

NEW YORK GROWN FOOD FOR NEW YORK KIDS

Memorandum of Support: S. 4561(Hinchey)/A. 5404(Lupardo)

The New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition strongly supports S.4561 (Hinchey)/A.5404 (Lupardo). Passing this bill will correct administrative discrepancies between the state and federal school meals programs caused by the pandemic, and allow New York grown foods purchased by school districts for all school lunches served during the 2020-21 school year to count towards the Farm to School incentive program, *as set forth by the legislature in the SFY21 budget.*

Background: Why New York Schools, Farmers, and Kids Need this Bill Now

To safeguard the health of students and school food workers during the pandemic, the USDA allowed all schools a special waiver to serve lunch through federal summer meals programs during the 2020-21 school year. These schools became “emergency food responders,” providing safe, nutritious, and free lunch meals to kids and their families through either the USDA’s Summer Seamless Option (SSO), an extension of the National School Lunch Program, or the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) program. Unfortunately, the State Education Department determined that because the budget named the National School Lunch Program in the language enabling the incentive program, purchases of New York grown food served through SSO counted towards qualifying schools for the Farm to School incentive while identical purchases made for meals served by schools using SFSP did not. This rendered at least half of schools who use SFSP ineligible for the, and potentially decreased access to healthy local food for hundreds of thousands of kids during a public health crisis. While steps have been taken to correct this issue by state agencies and the legislature, it will not be fully fixed without changing the enabling language for the incentive program, as set forth in this bill.

Passing this Bill helps Schools and Farmers and Supports the Health of Kids when they Need it Most

The State’s Farm to School incentive program is a national model, spurring all schools to increase purchases of food from New York farms and serve this healthy, fresh, local food to kids at schools. During the pandemic, farms—particularly dairy farms—and schools alike have struggled with revenue losses, and public health interventions to improve nutrition have been spotlighted as critical to our overall health. We need the Farm to School incentive now more than ever to aid schools in continuing to purchase food from New York farms by reliably increasing their state reimbursement when they are successful. At the same time, this program will bolster the health of kids from all socioeconomic strata by increasing access to healthy, fresh, local food at school, where kids consume about half of their daily calories. And finally, the state’s Farm to School Incentive program supports the relationships between schools and farmers that are key to creating new markets and investing in local food system resilience.

By passing this legislation and funding this program at \$10 million in the SFY22 state budget, the legislature can help New York build better and stronger local food supply chains, help New York’s farmers succeed, and provide a critical public health intervention for some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers – our children.

The New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition Thanks the Legislature for their Attention to this Important Matter and Urges Swift Passage of this Bill!

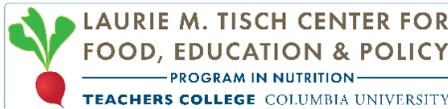
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