



Dear Massachusetts Policy Makers:

**We, the undersigned farms, businesses and organizations of the Massachusetts Farm to School Network, collectively write to ask you to support “An act establishing the Massachusetts Farm to School Grant Program,” SD.1086 introduced by Senator Lesser and HD.3129 introduced Representative Pignatelli.**

The establishment of this competitive grant program within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would provide eligible schools the critical funds needed to start up or expand farm to school activities such as serving local foods in school meals, providing nutrition education, and garden based learning opportunities. The program would support the infrastructure investments, staff training, and educational initiatives that lead to farm to school program success and sustainability.

We know that farm to school is a great investment for Massachusetts - contributing to local economic development, student health, and academic achievement. For every dollar spent on purchasing directly from a Massachusetts farmer, an additional \$1.12 in local economic activity is generated. Massachusetts schools spend approximately \$77 million on food each school year. In 2014, 171 of Massachusetts’ 419 school districts spent \$10.26 million on local foods. A grant program would help increase local food purchasing from these districts and additional school districts buying local foods. If we doubled the amount of local food purchased for Massachusetts school meals, that would contribute an additional \$20+ million to local economies across the state.

Farm to school programs help schools serve healthier, local food, which has been proven to increase participation in school nutrition programs. That means more kids, especially those coming from homes that are struggling to put food on their own tables, are eating nutritious meals, which help them grow and thrive at school. Supporting students to develop healthy eating habits at a young age can prevent diet-related diseases later on. Currently, 25% of MA teens are overweight or obese, and farm to school can help to reverse that trend.

Students participating in farm to school programs not only learn healthy eating habits, but these programs also contribute to overall academic achievement. Research has shown that the experiential and garden based learning, at the root of farm to school

education, supports effective teaching of core subject areas as well as critical social and emotional learning.

Our communities are stronger when we have good connections between our families, our schools, and our farms. Farm to school cultivates these connections, providing opportunities for community members to learn about where their food comes from, and how to engage with local farmers in meaningful ways.

We hope you will support the establishment of the farm to school grant program through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. We are excited to endorse this request, and ask for your support.

Sincerely,

Massachusetts Farm to School Network