



TEAM: FOOD & AGRICULTURE

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SUBJECT: LOCAL FOOD FOR SCHOOLS & LOCAL FOOD PURCHASE ASSISTANCE: STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES

REQUESTED ACTION

- Restore and expand funding for the Local Food for Schools (LFS) and Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Cooperative Agreement Programs.
- Pass the Farm to School Act of 2025 (H.R. 6065 / S. 3127).
- Reform the USDA Foods Program to allow school meal providers to use entitlement dollars for local food purchases.
- Increase federal reimbursement rates for school meals to support scratch cooking and local procurement.

HOW THIS SUPPORTS BUSINESSES

LFS and LFPA programs create stable, predictable markets for the 90% of American farms that are small and mid-sized operations. These programs:

- Provide consistent institutional demand that restaurants and farmers' markets cannot match.
- Strengthen regional supply chains by supporting food hubs, processors, aggregators, and distributors.
- Circulate dollars locally—every \$1 spent on local food generates up to \$2 in regional economic activity.
- Support producers who grow real food, aligning with the Dietary Guidelines' shift away from ultra-processed products.

Examples of economic impact:

- California LFPA investments (2022–2024) totaled \$88.5 million, supporting 600+ farmers and supplying 50+ food banks, resulting in 18 million meals and \$20 million spent on fresh food.



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- Sacramento City Unified School District used \$294,600 in LFS funds to purchase mandarins, rice, pears, grapes, honey, and beef from California producers—including rice grown just 25 miles from its Central Kitchen.

HOW THIS SUPPORTS RESIDENTS OF OUR REGION

The Capital Region is a national leader in agriculture, food innovation, and nutrition research. Yet despite agricultural abundance, the region faces food insecurity, limited access to healthy foods, rising costs, and supply chain disruptions.

LFS and LFPA programs directly address these challenges by:

- Increasing access to fresh, nutritious foods for students, families, and seniors.
- Supporting scratch cooking and healthier school meals.
- Strengthening local food systems that keep dollars circulating in the region.
- Providing culturally relevant foods grown by local producers, including Tribal nations.

STRENGTHENING SCHOOL MEALS & REDUCING COST THROUGH LOCAL PROCUREMENT

Schools and food banks face rising costs as they work to provide fresher, less-processed meals. Local Food for Schools (LFS) and Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) help meet these needs by making it easier and more affordable to buy food from nearby farmers.

These programs:

- Lower costs by shortening supply chains and reducing dependency on expensive, highly processed foods.
- Improve meal quality by increasing access to whole foods that support scratch cooking.
- Keep federal dollars local, supporting small and mid-sized farms rather than large manufacturers.
- Give communities more control, enabling them to buy foods that match local needs, cultures, and growing conditions.

LFS and LFPA also help schools meet federal nutrition requirements more efficiently by providing flexible purchasing options, equipment funds, and technical assistance. This ensures institutions can serve fresher, higher-quality meals while strengthening regional economies and supporting American farmers.

SUPPORTING SMALL & MID-SIZED FARMS AND UNDERSERVED PRODUCERS



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Most USDA funding opportunities historically favor commodity crop producers. LFS and LFPA created accessible pathways to federal funding for fruit and vegetable producers who otherwise wouldn't qualify for programs like crop insurance. These programs open doors for historically underserved producers including farmers of color, women farmers, beginning farmers, veteran farmers, and Tribal nations, as well as small and mid-sized operations lacking infrastructure to compete with industrial food manufacturers. When these programs were canceled in 2025, over 600 California farmers lost critical markets, institutions lost access to fresh local food, and regional economies lost the economic multiplier effect. In California alone, the program cancellation resulted in nearly one million dollars in lost sales for farmers during a brief funding freeze.

State agencies used 25% of funds for technical assistance helping smaller producers meet food safety requirements, achieve GAP certification, navigate institutional procurement, and scale strategically. This capacity building creates sustainable pathways for broader participation in federal funding streams while building supply chains to deliver real food to schools and food banks.

LOCAL CONTROL AND ACCOUNTABILITY

LFS and LFPA give states and communities authority to design procurement systems that support regional agriculture, reflect local dietary needs, ensure transparency, and allow communities to verify that institutions are purchasing real, fresh food.

REFORM OPPORTUNITY: USDA FOODS PROGRAM

The USDA Foods entitlement program is dominated by ultra-processed items. Proposed reform: Allow school meal providers to use USDA Foods entitlement dollars for local food purchases. This would redirect existing federal spending toward local farmers, reduce reliance on ultra-processed foods, and support scratch cooking.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restore and expand LFS and LFPA funding.
- Pass the Farm to School Act of 2025 (H.R. 6065 / S. 3127).
- Reform USDA Foods to allow entitlement dollars for local food purchases.
- Increase federal reimbursement rates for school meals.
- This policy strengthens American agriculture, builds resilient regional food systems, expands economic opportunity, and ensures schools and food banks can serve the real food required by federal nutrition policy.