

# NEW YORK GROWN FOOD FOR NEW YORK KIDS

November 19, 2021

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

Thank you for your commitment and leadership as Lieutenant Governor and now Governor to the wellbeing of our kids, our communities, and our farm and food economy. We are a coalition of farm, school, food, anti-hunger, environmental, and nutrition groups and professionals writing today to ask you to take action in the SFY23 Executive budget proposal to unleash the transformative power of farm to school in New York.

Farm to school is an investment in the future of our children's health, the state's farm economy, and the resilient local and regional supply chains we need. The COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted New Yorkers with pre-existing diet-related diseases, also highlighted weaknesses in the current food systems that triggered global supply chain failures and are now leading to rising food costs and difficulty procuring food. This has impacted our schools' ability to feed our kids; an August 2021 survey of New York school districts revealed that 58% are experiencing food supply chain disruptions.

The good news is that the state of New York has a nation-leading farm to school reimbursement and farm to school grants program which, together, can help more schools reliably purchase healthy, local food to feed to kids. Many districts in New York, including [Buffalo](#), [Niagara Falls](#), Hamburg, and Wilson, are turning to local farmers to help them navigate the current supply chain disruptions and serve kids more healthy local food. These farm to school activities also have enormous economic development potential, directing millions of dollars annually towards supporting jobs and existing and new farm and food businesses. [Recent research](#) has revealed that, with continued commitment to their improvement, New York's Farm to School programs have the potential to generate over \$300 million in school spending on food from New York farmers by 2024 with up to half a billion dollars in total economic impact - a return on investment of \$3.50 for every taxpayer dollar spent.

So far, the Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive has generated only \$13 million of this potential spending, and despite their immense dedication, ingenuity, and perseverance, New York school food service professionals need additional support to fully unlock the transformative potential of farm to school. [AFT research](#) reveals that 75% of schools believe they could reach 30% spending on local food by 2025 with the right support, but the incentive program will be unable to reach its full potential without administrative and program design changes. We urge you to unlock the transformative power of these programs in the SFY23 Executive Budget Proposal by:

- Advancing bold comprehensive Article VII farm to school legislation to improve and codify the farm to school incentive and grants programs into law, and to update state procurement law; and
- Including strong funding for state Farm to School incentive and grants programs and increasing agency staff responsible for administering these programs.

## **Introducing Comprehensive Legislation to Advance a Bold Vision for Farm to School in New York**

New York's incentive and grants programs have positioned New York as a national Farm to School leader by rewarding schools that spend at least 30% of their lunch budget on foods from New York farmers with quadruple their per lunch meal reimbursement, and by providing them with some of the support they need to get there. However, research has shown that the separation of lunch from other school meals, implementation challenges, and an oversubscribed farm to school grants program have stifled widespread participation in the incentive program since its inception three years ago. While it has generated substantial interest among schools, there has been only marginal growth in successful participation. We ask that you take bold action this year and introduce comprehensive farm to school legislation to improve and make these programs permanent in order to realize the full transformative power of farm to school. This legislation should include:

- Language to change the incentive program so that schools that spend 30% of *total* reimbursable meal costs on New York grown foods served at breakfast, lunch, or snack are eligible to receive an additional 30 cents in reimbursement; up to 11 additional cents per breakfast meal served and 19 cents per lunch meal served. This minimal added reimbursement and expansion of eligible meals will address current administrative challenges, empower schools across the state to increase purchasing of New York grown food, and ensure more kids have access to healthy local food throughout the school day;
- A public comment process to ensure collaborative and timely development of program implementation rules to restore trust in the program, and provide the consistency and predictability schools need to participate;
- Language to codify the highly popular state farm to school grants program which provides schools with funding for the infrastructure, training, and support they need to procure more local food; and
- Amendments to GML §103 to simplify and raise the state small purchase threshold to match the federal threshold of \$250,000 for school food purchases. This is an easy and costless way to help schools increase spending on local food.

