

The Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act

Sponsored by Representative Chellie Pingree and Senator Sherrod Brown

The Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act will improve federal farm bill programs that support local and regional farm and food systems. This legislation will help farmers and ranchers engaged in local and regional agriculture by addressing production, aggregation, processing, marketing, and distribution needs and will also assist consumers by improving access to healthy food and direct and retail markets. And of utmost importance, this legislation will provide more secure funding for critically important programs that support family farms, expand new farming opportunities, and invest in the local agriculture economy.

The Benefits of Local and Regional Food Systems

Local and regional agriculture is a major economic driver in the farm economy. There are now more than 7,000 farmers markets throughout the United States—a 150 percent increase since 2000, direct to consumer sales have accounted for more than \$1.2 billion in annual revenues. Now, on the heels of that expansion, we are witnessing the rapid growth of local and regional food markets that have scaled up beyond direct marketing. Together these markets represent important new job growth and economic development.

The Local Farm, Food, and Jobs Act will:

Boost Income and Opportunities for Farmers and Ranchers by –

- Improving access to Farm Service Agency credit programs for farmers and ranchers producing for local and regional food markets.
- Requiring Farm Credit Services institutions to enhance lending opportunities for farmers and ranchers producing for local and regional food markets, beginning farmers, and small farms.
- Funding Value-Added Producer Grants at an annual amount \$30 million and expands the program to include food hubs and outreach to underserved states and communities.
- Authorizing the Risk Management Agency to develop a whole farm revenue insurance product for diversified operations, including specialty crops & mixed grain/livestock or dairy operations.
- Directing the Risk Management Agency to eliminate the organic premium surcharge and to complete the development of organic price series.
- Funding the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program at an annual amount \$7 million and raising the maximum cap per participants from \$750 to \$1,000.
- Expands the production of fruits and vegetables by allowing greater planting flexibility for commodity program participants.
- Funding farmer food safety training through the National Food Safety Training, Education, Extension, Outreach and Technical Assistance program at an annual amount of \$15 million.
- Improving opportunities for local and regional food producers to participate in the Conservation Stewardship Program Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Farmland Protection Program, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, and Technical Assistance.

Improve Local and Regional Food System Infrastructure and Markets by –

- Increasing the Business and Industry loan funding set-aside for local and regionally produced agriculture products and food enterprises.
- Providing authority for local and regional food system funding under Rural Business Opportunity Grants, Rural Business Enterprise Grants, & Community Facility Grants & Loans.
- Funding the Local Marketing Promotion Program -- the former Farmers Market Promotion Program plus funding for larger scale, non-direct local marketing -- at \$30 million per year.
- Funding the Specialty Crop Block Grant program at an annual amount of \$90 million and creating an annual allocation for local and regional crop and market development.
- Improving Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) outreach and technical assistance to small and very small livestock processing plants.
- Requiring FSIS to create guidance for small and very small livestock processing plants to better enable compliance with food safety requirements.
- Requiring FSIS to provide an electronic submission option for the meat label approval process and to create a searchable database of existing meat labels.

- Directing USDA to produce a report to Congress on additional steps that can be taken to better meet the needs of small poultry growers and processors.

Expand Access to Healthy Foods for Consumers by –

- Improving SNAP participant access to farmers markets, CSAs, and other direct marketing outlets by creating a level playing field for electronic benefit transfer among vendors.
- Improving SNAP Education and Outreach by encouraging states to use farmers markets and other direct marketing outlets as a venue for nutrition education activities and providing states the discretion to include nutrition incentives as part of educational efforts.
- Funding the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program at \$25 million a year.
- Providing \$10 million for the Community Food Projects program and increasing the maximum grant term from three to five years.
- Allowing schools the option to use a portion of their AMS school lunch commodity dollars or DoD Fresh program dollars for the purchase of local and regional foods.
- Bolstering requirements that specify AMS purchases use a geographic preference for the procurement of locally produced foods.
- Amending Section 32 to support the development of local and regional agriculture markets.
- Encouraging States to include community-supported agriculture programs as eligible to participate in the Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

Enhance Agriculture Research and Extension by –

- Establishing local and regional food systems as an added new priority area within the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.
- Authorizing an Extension technical assistance initiative to help create sustainable local and regional food systems in the neediest parts of rural America.
- Creating a new initiative for the collection and production of critically important research data on local and regional food systems.
- Directing USDA Research, Education, and Extension Office to coordinate classical plant and animal breeding research activities and projects to develop locally-adapted cultivars and breeds.