



April 20, 2021

Dear Minnesota decision makers,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to support increases to the Farm to School budget in the Agriculture Omnibus Bill, as proposed by H.F. 1940 (Miller) & S.F. 1760 (Goggin).

Our farmers, schools and children are facing an urgent crisis due to the ongoing pandemic, and they need your investment.

Farmers have lost business and faced dire uncertainty of their sales this year. According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, net cash farm income is expected to fall 7.5% in 2021, the first decrease since 2016. This will be driven by a marked decrease in direct government payments related to COVID disaster release and supplemental income payments. Providing new direct markets is one way to ease the transition back to a post- Covid economy.

Farm to School is good for farmers. Farmers growing foods for their local communities is a rapidly growing important area of Minnesota agriculture that needs public support and investment to expand markets. Farm to School gives farmers a large, stable, predictable market that they can plan for in advance. It also allows them to grow value added crops that boost the bottom line and keep more families living on and caring for the land.

COVID-19 has undone the progress MN had made to reduce hunger levels, and today 1 in 9 Minnesotans, including 1 in 6 kids, is facing hunger--a record number we must address.

Farm to School is good for our kids because it gives them access to and knowledge of healthy local foods. The link between the food kids eat and their educational and health outcomes is becoming increasingly clear. Access to fresh, healthy food, starting as young as possible, fuels brain development and shapes food preference over a lifetime.

Farm to School will also help our economy recover. A study out of Oregon showed that for every dollar spent on Farm to School programs, \$2.16 is generated in additional economic activity for the local economy. Our Farm to School bill would not only support farmers directly, it would also give small businesses and entrepreneurs in Greater Minnesota a boost in revitalizing their communities. After most businesses, schools and farmers faced financial hardship this past year due to the pandemic, funding this bill will provide much needed economic help to aid in increased local sales. This will in turn keep money in our local communities.

This Farm to School & Early Care bill is a worthy investment that works for the health of our children, the health of our family farms and the health of our local communities. Especially now, with farmers, schools, kids and communities facing unprecedented need, Minnesotans can easily agree that this

makes sense for our state to support a statewide a farm to school program through our public support and public investment.

Please support Farm to School in the Agriculture Omnibus Finance Bill.

Sincerely,

*Alexandria School District Food and Nutrition Services*

*American Heart Association*

*Arrowhead Head Start*

*Becker Public Schools*

*Columbia Heights Public Schools*

*District 877 Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools*

*Dream of Wild Health*

*Eden Prairie School District 272*

*Foley Public Schools*

*Forest Lake Area Schools*

*Fridley Public Schools*

*Highland Park Montessori School*

*Holdingsford Schools*

*Hopkins Public Schools*

*Hunger Solutions Minnesota*

*Hutchinson Public Schools #423*

*Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy*

*Inver Grove Heights School District*

*ISD196- Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Schools*

*Keystone Community Services*

*Land Stewardship Project*

*Latino Economic Development Center*

*Legal Services Advocacy Project*

*Little Falls Community Schools*

*MAZON Advocacy Project: Minnesota*

*Minneapolis Public Schools Culinary & Wellness Services*

*Minnesota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*

*Minnesota Farmers Union*

*Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)*

*Minnesota School Nutrition Association*

*Minnesota School Nutrition Directors*

*Minnesotans for Healthy Kids Coalition*

*Mounds View School District*

*Orono Schools*

*Owatonna Public Schools ISD 761*

*Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools*

*PRISM*

*Providers Choice*

*Renewing the Countryside*

*Roseville Area Schools*

*Saint Anthony School District*

*Sartell-St. Stephen ISD 748*

*Shakopee Public Schools Food Service*

*South St. Paul Public Schools*

*Sprout MN*

*The Aliveness Project*

*The Food Group*

*Tri Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.*

*Wayzata School District*

*White Bear Lake Area Schools*

*Winona School District--Nutrition*

*Youth & Families Determined to Succeed*

## **Recommended language to adopt in the final Agricultural Omnibus Bill:**

As the Conference Committee convenes to consider differences in the House and Senate versions of the Omnibus Agriculture Finance Bill (H.F. 1524 and S.F. 958), we wanted you to know the Farm to School and Early Care Stakeholder Group's priorities and concerns.

