



April 23, 2025

The Honorable Esmeralda Soria, Chair
Assembly Agriculture Committee
1020 N Street, Room 362
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 675 (Aguiar-Curry): The California Farm to School Act (SUPPORT)

Dear Chair Soria,

On behalf of the Chef Ann Foundation, I write in support of AB 675 (Aguiar-Curry), which will codify the California Farm to School Program within the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), ensuring students receive nutritious, locally grown meals and access to hands-on food education while also supporting local farmers.

The Chef Ann Foundation is a national non-profit dedicated to promoting whole-ingredient, scratch cooking in schools. Scratch cooking enables schools to serve the healthiest, tastiest meals so that students are well-nourished and ready to learn. To date, the Chef Ann Foundation has reached more than 16,000 schools and 4.4 million students. Our mission is to ensure that school food professionals have the resources, funding, and support they need to provide fresh, healthy, delicious, cooked from scratch meals that support the health of children and our planet. Scratch, whole-ingredient cooking in schools is a vehicle to achieving many different goals on our path forward to healthier communities, including ensuring that school meals are locally sourced and support our local producers.

Currently funded through the budget, the Farm to School Incubator Grant Program does not exist in statute. AB 675 will make sure the program continues to strengthen student development, enhance community climate resilience, and drive lasting, scalable change.



The Office of Farm to Fork, within CDFA, enhances access to healthy, locally grown food for all Californians. It oversees the California Farm to School Incubator Grant Program, which funds school initiatives that improve nutrition, support local farmers, and foster culinary and agricultural education. Serving 49% of California students – prioritizing those in high-need communities – the program increases procurement of California-grown foods and promotes climate-smart practices, all while improving economic opportunities and enhancing education and nutrition in high-need communities.

Chef Ann Foundation recognizes the vital role that the local farm economy plays in increasing scratch cooking in schools and improving child nutrition. School food in the U.S. is a \$23.5 billion industry.¹ Because of its sheer scale, the school food sector has an outsized impact on shaping the nation's food system. When schools are equipped to serve scratch-made meals, they can source more whole products from local and regional farms and other food businesses. For every dollar spent on farm-to-school programs, an extra \$0.60 – \$2.16 is generated in regional economic activity.² For farmers, fishers, and ranchers, selling to schools can provide a steady income stream, diversify their markets, and offer reliable sales and fair pay.³

Using more locally and regionally procured ingredients in school food has a variety of benefits that help improve child and environmental health. Sourcing locally allows schools to use more fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, and other minimally processed food products in their meals, which improves the quality of meals and encourages scratch cooking.⁴⁻¹⁰ Cooking with whole ingredients lets kids consume essential nutrients in their natural, more bioavailable form as part of a complex whole food, eat more fiber and protein, and consume fewer preservatives, fillers, food dyes, sodium, and added sugars.¹¹ When schools source local or regional ingredients, they can also reduce the

¹ <https://schoolnutrition.org/about-school-meals/school-meal-statistics/#production-costs>

² https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5c469df2395cd53c3d913b2d/611027419232d281ad2f51ff_BenefitsFactSheet.pdf

³ <https://www.farmtoschool.org/news-and-articles/press-release-celebrating-national-farm-to-school-month-2024>

⁴ Colorado Department of Education. (2022). HB-1132 Local Food Purchasing Program 2022 Legislative Report.

⁵ Colorado Department of Education. (2023). HB-1132 Local Food Purchasing Program 2023 Legislative Report.

⁶ <https://schoolnutrition.org/journal/spring2015-serving-fish-in-schoolmeals-perceptions-ofschool-nutrition-professionals-in-alaska/> 23

⁷ https://www.iatp.org/documents/mda-farm-schoolgrant-evaluation_24

⁹ foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/10-cents-a-meal2021-2022-evaluation-results 25

¹⁰ Washington State Department of Agriculture. (2024). WSDA Farm to School Purchasing Grant Data from SY 2021-2022

¹¹ <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2020.00101>



amount of ultra-processed foods they serve,¹²⁻¹⁵ use more culturally affirming ingredients,¹⁶⁻¹⁸ and reduce the amount of food and packaging waste they generate.¹⁹⁻²⁰

AB 675 (Aguiar-Curry) is a vital step toward ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of the California Farm to School Program. Codifying this program will provide continued support for school food professionals and students' nutritional needs, foster hands-on food education, and strengthen local economies. It will secure the program's continuity, particularly for underserved communities, while promoting environmentally sustainable farming practices. AB 675 presents a critical opportunity to drive lasting, positive change for students, school food professionals, local farmers, and the state's future.

For these reasons, Chef Ann Foundation supports and urges your AYE vote for AB 675 (Aguiar-Curry).

Sincerely,

Mara Fleishman

Chief Executive Officer, Chef Ann Foundation

cc: Assembly Majority Leader Aguiar-Curry, Author
 Members, Assembly Agriculture Committee

¹³ See Reference #7

¹⁴ <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13103390>

¹⁵ https://cms.agr.wa.gov/WSDAKentico/Documents/Pubs/FINAL_078-FarmToSchoolPurchasingGrantImpactInfographic-WEB.pdf

¹⁶ <https://schoolnutrition.org/journal/spring2015-serving-fish-in-schoolmeals-perceptions-of-school-nutrition-professionals-in-alaska/>

¹⁷ Kruse, D. (2014, March 7). FY 14 Nutritional Alaskan Foods in Schools Report (Covering Quarters 1 and 2). Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, & Economic Development. Retrieved via email from Alaska Community Economic Development Community Aid and Accountability Office [CAA@ Alaska.gov]

¹⁸ See Reference #10

¹⁹ See Reference #15

²⁰ See Reference #10