

## **Local School Foods Expansion Act of 2023**

The Pilot Project for the Procurement of Unprocessed Fruits and Vegetables was first passed in the 2014 Farm Bill, and has been successful in helping schools in participating states increase the amounts of fresh, unprocessed fruits and vegetables used in the National School Lunch Program. Additionally, the Pilot Project ensured that schools in participating states have more flexibility to source fresh foods from local vendors. However, the current Pilot Project is limited to only eight states.

In order to build on the success of the current Pilot Project, the Local Schools Food Expansion Act of 2023 establishes a permanent program for the Procurement of Unprocessed Fruits and Vegetables. By making the project permanent, more states and school food authorities will have the flexibility to increase the availability of fresh, healthy foods in school lunches, while developing new relationships with local farmers, growers and producers.

The bill amends Section 2 of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to allow participating States and school food authorities to purchase locally grown, fresh fruits and vegetables with existing School Lunch Program funds. Moreover, it instructs the Secretary of USDA to expand the program to 14 states and directs the USDA to select participating states by prioritizing:

- The per capita quantity and variety of growers of local fruits and vegetables of the state;
- the demonstrated commitment of the state to farm-to-school efforts, small, local, tribal and socially disadvantaged farmers;
- whether the state contains a sufficient quantity of local educational agencies, various population sizes, and geographical locations; and
- whether the state will serve a high proportion of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition, the Local Schools Food Expansion Act of 2023 expands reporting requirements and evaluation standards to include state feedback, and requires the Secretary to evaluate the impact of the existing program within one year of the Act's enactment. The Secretary then has four years to submit to Congress a report that includes an analysis of these results.

The bill authorizes mandatory funding of \$15,000,000 for fiscal years 2024 – 2028, of which \$10,000,000 shall be reserved for states to carry out state program administration and provide technical assistance to food vendors to become certified to participate in the program. Each state selected shall receive not less than \$300,000 for each fiscal year it participates in the program.