### **SUPPORT House Position: Bolster the Farm to School Reimbursement in AGRI (HF 1524, Lines 9.35-10.7)**

Farm to School is a critical market pathway that would create opportunities for beginning farmers and allow existing farmers to expand their markets. AGRI's mission is to support innovative markets and farming like Farm to School and Early Care. The current AGRI Farm to School grant funding is set at a pilot level of \$400,000 a year as the MN Department of Agriculture developed their RFP and reimbursement processes and stakeholders have worked to spread the word about this reimbursement grant opportunity to help schools and early cares purchase local food, modeled after successful reimbursement programs working in other states. Increasing this funding is critical to helping Farm to School and Early Care expand. The final bill should include Farm to School and Early Care in AGRI with increased funding to the reimbursement grant program to encourage the expansion of this new initiative.

House Language: providing funding not to exceed \$800,000 each year to develop and enhance farm-to-school markets for Minnesota farmers by providing more fruits, vegetables, meat, grain, and dairy for Minnesota children in school and child care settings including, at the commissioner's discretion, reimbursing schools for purchases from local farmers

CC:

The Honorable Tim Walz, Governor of Minnesota

The Honorable Peggy Flanagan, Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota

Senator Paul Gazelka, Majority Leader of the Senate

Representative Melissa Hortman, Speaker of the House

Commissioner Thom Petersen, Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Deputy Commissioner Andrea Vaubel, of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Assistant Commissioner Whitney Place, of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey, of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Government Relations Director Peder Kjeseth, of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Tribal Liaison Shannon Kesner, of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture



# Support and Advance FARM TO SCHOOL in Minnesota with HF 1940 & SF 1760!

Farm to School connects Minnesota farmers and kids by including local food in meals and teaching children about agriculture through hands-on activities.



Minnesota Farm to School is good for

## FARMERS

- 🍏 Direct access to institutions like schools gives farmers a stable and diversified income.
- 🍏 Schools and early care settings increase demand for more diverse crops, promoting soil health through crop rotation.
- 🍏 Access to local markets is critical for farmers. This bill provides technical assistance to help farmers successfully navigate selling to schools and early care settings.

## KIDS

- 🍏 Farm to school and early care programs provide access to fresh, nutritious, local foods children need to learn and grow.
- 🍏 Hands-on classroom activities educate kids about where food comes from and build an understanding of agriculture, farming and nutrition.
- 🍏 Young children are developing their lifelong taste preferences and eating habits. Children who participate in Farm to School activities are more likely to eat a wide variety of foods and are more willing to try new foods. They also eat an additional serving of fruits and vegetables per day!

## THE LOCAL ECONOMY

- 🍏 Local food supply chains create opportunities for farmers and businesses, like processors and distributors. But, the current lack of infrastructure means supply often cannot meet the high demand for local food.
- 🍏 Finding stable, local buyers creates a price floor for farmers, processors and distributors, driving the revitalization of rural communities.

## FARM TO SCHOOL'S IMPACT

**\$1.00 ⇨ \$2.16**

Investing \$1 in Farm to School generates an additional \$2.16 of local economic activity.<sup>1</sup>



Farmers Ben Doherty and Erin Johnson of Open Hands Farm in Northfield report that selling to schools has allowed them to triple their own business, hire more employees and support other local businesses in their community. Instead of going out the door to California, money spent on carrots from our neighbor farmers like Ben and Erin recirculates in Minnesota communities.

1. "The Benefits of Farm to School." National Farm to School Network. <http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2019).



# FARM TO SCHOOL in Minnesota

GOOD FOR FARMERS. GOOD FOR KIDS.  
GOOD FOR THE LOCAL ECONOMY.



## GOALS OF THE BILL

Increase funding for the grant program reimbursing Minnesota schools and early care centers for purchasing Minnesota-grown whole or minimally processed food.



## VOTE FOR HF 1940 / SF 1760!

### A step forward for food justice

Rural or urban, black, brown, or white—everyone deserves healthy, sustainably-grown local food. Farm to School is a first step toward a more just food system that prioritizes people's needs. If increase investing, we can build thriving local foods economies that provide opportunity for family farmers, revitalize our rural communities, and steward the land for generations to come.

Learn more at [FarmToSchoolMN.org](http://FarmToSchoolMN.org)

or by contacting:

Erin at [erin@iatp.org](mailto:erin@iatp.org) or

Anna at [anna.racer@gmail.com](mailto:anna.racer@gmail.com)

# 7.5%

According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, net cash farm income is expected to fall 7.5% this year. Providing new direct markets is one way to ease the transition for farmers in a post-covid economy.



Let's increase our investing in  
Minnesota's Farm to School program!

## COALITION CO-CHAIRS

