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Hello,

I am writing to strongly support the continuation of the USDA Farm to School Census.

Supporting farm to school programs is absolutely critical for supporting healthy eating patterns in children and our local economies. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that our food system is far too delicate and highlighted the need for stronger, more regional food systems. One key method for supporting this type of system is ensuring local food producers have a market. What better place to sell those goods than directly to schools feeding hungry kids?

To make these programs a reality, we must collect information about farm to school participation and activities to better understand how states and school food authorities (SFA) engage with farm to school efforts, including local food purchasing, gardening, and food education. The USDA Farm to School Census provides the only nationally representative data available on these programs and can provide farmers, ranchers and fishermen with important insight into schools interested in local purchasing, and what they may want to buy. This kind of local market information is a useful resource to help producers reach appropriately scaled market opportunities. It can also help state and federal policymakers understand the type, reach, and scale of innovative farm to school programs taking place, and how policies can best support this work. Finally, child nutrition programs have the opportunity to maximize the impact of government funds by including farm to school activities, and this data helps understand how child nutrition program operators are doing so.

While it is good for agencies to be mindful of the burden that data collection puts on SFAs, this information is being sought from those who already participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The Census directly helps understand how NSLP operations can best meet its program goals of child health and support for American producers.

The USDA Farm to School Census is important for producers and everyone interested in healthier child nutrition. It is critical that USDA continue its commitment to conducting the Farm to School Census in 2027.

Thank You.