

## 2016 Budget Priority New York School Nutrition Association

### **Support an Increase in Funding for Farm to School in New York State**

The New York School Nutrition Association urges the state to include funding in the 2016-17 Budget for an innovative proposal that would expand school children's access to healthy food grown in New York and strengthen New York's successful Farm to School program. The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program (NSL/SBP) is an important component in promoting healthy eating habits in children and with some children, may be the only source of nutrition that child will receive all day. Schools serve 1.7 million school lunches and 500,000 breakfasts each day in New York, which puts them on the front line of combatting a national epidemic – childhood obesity. It is in the interest of the state to promote programs that provide healthy food to children while supporting greater economic opportunities for New York's farmers.

The New York State Farm to School Program was created in 2002 under the jurisdiction of both the Department of Agriculture and Markets and the New York State Education Department. The purpose of the program is to connect schools with local farms and food producers to strengthen local agriculture, improve student health and promote regional food systems awareness. We propose an expansion of this successful program by creating dedicated funding for schools to purchase healthy foods grown in New York, such as fruits and vegetables, milk and yogurt, and other foods.

- If schools' purchased a minimum of 10% local of total food purchases yearly, schools would get an extra .05 cents a meal.
- If schools' purchased a minimum of 15% local of total food purchases, schools would get an extra .10 cents a meal.
- If schools' purchased a minimum of 20% local of total food purchases, schools would get an extra .25 cents a meal.

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets would provide guidance for schools of farmers, food processors, and distributors that could provide such foods grown or produced in New York to purchase, with input from experts such as the Governor's Council on Food Policy. The Department of Agriculture and Markets would then work with the State Education Department (SED) to determine appropriate payments per district based on the amount of food purchased from New York and the school district's monthly average daily participation.

According to the New York State Department of Health (DOH), 17 percent of New Yorkers under the age of 18 are obese and nearly 33 percent are overweight or obese. Unless something is done to counter these numbers, these obese youth will become obese and sick adults. Obesity is the root cause of a plethora of other diseases including diabetes, hypertension, asthma, arthritis and high-cholesterol. This, in turn, places a strain on health care costs with New York State's Medicaid program spending \$4.3 billion a year on obesity and related illnesses – with \$330 million of that

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being attributed to obesity in children. Obesity in young people is a problem in all parts of the state and something that will only continue to create a drain on New York's health systems and Medicaid unless something is done to counter this.

Creating opportunities for schools to purchase more healthy food produced in New York is highly consistent with efforts to strengthen economic opportunities for New York's farmers through events and programs like the Yogurt Summit, Farm to Table Upstate-Downstate Agriculture Summit, Fresh Connect Program, and Taste NY. New York is in the top 5 producers in America in nearly 15 fruits, vegetables and dairy products – ranging from apples to sweet corn to milk and Greek yogurt. Farms producing these healthy foods and associated food processors and other businesses annually generate more than \$46 billion in economic activity in New York, according to a recent report by Farm Credit East.

The fight to end childhood obesity in New York State needs to be an organized effort between the government and community partners. Children who lack healthy meals at home are significantly more likely to be in poor health, be at risk for developmental delays, and experience childhood food insecurity.

We feel strongly this is a win-win for the state's agricultural sector and the health of our students. Investing in this program will increase access to healthy food, which in turn, will have a positive effect on students overall well-being. We respectfully request your support in putting forth a robust plan to aid our farms, our schools and our children.

**On behalf of our 3,300 members, we respectfully request you to advocate for funding for the Farm to School Program in the 2016-17 Budget.**