

October 21, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
Chairman, Education and Labor Committee
United States House of Representatives
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow Chairwoman,
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Invest in healthy school meals and food education in the Build Back Better Act

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Chairman Scott, and Chairwoman Stabenow:

We, the undersigned organizations, wholeheartedly support all of the child nutrition provisions proposed in the Build Back Better Act. The current supply chain crisis in the United States is taking an unjust toll on our kids. Schools across the country are struggling to provide nutritious meals to the millions of kids they serve—an enormous blow during the already-challenging environment of the pandemic. We urge you to include the Healthy Food Incentives Demonstration Program and the School Kitchen Equipment grants in the final Build Back Better Act. These provisions will prove crucial in equipping schools with the resources they need for providing nourishing meals, local procurement, scratch cooking, and school gardens through greater participation, and in better preparing schools for future supply chain challenges. Investments in school meal programs and infrastructure will yield health and economic benefits that our country needs for resilience and recovery post-pandemic. And healthy and scratch-cooked school meals can also help to tackle the climate crisis and bolster regional food economies¹. We ask that you prioritize our children’s health and resilient food systems as you debate this once-in-a-generation opportunity.

First, we ask that the \$634 million in funding for the Healthy Food Incentives Demonstration Program is maintained. The current supply chain challenges experienced by many schools demonstrate the need for investing in stronger, more diverse local and regional food systems. In fact, some school nutrition programs with robust farm to school procurement already in place—such as school districts that have been buying from local vendors for years, or those that have local procurement practices at the ready—report fewer supply chain disruptions. Throughout the pandemic, examples like these have illustrated

¹ https://assets.website-files.com/5c469df2395cd53c3d913b2d/61390c1e5d450713760359c3_FarmtoECE-Covid_July2021.pdf

how farm to school activities help create a school food system more resilient to supply interruptions². The Build Back Better Act's investment in local procurement and scratch cooking will not only address child nutrition security, it will also unlock the often overlooked potential of school meals in building resilient local economies and an equitable food system. When schools source ingredients from local producers, each dollar invested can stimulate up to an additional \$2.16 in local economic activity³. This investment has also been designed to support schools in providing more culturally appropriate food options and sourcing food from socially disadvantaged producers.

Second, the Healthy Food Incentives Demonstration Program includes funding to support experiential nutrition education, which will improve students' nutritional, emotional, and educational well-being. Food and nutrition educators increase children's acceptance and enjoyment of the nutritious, tasty meals they are offered in schools, setting them up to make healthy choices for life. An evaluation of FoodCorps programming found that students who receive more hands-on nutrition education through gardening, cooking, and taste-testing activities were eating up to three times as many fruits and vegetables at school as students who received less⁴. Other studies have shown that better-nourished kids who start their day with a nutritious meal are better prepared to learn, setting them up to thrive for life.

Additionally, food education also plays an important role in climate resilience by reducing food waste because students know where their food comes from and can taste it before they see it on the cafeteria serving line. The Healthy Food Incentives Demonstration Program also supports climate mitigation goals by increasing the consumption of healthy meals that align with the dietary guidelines recommendations and have a lower carbon footprint.

Finally, the \$500 million in funding for school kitchen equipment grants must be prioritized. As the National School Lunch Program turned 75 this year, many school cafeterias are nearly as old. Too many schools direly need more modernized kitchens in order to prepare and store meals with fresh ingredients that are exciting to eat, reflect students' home cultures, and allow them to explore new foods. Additionally, funding for training in scratch cooking helps address the shortage of skilled school nutrition professionals and invests in these valuable careers. These grants are instrumental in offering healthy, scratch-cooked menus that make meal time a joyful experience and set students up for a healthy life.

Investing in local food systems, experiential food education, and school kitchens now is an investment in the wellbeing of our future generations. We urge you to prioritize our children's health and resilient food systems by including these critical programs in the final Build Back Better Act.

Sincerely,

² https://assets.website-files.com/5c469df2395cd53c3d913b2d/6110521216b78c5854ae23ac_EconomicImpactReport-min.pdf

³ https://assets.website-files.com/5c469df2395cd53c3d913b2d/611027419232d281ad2f51ff_BenefitsFactSheet.pdf

⁴ <https://foodcorps.org/cms/assets/uploads/2016/06/FoodCorps-Creating-Healthy-School-Environments-Teachers-College.pdf>

