

NEW YORK GROWN FOOD FOR NEW YORK KIDS

November 20th, 2020

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Thank you for working to keep New Yorkers safe and healthy amidst a pandemic that has changed our lives rapidly and radically. This pandemic revealed vulnerabilities inherent in our global food supply chain, underlined the importance of local farms to a resilient New York food supply, and highlighted improving diet as a critical public health intervention due to the more severe impacts people with diet-related disease face from COVID-19. For the past several years, your administration has committed to building Farm to School in New York, which supports our farms and the health of our kids, through the winning combination of a nation-leading purchasing incentive and the supportive Farm to School grants program. As we look to rebuild and address the issues the pandemic has both caused and revealed, Farm to School programs rise to the fore as an important way to do so in New York.

New York's Farm to School programs have the potential to generate nearly \$150 million in school spending on food from farms by 2024 with \$250 million in total economic impact, while supporting job creation and resilient local economies. Maintaining your commitment to these programs in the year ahead will help achieve this economic potential, providing our farmers with a source of economic stability at a time when so many have struggled with market uncertainty, supply chain breaks, and revenue losses. Farm to School programs also improve school meals—a key source of sustenance and nutrition for students, who consume half of their daily calories at school on average. Since the onset of the pandemic, unemployment and food insecurity rates in New York have risen drastically, and Black and Hispanic New Yorkers have been disproportionately impacted. Improving the quality of school meals through Farm to School is a key way to improve the diet and health outcomes of all kids when they need it most, no matter their socioeconomic status.

School food service professionals deserve enormous praise for their dedication, ingenuity, and tireless work to feed nutritious meals to thousands of students and their families during this pandemic, all while still supporting local farmers as much as possible. We recognize that the state faces steep new budget challenges, but the benefits of continuing to invest in Farm to School at this moment are central to the effort to keep New Yorkers healthy, and revitalize a strong resilient local farm and food economy. To achieve this, in the year ahead we ask that you please:

- Propose to maintain \$10 million for the Farm to School Incentive program for lunch in the SFY22 Executive Budget Proposal, while beginning to design a program for breakfast for the future;
- Propose to maintain \$1.5 million for the Farm to School grants program in the SFY22 Executive Budget Proposal, and sub-allocating \$500,000 of this funding to create a centrally coordinated Farm to School regional coordinator program to support schools in increasing local purchases;
- Amend GML §103 to simplify and increase the state small purchase threshold to \$250,000; and
- Sign S.8561A (Metzger)/A.10607 (Lupardo) into law to establish a Supply Chain Working Group.

Maintaining \$10 Million for Farm to School Incentive Lunch Program and Working to Add Breakfast

In the January 2020 Growing Opportunity report, American Farmland Trust found that with the right support 72% of K-12 schools were confident they could reach 30% spending of lunch dollars on New York grown food by 2024. This would inject \$150 million into the farm economy, generate nearly \$250 million in total economic impact statewide and increase access to fresh local food for 700,000 students. Schools most commonly reported buying products like fluid milk, cheese, and yogurt from New York farms, indicating that our dairy farmers will benefit most from this positive economic impact. Follow up research conducted in the summer of 2020 found that the pandemic did not slow this potential, and that *the rate of economic return from this program could be as high as \$3.46 for every dollar spent!*

However, schools reported barriers that, if left unaddressed, will curtail their ability to achieve this potential. This included the challenge of separating lunch and a lack of time and expertise to procure, prepare, and serve local foods. Keeping the program focused on lunch will also limit healthy local food kids have access to throughout the school day, and may create a mirage of increased K-12 spending at farms if schools simply shift local purchases made for other meals to lunch in order to qualify. We recognize that the state needs to make difficult budget decisions right now, so we ask that you:

- Maintain momentum by proposing \$10 million for the current program in the SFY22 Executive Budget Proposal; and
- Begin developing ways to incorporate breakfast into the program in the future modelled after the current program for lunch—for example by setting a local spending threshold schools need to meet for breakfast, and then reimbursing successful schools at a higher rate.

