

January 27, 2005

Senator John Kerry
304 Russell Building, Third Floor
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kerry,

I am writing to urge you to support funding for "Access to Local Foods and School Gardens" (Section 122 of the Child Nutrition Act). Financial support for this legislation will provide start-up funding for school districts to purchase from local farms, bringing fresh, locally-grown food into schools, improving children's health, and supporting local family farmers!

As you are likely aware, childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate; obesity rates have doubled in children and tripled in teens over the last two decades. One in seven young people is obese and one in three is overweight, putting them at increased risk for chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. One of the many components of maintaining a healthy weight and reducing the risk of these diet-related diseases is the inclusion of a variety of fruits and vegetables in the daily diet. Currently, less than 13% of school-age children eat the recommended amount of fruit and 20% eat less than one serving of vegetables.

Since children learn by doing, providing healthy options in school cafeterias is essential to instilling lifelong healthy eating habits. Hooking young people on healthy fare early on will be important to reducing the alarming rates of obesity and diet-related disease. Farm to cafeteria programs provide an exciting opportunity for food service directors seeking innovative strategies to serve tasty, appealing, and healthful foods. Such programs show that given the choice and the education, children will choose healthier eating options. Studies of several farm to cafeteria programs show that more students participate in school meal programs when farm fresh products are on the menu. Likewise, kids choosing farm to cafeteria options eat significantly more servings of fruits and vegetables.

Funding for Section 122 also supports the viability of local farms as community dollars flow into community-owned businesses. Nationally, consumers are realizing the benefits of establishing closer ties with local food producers. Buying local contributes to the growth of small businesses, generates jobs and supports local farming. Further, it is good for the environment since food produced locally consumes less fossil fuel for transportation and requires fewer packaging materials. Farm to cafeteria programs offer a win-win situation by providing children with daily opportunities to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables, while supporting a more sustainable environment and providing family farmers with access to local markets.

Currently in Massachusetts, 10 out of 350 school districts are involved in farm to cafeteria projects. This is just a small percentage of what is possible with additional support and funding through Section 122 of the Child Nutrition Act. A modest investment in these programs will help schools develop long-lasting farm to cafeteria programs. I urge you to consider the possibilities for improved child nutrition and greater support of our local family farmers through support of "Access to Local Foods and School Gardens."

Thank you for consideration on this issue. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Nyssa Schloyer