

April 20, 2017

The Honorable Alberta Darling
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance
Room 317 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI

The Honorable John Nygren
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance
Room 309 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI

RE: Funding for Wisconsin Farm to School in the 2017-2019 Wisconsin Budget

Dear Co-Chair Darling, Co-Chair Nygren, & members of the Joint Committee on Finance:

We write today asking for your continued support of the Wisconsin Farm to School Program in the 2017-2019 budget. We represent farmers, food processors, school nutrition professionals, public health, school administrators, educators, and agricultural producers – the diverse voices who experience the benefits of the Wisconsin Farm to School Program housed at DATCP.

The Governor's Budget eliminates the Wisconsin Farm to School Program "to reflect budget efficiency measures." The farm to school program spurs over \$9 million dollars in purchases of Wisconsin-grown and processed foods by Wisconsin schools each year, and for over 500,000 students. Funding for the Farm to School program is vital to growing and strengthening vibrant farm to institution market opportunities and programs growing in the state.

Wisconsin Farm to School broadly connects K-12 public and private schools, early care centers, hospitals, universities and other institutions with Wisconsin-grown and processed fruits, vegetables, dairy products, proteins, and other nutritious foods for breakfasts, lunches, and snacks. Farm to school improves farmers' incomes and direct access to steady institutional markets.

Since the bipartisan support of Act 293 in 2009, Wisconsin Farm to School has grown to over 390 programs across the state, with over half of a million Wisconsin students benefiting from school meals rich with Wisconsin-grown foods along with nutrition education. Farm to school is a proven strategy to increase student selection and consumption of healthy foods, especially for those with the lowest intake.

There is a growing need for structural and systemic changes within Wisconsin's network of food producers, processors, distributors and regulations to support development of large scale Wisconsin-grown agricultural commodities arriving on students' trays. The Farm to School Program is integral to building relationships, developing projects, and conducting this foundational work that will continue to move Farm to School and other institutional purchasing movements forward.

Since 2013 the Project Director was integral in the selection of Wisconsin to participate in a USDA Pilot Project, which allowed Wisconsin schools to divert \$1.4 million dollars of their USDA commodity food budgets toward the purchase of Wisconsin-grown fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy products, proteins, and other nutritious foods. Wisconsin was one of only eight states selected to participate in this project. The

Farm to School Program Director was also instrumental in awards over \$200,000 of federal grant funds to conduct trainings and develop Wisconsin supply chains that encourage procurement of Wisconsin-grown foods including potatoes, yogurt, and applesauce.

With 47% of surveyed Wisconsin school districts planning to begin or increase purchases of Wisconsin-produced foods, and growing demand from early care centers, hospitals, and universities - the potential for growth is significant. Over half of these sites are interested in making more purchases, but are challenged to find suppliers or farmers. Support from the Wisconsin Farm to School Program Director is invaluable in developing these new opportunities.

The benefits of Farm to School are many, and long lasting: Farm to School develops markets for all Wisconsin's agriculture producers and educates students as healthy eaters for now – and the future. In this time of difficult fiscal decisions, we respectfully request your continued inclusion of the Farm to School Program in the Wisconsin state budget. The modest expenditure of \$66,400 for 1.0 FTE GPR position for the Program Director for Wisconsin's Farm to School Program is a meaningful investment in the future of the state's farmers and students.

Sincerely,

Dairy Business Association
FairShare CSA Coalition
Grassworks
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Midwest Food Products Association
REAP Food Group
School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin
Wisconsin Agri-Business Association
Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments & Boards
Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants
Wisconsin Cattlemen Association
Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Wisconsin Pork Association
Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association
Wisconsin Public Health Association
Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance
Wisconsin Soybean Association