Incorporating breakfast will not only reduce the administrative burden of the program, but will increase access to local food for students throughout the school day and have a considerable economic impact—*current data suggests that if K-12 schools achieved 30% spending on breakfast, they would generate over \$78 million in annual farm spending and nearly \$112 million in additional economic impact.*

Maintaining \$1.5 million for Farm to School Grants Program, and Sub-Allocating \$500,000 to Create a Farm to School Regional Coordinator Program

Since the inception of the Farm to School grants program in 2015, interest and demand for these funds have grown, and now the training, job support, and equipment funding these grants provide have become critical to helping schools find the pathway to achieve 30% spending on New York grown foods. Demand for these funds in the last two grant years has been double what is available, and state funding for these activities that help schools increase local purchasing will be even more critical as schools face new budget shortfalls. In a tight budget year, we ask that you maintain funding for the farm to school grants program at \$1.5 million in the SFY22 Executive Budget Proposal so that it can continue to help schools work to achieve 30%.

Farm to School coordinators are a critical part of this support, and state investments into these positions could be better leveraged through the creation of a centrally coordinated program that puts a farm to school coordinator in every region of the state. Farm to school coordinators are uniquely able to help schools connect with farmers and overcome procurement, administrative, and food preparation barriers that currently hold them back. Further, this would create jobs across the state as *research shows that every farm to school job creates up to 2.35 more jobs in the local community.* To take a big step forward in providing the technical assistance that schools need, we recommend proposing to sub-allocate, in writing, \$500,000 of the Farm to School grant funds to create a farm to school coordinator program in the SFY22 executive budget.

Amending GML § 103 to Simplify and Increase the State Small Purchase Threshold to \$250,000

Another important pathway to supporting schools in increasing the amount they spend on local food is addressing the barriers created by procurement laws. Currently, schools need to follow a patchwork of local, state, and federal laws and regulations which were designed to ensure schools award contracts to the least-cost, most responsive vendor, but which were not designed with local purchases in mind.

Changing our state laws to increase the state small purchase threshold is a costless way to enable more schools to use informal, less time-intensive procurement methods when spending higher sums of money—helping them increase support to farmers and motivating them to work to reach 30%.

In the SFY21 budget, the state took a step forward by increasing the overall small purchase threshold amount, but retained the complicated system it is embedded in. State GML §103 currently requires schools to calculate their own small purchase threshold using a complicated formula, and then apply to NYSED for a waiver each time they want to make a small purchase above a certain amount. Data collected this summer reveals that this system is confusing and underused: 68% of schools reported that they didn't know what the state small purchase threshold amount was, only 23% of schools reported making small purchases to buy local food, and NYSED reported no schools have applied for waivers. We recommend the state amend GML §103 to simplify and raise the state small purchase threshold to match the federal threshold of \$250,000 as an easy and costless way to help schools increase spending on local food and unlock the economic potential of this program in New York.

Signing S.8561A (Metzger)/A.10607 (Lupardo) into Law to Establish a Supply Chain Working Group

Finally, schools reported supply chain related barriers, including that current vendors don't carry local farm products and that there isn't enough availability of New York grown food for purchase in the winter. Schools also reported a lack of time to prepare farm-fresh food as a big barrier to reaching 30%. Further, it will be very difficult for any one farm to supply New York City's schools without aggregation—and helping New York farmers enter this market would be groundbreaking. To better coordinate the farm to school supply chain for success, we need to identify gaps in the current system, and then make investments to fill them—including increasing value-added processing and aggregation. This effort will also contribute to building a more resilient local food supply chain that can withstand future disruptions. As a first step, we ask that you sign S.8561A (Metzger)/A.10607 (Lupardo), which passed in both houses this summer, and which would establish a supply chain working group to identify gaps in farm to school and other local food supply chains. Out of this, we can learn where investments need to be made so that local supply chains are more stable and resilient in the future.

