

House Designates October Farm to School Month; Program Supports Farmers, Students

(Washington, D.C.) – The U.S. House of Representatives last night passed a resolution introduced by U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) to establish October as National Farm to School Month. Farm to School programs bring locally or regionally grown fresh produce into schools, thereby significantly improving nutrition for children eating school lunches and supporting local economic growth. Earlier this year, Holt introduced legislation to require \$40 million in funding for farm to school programs. The initiative is included in child nutrition legislation pending in the House.

“As a representative from the Garden State it should not be a surprise that I support bringing Jersey tomatoes or sweet corn into schools,” Holt said. “But this is not just a local resolution. Farm to school programs are a key priority for Agriculture Secretary Vilsack and First Lady Michelle Obama has planted a garden at the White House with the help of local students. Farm to school programs can help in the fight against childhood obesity and economically support our local farmers.”

Video of Rep. Holt speaking about the legislation can be found here:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YC1I5r50gGM>.

The resolution, which can be read in full below, highlights the benefits of Farm to School programs. The House resolved that:

“a) Farm to School programs should be recognized as a proven effective strategy that can provide immediate and long-term benefits to child health, small and medium-sized agricultural producer income, and community economic development; and

b) the Federal Government should partner in assisting schools and local educational agencies with planning, technical assistance, and implementation of Farm to School programs; and

c) encourages schools and local education agencies to use local produce in meals throughout the month of October; and

d) encourages schools, farmers and farm groups, local businesses, nonprofit institutions, churches, cities, State governments, and other local groups to raise awareness of Farm to School efforts in their communities.”

New Jersey Farm to School advocates hailed the resolution’s passage.

“The New Jersey Farm to School Network is fully supportive of the ‘stake in the ground’ commitment this resolution establishes. Representative Holt’s efforts to highlight the importance of farm to school nationally will lead to improvements in agricultural economies and school nutrition, benefitting both farmers and the children of the Garden State.”

Added Holt: “While there are presently more than 10,000 Farm to School programs operational in all 50 states, this is a fraction of the more than 94,000 public and nonprofit private schools operating the National School Lunch Program,” Holt said. “Establishing October as National Farm to School Month will increase awareness and provide the recognition that the existing programs have earned.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that as of 2008 almost 32 percent of our children were either overweight or obese. Obese children can develop adult diseases such as hypertension and Type-2 diabetes and, in the long term, these children are at increased risk for heart disease, stroke, and cancer. A study by Mission:Readiness, an organization of retired senior military leaders, found that more than 9 million young adults are too overweight to join the Armed Services.

Resolution text:

H. RES. 1655

Expressing support for designation of October as ‘National Farm to School Month’.

Whereas Farm to School programs of varying scale are currently operational in over 8,900 schools in all 50 States;

Whereas Farm to School programs connect schools and local farms in order to serve healthier meals in school cafeterias, improve student nutrition, and provide agriculture, health, and nutrition education;

Whereas Farm to School programs often have experiential education components that can lead to permanent improvements in children's diets both in school and at home;

Whereas Farm to School programs facilitate the purchase of local food for school meals, thus increasing local farm sales and stimulating local economies;

Whereas Farm to School programs can benefit small and mid-sized agricultural producers by providing access to consistent markets and the planning and organization skills to expand to other institutional customers;

Whereas Farm to School programs can be particularly important for beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers as schools provide a consistent and secure customer base;

Whereas Farm to School programs can benefit local economies, for every \$1 spent on local foods in schools, \$1 to \$3 circulate in the local economy;

Whereas one-third of children in the United States are now obese or overweight, and over the past 3 decades, obesity rates have quadrupled in 6- to 11-year-olds and tripled in 12- to 19-year-olds according to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Health and Nutrition Examination survey;

Whereas more than 9,000,000 young adults (25 percent) are too overweight to join the United States Armed Forces, making children's obesity rates a matter of national security;

Whereas United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) data shows that only 2 percent of children meet the Food Guide Pyramid serving recommendations;

Whereas communities with high levels of poverty have less access to fresh fruits and vegetables than higher-income communities;

Whereas increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is 1 of 6 major strategies to prevent and control obesity, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;

Whereas Farm to School programs can increase children's daily intake of fresh fruits and vegetables and studies have demonstrated that children in schools with an active Farm to School program increased their average consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by 1 or more servings per day;

Whereas 31,000,000 children eat school food 5 days a week, 180 days a year, and for many of these children, school food programs provide more than half of their daily calories;

Whereas approximately 60 percent of students in the United States are eligible to receive free or reduced-price school lunches;

Whereas Farm to School programs are popular among children and can increase school lunch participation ranging from 3 percent to 16 percent for all meals;

Whereas the National School Lunch Program established under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act has potential to provide fresher and healthier foods to millions of children in the United States;

Whereas Farm to School programs decrease the distance food travels to schools, which can

reduce the energy used in transportation; and

Whereas the month of October would be an appropriate month to designate as `National Farm to School Month': Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That--

(1) it is the sense of the House of Representatives that--

(A) Farm to School programs should be recognized as a proven effective strategy that can provide immediate and long-term benefits to child health, small and medium-sized agricultural producer income, and community economic development; and

(B) the Federal Government should partner in assisting schools and local educational agencies with planning, technical assistance, and implementation of Farm to School programs; and

(2) the House of Representatives--

(A) expresses support for designation of `National Farm to School Month';

(B) encourages schools and local education agencies to use local produce in meals; and

(C) encourages schools, farmers and farm groups, local businesses, nonprofit institutions, churches, cities, State governments, and other local groups to raise awareness of Farm to School efforts in their communities.

House Passes Holt Resolution Promoting Farm to School Programs

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