



Dear Massachusetts Legislators:

**We, the undersigned farms, businesses and organizations of the Massachusetts Food for Massachusetts Kids Coalition, collectively write to ask you to support “An act establishing farm to school grants to promote healthy eating and strengthen the agricultural economy,” S.349 introduced by Senator Lesser and H.686 introduced Representative Pignatelli.**

The establishment of this grant program within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would provide eligible schools as well as early education and care programs the critical funds needed to start up or expand farm to school activities such as renovating kitchen facilities, training staff, establishing direct market systems for local farmers, and providing garden-based and other outdoor learning opportunities for students.

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.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has created serious supply chain disruptions in the food system. Helping schools tap into local markets will help mitigate the negative consequences of current supply chain disruptions. At the same time, providing more stable markets for our local producers can strengthen our economy and our food supply, making us more resilient overall.

As schools continue to adapt to the changing educational landscape caused by COVID-19, offering safe spaces to come back to work and opportunities for upskilling will be critical for the retention of school nutrition staff, educators, and others. The training and technical assistance accessible to grant recipients brings additional value to existing staff positions and contributes to statewide workforce development efforts. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has made obvious how important outdoor learning spaces are to help protect public health. Outdoor learning not only provides safety for children and educators, it also creates new opportunities to incorporate farm to school curriculum and help students build lasting connections with locally grown food, farms, and more.

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 Food for Massachusetts Kids Coalition

Backyard Growers  
Food Bank of Western Massachusetts  
FoodCorps Massachusetts  
Franklin County Community Development Corporation  
Healthcare Without Harm  
Healthy Chelsea  
Island Grown Initiative  
Massachusetts Farm to School  
Massachusetts Food System Collaborative  
Mill City Grows  
New Bedford Public Schools

Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance  
Oakdale Farms  
Project Bread  
Rescuing Leftover Cuisine  
School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts  
School Sprouts Educational Gardens  
Share Our Strength  
Sustainable Nantucket  
The Marion Institute  
Three Sisters Garden Project