



April 1, 2025

Dear members of the House Agriculture Committee:

I am writing to urge your support for Representative Nelson's Farm to School and Early Care Bill, HF 1795, and its inclusion in the final Agriculture Omnibus Bill.

IATP is a member of the Minnesota Farm to Kids Alliance, and has worked on supporting Farm to School and Early Care programs in Minnesota for over a decade, collaborating with schools, Head Starts and early cares to implement local purchasing, creating supportive resources and conducting evaluation activities to bolster the growth of these initiatives statewide—including evaluation of MDA's Farm to School Grant Program.

MDA's grant program is currently funded at \$1.29M/year in state funding, but demand for this support is consistently greater than available funding.

- FY2023: when MDA had a previous infusion of federal funding to boost the amount available to \$4.2M, they received 128 Farm to School grant applications for \$5.43M total in requests.
- FY 2024: MDA received 92 applications requesting \$1.85 million for the \$1 million available.

In our evaluation work examining the impact of this grant program, we saw that the grant can act as an incentive for schools and early cares to establish buying relationships with MN farmers that often extend beyond the terms of the initial grant, with schools purchasing more than they are reimbursed for and integrating local farmers into their regular buying practices. Our partners at U of MN Extension found that every dollar spent on Farm to School generates an additional \$1 of local economic activity. As of September 2024, grantees had used FY23 funds to purchase from 437 producers, including meat, dairy, grain, fruit and vegetable growers around the state, and the number has continued to climb.

Farmers are scaling up to take advantage of these funds, and increased funding is vital for farmers to rely on this critical market and make their own investments to scale to wholesale markets. An increase in state funding is especially important now, after the recent decision to cancel federal investment into the Local Food for Schools Program

Farm to School and Early Care initiatives enhance the well-being of Minnesota kids, empower local farmers and create a positive economic impact. We urge you to support this bill!

Sincerely,

Erin McKee, Community Food Systems Program Director