now the most generous incentive in the country to encourage in-state food purchasing by K-12 schools. In order to maximize participation from schools, which are already in the menu planning stage for the 2019-20 school year, we recommend:

- Continuing to fund this incentive as an entitlement program in the FY2019-20 state budget to provide a reimbursement of 25 cents per lunch meal to schools that annually spend at least 30% of their lunch dollars on items grown or produced in New York State.

- Releasing guidelines from New York State Department of Education by the end of November 2018 on how schools can qualify for the increased reimbursement incentive and ensuring that guidelines detail a process that is both user-friendly for K-12 schools, and stringent enough that it will have a measurable effect on New York farm sales. The overall spending on local products should include any products that are purchased by the district including via grants, reimbursements, or allocations.
- Providing ongoing, statewide trainings for schools on how to follow these guidelines and procure New York grown food.

### Expand Access to and Supply of Food Grown by New York Farmers that is Available for Purchase by all K-12 Schools

Administering the New York Grown Food Purchasing Incentive alongside the Farm to School Grants program is critical in helping to increase the ability of schools to purchase and handle foods grown and produced in New York State. The popular Farm to School grants program has begun to make the investments necessary to grow Farm to School programs by funding the hiring of Farm to School coordinators, purchase of equipment, and training opportunities for school food service workers on how to use farm fresh products. Regional Farm to School coordinators in the North Country and Southern Tier supported by these grants have been instrumental in helping schools purchase local food by assisting with planning, providing necessary technical assistance, aggregating purchasing to increase buying power, and fostering relationships to connect farms with schools.

Continuing to support these activities, as well as investing in the capacity throughout the supply chain to aggregate, process, and transport farm products into schools will help unlock the full potential of the New York Grown Purchasing Incentive while also building market pathways for other institutions to purchase local foods. Additionally, the ability to trace food and raw ingredients back to their source of origin will be essential to ensure that the New York Grown Purchasing Incentive has the integrity necessary to realize its public health and economic development goals. Over the long term, investing in a coordinated, statewide network of regional coordinators and in the further infrastructure development will be critical to unlock the potential of the New York Grown Purchasing Incentive. Over the next year, we suggest:

- Appropriating \$3 million for the Farm to School grants program in the FY2019-20 State Budget to meet the current demand for this popular and successful program, and creating a new category within the Farm to School grants for statewide training and support which could be used to hire regional coordinators, deliver broader statewide Farm to School training, and/or build other regional efforts;
- Building on the state's investment in supply chain infrastructure by creating a \$5 million Farm to School Capital Project Grants Fund through REDCs for school districts, farmers, food hubs, food banks, and processors to invest in capital projects that support minimal processing and packaging, transportation, storage, cooking and/or source verification of New York food products; and

- Amending State Finance Law to increase the discretionary purchasing threshold for school districts purchasing local food to \$75,000, and providing easy-to-understand guidance and ongoing statewide trainings on how to use informal procurement methods to purchase New York Grown food.

Give a New Generation of Students Hands-on Food and Nutrition Education through Eating and Enjoying New York Grown Foods

Children choose and eat more fresh foods in school meals if they are directly involved in growing or preparing them, or if they learn about these foods in an experiential way. Nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, school gardens, farm visits and food tastings are just a few of the activities that New York schools undertake to teach kids about farms and the benefits of healthy eating; lessons that will serve them for a lifetime. Further, when children are more fully engaged in learning about the farm fresh foods they are eating, they bring these lessons home with them, consuming more fresh fruits and vegetables with their families. We recommend that the State of New York promote more of these activities in schools by:

- Creating a Model New York State School Wellness Policy supporting Farm to School that promotes locally-sourced school meals and links them with increased experiential education such as hands-on lessons, taste tests, school gardens activities, local farm visits, and family engagement.

New York has a tremendous opportunity to build on recent success and continue to lead the nation in increasing access to healthy meals for our schoolchildren while creating substantial economic opportunities for our State's farmers. Thank you for all of your leadership in these areas, and for your consideration of these actions at this critical moment in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

*See attached list of signatories*

cc: Patrick Hooker, Deputy Secretary for Food and Agriculture  
Jamie Frank, Assistant Secretary for Education  
Richard Ball, Commissioner, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets  
Mary Ellen Elia, Commissioner, New York State Department of Education

Michael Gulino, NYS Coordinator, Action for Healthy Kids

Joshua Bakelaar, Local Economies and Agriculture Director, Adirondack North Country Association

Chris Clapper, Superintendent, Alexandria CSD

David Haight, New York State Director, American Farmland Trust

Caitlin O'Brien, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association

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Renee St. Jacques, Assistant Director of Public Policy, New York Farm Bureau

Julie Tighe, President, New York League of Conservation Voters

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Carol DeNysschen, PhD, RD, MPH, CDN, FAND; President, New York State Academy of Nutrition and  
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Michael Borges, Executive Director, New York State Association of School Business Officials

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Bill Miller, President, New York State School Boards Association

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Julia Van Loon, President, Slate Foods-Red Barn Provisions, New York Beef in Schools

Rich Vergili, Chapter Co-Leader, Slow Food Hudson Valley

Kelly McGlinchey, Board Co-Chair, Slow Food NYC

Laura Luciano, Governor, Slow Food New York State

Jennifer John, Executive Director, The Sylvia Center

August Ruckdeschel, Chair, Suffolk County Food Policy Council

Patricia B. LaBarr, Superintendent, Watertown City School District

Wendy Siskin, Senior Program Director, Wellness in the Schools

Sue Bell, School Food Service Director, Wilson Central School District