Thank you again for your leadership in keeping New Yorkers safe and healthy during this pandemic, and all that you continue to do to support our farms and our schools in purchasing and serving more healthy local food. With your commitment to the strategic actions and investments above, we can continue to build farm to school to the benefit of the economy, public health, and future resilience. Thank you for considering these actions now and in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

See attached list of signatures

Cc: Richard Ball, Commissioner, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
Betty Rosa, Acting Commissioner, New York State Department of Education
Senator Jen Metzger, Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee
Senator Shelley Mayer, Chair, Senate Education Committee

Senator Rachel May, Chair, Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

Senator John Liu, Chair, New York City Education Committee

Senator Robert Jackson, Chair, Committee on Cities

Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Chair, Assembly Agriculture Committee

Assemblymen Michael Benedetto, Chair, Assembly Education Committee

Connie Pickett, Vice President of Communications and Strategic Initiatives, Adirondack Foundation

Kate Fish, Executive Director, Adirondack North Country Association

Brittany Christenson, Executive Director, AdkAction

Anita Trautwein, Food Service Director, Alden Central School

Samantha Levy, New York Policy Manager, American Farmland Trust

Andrew Doell, Superintendent, Bloomfield CSD

Mark Bordeau & Julie Raway, Senior Director of Food Services & Registered Dietician, Broome-Tioga
BOCES

Shirly Evans & Katie Denning, Cook Managers, Buffalo Board of Education Foodservice

Lauri Broady, Director of School Nutrition, Canajoharie CSD and Fort Plain CSD

Jamie Farr, Superintendent, Canandaigua City SD

Moira Tidball, Co-Owner, Canoga Creek Farm and Conservancy

Amy Klein, Chief Executive Officer, Capital Roots

Wes Gillingham, Associate Director, Catskill Mountainkeeper

Phoebe Schreiner, Executive Director, Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship

Kathleen A. Curtis, Executive Director, Clean and Healthy New York

Erika Rincon, Farm to School Coordinator, Common Ground Farm

Barbara Albi, Food Service Director, Depew UFSD

Heather Meehan, Outreach & Education Manager and Farm to School Coordinator, East End Food
Institute

Ally Miller, Institutional Giving Manager, Edible Schoolyard NYC

Gabrielle Blavatsky, Policy Director, Equity Advocates

Rocci Aguirre, Director of Conservation, Essex Farm Institute

Nicholas Buess, Associate Director Mobilization and Policy, Food Bank for New York City

Andrew Barrett, New York Program Director, Food Corps

Nick Weith, Food Service Director, Forestville CSD

Anne Campbell, Wellness Director, Genesee Valley Central School

Gerald Barker, Director of Child Nutrition, Geneva City SD

Lauren French, Superintendent, Gouverneur Central School

Anne Rich, Director of Food and Nutrition Services, Hamburg Central Schools

Taylor C. Washington, Farm to School Program Manager, Headwater Food Hub

Jorian Wekin, Director, Hub on the Hill

Todd M. Erling, Executive Director, Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp

Tami Augugliaro, Food Service Director, Lancaster CSD

Julia McCarthy, Interim Deputy Director, Lauri M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Teachers College at Columbia University

Renée St. Jacques, Associate Director of Public Policy, New York Farm Bureau

Michael Puntillo, President, New York Juice Company

Jessica L. Garay, Public Policy Coordinator, New York State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Domenico Barile Jr., Food Service Director, Niagara Wheatfield CSD

Emily Gartenberg, Program Associate, No Kid Hungry New York

Jennifer Martin, Executive Director, New York School Nutrition Association

Tom Tatum, Deputy Director of Government Relations, New York State Association of School Business
Officials

Dana Platin, President, New York State Parent Teacher Association

Mark-Antonio Smith, Director, The Nurtury for Kids LLC

Kate Dorr, School Nutrition Director, Oneida Herkimer Madison BOCES

Myra Trumbull, Food Service Director, Oppenheim Epratah St. Johnsville CSD

Madeline Henriquez, Interim Executive Director, Poughkeepsie Farm Project

John C. Salo, Executive Director, Rural Health Network of South Central New York

David A. Little, Esq., Executive Director, Rural Schools Association of New York State

Julia Van Loon, President, Slate Foods, Inc.

Adam Snell and Kathy Bishop, Food Service Director & Food Service Manager, South Seneca CSD

August Ruckdeschel, Chair, Suffolk County Food Policy Council

Rosemarie Hanson, Food Service Director, Trumansburg Schools

Matthew Doris, Food Service Director, Tuckahoe Common School

Nancy Easton, Executive Director, Wellness in the Schools

Susan Bell, Food Service Director, Wilson CSD

Kathleen E. Schuessler, Superintendent, Wyoming CSD