## **Advancing Strong Funding for Farm to School Incentive, Grants Program, and Administrative Staff**

The benefits of continuing to invest in Farm to School at this moment are central to the efforts to keep New Yorkers healthy and to build a strong local farm and food economy more resilient to the shocks experienced during the height of the pandemic. Despite the challenges they currently face, school food service directors are still dedicated to growing their farm to school programs and pursuing the Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive. Continued budgetary support for this program is key to helping schools continue to purchase more healthy local foods, even in the face of budgetary constraints and rising food costs. In the SFY23 Executive Budget proposal we respectfully request that you maintain \$10 million in funding for the Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive, but change the program structure to provide 30 cents to schools that spend 30% of *all reimbursable school meals* on New York food products to mirror the legislative language requested above.

Since the inception of the Farm to School grants program in 2015, interest and demand for these funds have grown, and the training, job support, and equipment funding these grants provide have become instrumental to helping schools build the on-ramp to achieve 30% spending on New York grown foods. Demand for these funds in the last three 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 continued budget shortfalls and supply chain disruptions. Farm to School coordinators, essential to help schools connect with farmers and overcome procurement, administrative, and food

preparation barriers currently holding them back, are also funded through this program. Last year, a Regional Farm to School Coordinator Program was created as a partnership between NYSDAM and Cornell with the goal of ensuring a regional coordinator was available to every school in the state. These coordinators are already making a difference in many of our communities, and we encourage your administration to expand this program to provide statewide coverage – especially since research shows that every farm to school job creates up to 2.35 more jobs in the local community. In the SFY23 Executive Budget proposal we ask that you

- Increase funding for the Farm to School grants program to \$3 million to meet demand for critical capacity building grants and to continue to fund the Regional Coordinator program at \$500,000 so schools can reach 30%, ensuring that any increases do not reduce funding for other critical agricultural programs.

The New York Department of Agriculture and Markets is an instrumental partner in both administering these programs and engaging New York farmers and producers to work with schools and other institutional purchasers. Schools have repeatedly identified the challenges they face identifying farmers or vendors they can purchase New York grown food from, and NYSDAM is working with Cornell Cooperative Extension, American Farmland Trust, the New York School Nutrition Association, and many other organizations across the state to meet those needs. In the SFY23 Executive Budget proposal we ask that you

- Add 1 additional FTE staff to the Department of Agriculture and Markets to expand work building local supply chains and supporting New York farmers in selling to schools.

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, Commissioner, New York State Education Department  
Senator Michelle Hinchey, 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 1  
Senator Jeremy Cooney, Chair, Committee on Cities 2  
Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Chair, Assembly Agriculture Committee  
Assemblyman Michael Benedetto, Chair, Assembly Education Committee  
Assemblyman Edward Braunstein, Chair, Assembly Cities Committee  
Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, Chair, Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

Erica Goodman, New York Regional Director, American Farmland Trust

Tom Tatun, Director of Government Relations, Association of School Business Officials - New York

Kris Wicks, Food Service Director, Attica Central School District

Karen Pagano, Food Service Director, Beacon City School District

Keonna Yearwood, Farm to School Co-Director Brady Faith Center

Judiann Carmack-Fayyaz, Educator, Farm to School, Bridgehampton UFSD

Annie Hudock and Julie Raway, Senior Food Service Director and Registered Dietitian, Broome-Tioga

#### BOCES

Michelle Richer, Food Service Director, Brushton-Moira CSD

Bridget O'Brien Wood, Director of Food Service, Buffalo Public Schools

Amy Klein, Chief Executive Officer, Capital Roots

Lonny Schaefer, Owner, Catskill Cattle Company

Wes Gillingham, Associate Director, Catskill Mountainkeeper

Phoebe Schreiner, Executive Director, Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE)

