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Dear Office of Management and Budget,

I am writing on behalf of Ecotrust, an Oregon-based non-profit farm to school partner, in support of the continuation and enhancement of the USDA Farm to School Census. This valuable tool provides critical data that informs local, state, and national efforts to strengthen farm to school initiatives, support agriculture, and improve student health and academic outcomes.

Oregon has long been a leader in farm to school programming, investing in partnerships that connect schools with local farmers, fishers, ranchers, and food producers. The USDA Farm to School Census helps us assess the reach and impact of our coordinated statewide efforts, identify gaps in access, and advocate for evidence-based policies and funding. It also offers insight into best practices and emerging trends, enabling us to adapt and innovate at the state level.

Reliable national data is essential for understanding the scope, reach and benefits of farm to school programs and policies in Oregon. We just completed an exhaustive 10-year strategic vision process that identified five goals public-private partners have agreed to work towards over the next decade. Multiple data points from the USDA Farm to School Census are used as evaluation indicators to track progress towards those goals. Eliminating this crucial data source would lead to greater inefficiencies. By providing a clear understanding of what works on a national scale, the Farm to School Census ultimately enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of farm to school efforts nationwide, aligning with the goals of fiscal responsibility and government efficiency.

Finally, Oregon agencies and organizations partner with the USDA to ensure a high rate of participation in the census. As a collaborative, we work to ensure Child Nutrition Program Sponsors complete the USDA Farm to School Census and had nearly 90% participation rate in the last census. While we appreciate efforts to reduce burdens on school food authorities, we have a reduced state reporting burden because we support and then make use of this national data set. We commit to continuing our on the ground efforts to ensure a high rate of participation in the USDA Farm to School census.

We strongly urge the USDA to continue prioritizing the Farm to School Census as an essential resource for kids, farmers, and communities.

Sincerely,
Angela Hedstrom
Senior Manager, Community Food Systems
Ecotrust