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

A Well-Fed World	(Washington, DC)
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics	(Washington, DC)
America Forward	(Washington, DC)
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists	(Raleigh, NC)
Brigaid	(New London, CT)
Captain Planet Foundation	(Atlanta, GA)
Center for Science in the Public Interest	(Washington, DC)
Chef Ann Foundation	(Boulder, CO)
Coalition for Healthy School Food	(Mamaroneck, NY)
Common Threads	(San Antonio, TX)
Cultivate Empathy for All	(Berkeley, CA)
Family Farm Action	(Mexico, MO)
Farm Aid	(Cambridge, MA)
First Focus Campaign for Children	(Washington, DC)
FoodCorps	(Washington, DC)
Friends of the Earth	(Washington, DC)
Hazon	(New York City, NY)
Hindu American Foundation	(Washington, DC)
Hip Hop is Green	(Seattle, WA)
Jewish Youth Climate Movement	(New York, NY)
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future	(Baltimore, MD)
KidsGardening	(Burlington, VT)
LunchAssist	(West Hollywood, CA)
National Farm to School Network	(Washington, DC)
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	(Washington, DC)
NYCLASS	(New York, NY)
Rural Coalition	(Washington, DC)
School Nutrition Association	(Arlington, VA)
ScratchWorks	(New York City, NY)
School Garden Support Organization Network	(Austin, TX)
Small Bites Adventure Club	(Atlanta, GA)
The Common Market	(Philadelphia, PA)
The Praxis Project	(Oakland, CA)

STATE AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Blue Mountain Vegetable Farm	(Magazine, AR)
Western Arkansas Child Development, Inc.	(Alma, AR)
Eat for the Earth	(Santa Cruz, CA)
Farm to Pantry	(Healdsburg, CA)
Garden School Foundation	(Los Angeles, CA)
Lean and Green Kids	(Oceanside, CA)
San Diego Unified School District	(San Diego, CA)
Nourish Colorado	(Denver, CO)
East Hampton Public Schools	(East Hampton, CT)
End Hunger Connecticut!	(East Hartford, CT)
Green Village Initiative	(Bridgeport, CT)
Micro2life LLC	(Simsbury, CT)
Middletown Board of Education - Macdonough Elementary	(Middletown, CT)
Milford Board of Education	(Milford, CT)
Naugatuck Public Schools	(Naugatuck, CT)
New London Public Schools Child Nutrition Program	(New London, CT)
Norwalk Grows	(Norwalk, CT)
The Foodshed Network	(Greenwich, CT)
Thompson Public Schools	(North Grosvenordale, CT)
City Blossoms	(Washington, DC)
DC Bilingual Public Charter School	(Washington, DC)
DC Greens	(Washington, DC)
Baldwin County Office of Nutrition	(Milledeville, GA)
Burke County Public Schools	(Waynesboro, GA)
Marietta City Schools	(Marietta, GA)
IL Farm to School Network@ Seven Generations Ahead	(Chicago, IL)
Illinois Stewardship Alliance	(Springfield, IL)
Massachusetts Farm to School	(Boston, MA)
Full Plates Full Potential	(Brunswick, ME)
Sheepscot Valley RSU #12	(Somerville, ME)
Ann Arbor Public Schools Chartwells	(Ann Arbor, MI)
Balanced Pilates	(Midland, MI)
Crim Fitness Foundation	(Flint, MI)

Detroit Food Academy	(Detroit, MI)
Detroit Healthy Youth Initiative at Wayne State University	(Detroit, MI)
GenesisHOPE	(Detroit, MI)
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities	(Traverse City and Petoskey, MI)
Growing Hope	(Ypsilanti, MI)
Montague Area Public Schools	(Montague, MI)
Northwest Education Services	(Traverse City, MI)
Taste the Local Difference	(Traverse City, MI)
Wayne State University Center for Health and Community Impact	(Detroit, MI)
West Michigan Food Processing Association	(North Muskegon, MI)
Whitehall District Schools	(Whitehall, MI)
Urban Harvest STL	(St. Louis, MO)
NH Farm to School	(Durham, NH)
Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success	(Manchester, NH)
La Semilla Food Center	(Anthony, NM)
Raices del Saber Xinachtli Community School	(Las Cruces, NM)
Chilis on Wheels New York	(New York, NY)
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group	(Kingston, NY)
Red Rabbit	(New York, NY)
Green Umbrella	(Cincinnati, OH)
Ohio Food Policy Network	(Columbus, Ohio)
Friends of Family Farmers	(Waltersville, OR)
Growing Gardens	(Portland, OR)
Hummingbird Wholesale	(Eugene, OR)
Oregon Farm to School & School Garden Network	(Ashland, OR)
Rogue Valley Farm To School	(Ashland, OR)
Serendipity Center	(Portland, OR)
Umatilla School District	(Umatilla, OR)
District Five of Lexington and Richland Counties	(Irmo, SC)
Rooted	(Madison, WI)