

February 28, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), we are writing to express our support for SF 2158/HF 2043 Farm to School and Early Care bills. These measures provide grant support, coordination, technical assistance, and evaluation of Farm to School procurement initiatives across the state.

Farm to School is often described as a WIN-WIN-WIN for students, farmers, and the economy. Minneapolis Public Schools has been working at the nexus of Farm to School since 2013 and can attest to its benefits. Each year, we partner with local farms to raise produce, protein, and grains that are utilized in MPS meals. This local sourcing gives students access to fresh, flavorful meals. It diversifies marketing channels for our local farm partners and generates increased agricultural sales in our region.

For students - During the 2022-203 school year, Minneapolis Public Schools will purchase 150,000 pounds of locally grown fresh produce (38 different varieties) for service to our students. We also partner with local livestock farmers to purchase MN-raised poultry and beef. Our Farm to School procurement also includes locally grown grains and dried beans.

As students enjoy these delicious locally grown foods, we also seek to provide them with education and context about our regional agricultural economy and the people who grow their food. At MPS, Farm to School menu items spark curiosity and connections and help students to develop lifelong skills in healthy eating and food preparation.

For farmers - Schools represent an incredible market opportunity for farmers to grow and diversify their businesses. MPS is able to purchase large volumes of locally grown and locally raised foods, including cosmetically imperfect "seconds". We've also worked with our farm partners to develop recipes featuring cuts of protein that are otherwise difficult to market, creating an affordable ingredient for MPS and a new market opportunity for the farmer.

Farmers who sell to MPS emphasize how our program provides them with meaningful business they can count on, year after year. Since we started our Farm to School program in 2013, MPS has seen partner farms purchase machinery, build new pack sheds, and expand into additional wholesale markets with support from Farm to School sales.

For the local economy - Farm to School in Minnesota has the potential to generate millions in revenue for Minnesota farmers and agricultural economies- farmers who shop in their local communities, eat at local restaurants, buy farm inputs, employ neighbors, contribute to the vitality of their communities. Farm to School sales have built significant capacity within MN's local agriculture economy. That capacity allowed farmers to step up and fill supply chain gaps during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The positive impact of Farm to School programming has been amplified by past state support for Farm to School grants and capacity building. School districts of all sizes benefit from technical support for planning and implementation. Purchasing local, unprocessed ingredients often requires additional time, knowledge and equipment. MPS's Farm to School efforts have been bolstered by these strategic investments. As such, we write to share our strong support for HF 2043 and SF 2158.



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