



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 20, 2017

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Ag groups voice support for Farm to School program

CHIPPEWA FALLS – A broad and diverse coalition of advocacy groups signed on to a letter that was circulated today voicing support for the Farm to School Program, which faces elimination in the pending 2017-2019 State Budget.

In the letter, which was hand-delivered and emailed to all members of the Joint Committee on Finance, the 19 supporting groups called for the committee to save the vital program, which was cut in the proposed budget “to reflect budget efficiency measures.”

The groups signing onto the letter represent farmers, food processors, school nutrition professionals, public health, school administrators, educators, and agricultural producers – all diverse voices who experience the benefits of DATCP’s Wisconsin Farm to School Program.

In the letter, the groups note how the Farm to School program spurs over \$9 million dollars in purchases of locally grown and processed foods by Wisconsin schools each year, impacting 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,” the letter reads. “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.”

Forty-seven percent of surveyed Wisconsin school districts are planning to begin or increase purchases of Wisconsin-produced foods. Growing demand has also been seen from early care centers, hospitals, and universities. “Over half of these sites are interested in making more purchases, but are challenged to find suppliers or farmers,” the letter notes. “Support from the Wisconsin Farm to School Program Director is invaluable in developing these new opportunities.”

The groups concluded that the modest expenditure of a \$66,400 salary for the 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. The Farm to School Program Director has been instrumental in awards of 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.

“Wisconsin Farmers Union believes Farm to School is an important investment in our farm economy and the next generation,” said Wisconsin Farmers Union President Darin Von Ruden. “The program allows for nutritious meals for youth in schools across Wisconsin while also supporting local and regional farmers and processors.”

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The groups who signed on in support for Farm to School include:

- 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

Wisconsin Farmers Union, a member-driven organization, is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement. For more information visit www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

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