Jeffery Zuercher, Food Service Director, Charter School for Applied Technologies

Amanda White, Food Service Supervisor, Clyde-Savannah CSD

Ribka Getachew, Director of the NY Good Food Purchasing Program Campaign, Community Food

#### Advocates

Robert Edwards, Superintendent, Cortland Enlarged City SD

Kate Fullam and Miranda Capriotti, Director and Outreach & Education Manager, East End Food Institute

Vicky Williams, Cafeteria Manager, Ellicottville CSD

Gabrielle Blavatsky, Policy Director, Equity Advocates

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

Randi Quackenbush, Director of Community Impact, Food Bank of the Southern Tier

Hayley Klein, FoodCorps New Jersey/New York Program Associate Director, FoodCorps

Carly Prusher, Director of School Meals, Glen Cove CSD

Heather Hollis, Food Service Director, Gouverneur CSD

James Gounaris, Director of Food and Nutrition Services, Great Neck UFSD

Anne Rich, Food Service Director, Hamburg Central Schools

Chris Hartman, President, Headwater Food Hub

Claire Barnett, Executive Director, Healthy Schools Network

Thomas Turck, Superintendent of Schools, Homer CSD

Jori Wekin, Director, Hub on the Hill, Inc

Todd Erling, Executive Director, Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp

Sarah Brannen, Associate Director, Hudson Valley Farm Hub

Sherry Tomasky, Director of Communications and Public Affairs, Hunger Solutions New York

Dave Dunn, Food Service Director, Kingston City SD

Tami Augugliaro, Director of Food Service, Lancaster CSD

Jenny Clark, Co-leader Farm Club, Marion Elementary School

Patrick Brady, Superintendent, Massena CSD

Melinda McCool, Superintendent, McGraw CSD

Cynthia Haskins, President and CEO, New York Apple Association

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

Patrick McClellan, Policy Director, New York League of Conservation Voters

Donna Riviello and Jennifer Martin, President and Executive Director, New York School Nutrition  
Association

Domenico Barile Jr, Food Service Director, Niagara Wheatfield CSD

Rachel Sabella, Director, No Kid Hungry New York

Katie Baildon, Policy Coordinator, Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York

Mark-Antonio Smith, Founder & CEO, The Nurtury for Kids, LLC

Jessica Garay, Public Policy Coordinator, NYS Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Sara Wall Bollinger, Director for Strategic Development, NYS Association for Rural Health

Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, Executive Director, NYS Parent Teacher Association

Brian Fessler, Director of Governmental Relations, NYS School Boards Association

Christine Hutchinson, Director, Our Core

Robert R. Ike, Ed.D., Superintendent, Palmyra-Macedon CSD

Maureen Branagan, Director of Child Nutrition, Rocky Point UFSD

Mark Bordeau, Executive Director, Rural Health Network of South Central NY

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

Ruth Pino, Food Service Manager, Saranac Lake CSD

Jackie Leaf, Executive Director, Seven Valleys Health Coalition

Kerrie Johnston and Maryssa Schlough, Assistant Superintendent and Farm to School Coordinator,  
Sidney CSD

Julia Van Loon, President/Founder, Slate Foods, Inc.

Laura Luciano, Slow Food Governor for NY State - Downstate, Slow Food New York State

Regan G. Kiembock, Director of Food Services, Southampton UFSD

Barbara Trybuskiewicz, Food Service Director, St. John the Baptist School (Alden, NY)

August Ruckdeschel, Chair, Suffolk County Food Policy Council

Kristi Sajdak, Food Service Director, Sweet Home CSD

Maura Ackerman, Facilitator, Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance

Jean Ecker, Director of Child Nutrition, Three Village CSD

Rosemary Beardsley, Food Service Director, Trumansburg CSD

Matthew Doris, Food Service Director, Tuckahoe Common School

Nancy Easton, Executive Director, Wellness in the Schools

Sue Whalen, Food Service Director, West Seneca CSD

Susan Bell, Food Service Director, Wilson CSD