

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

September 10, 2024

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write to encourage the U.S. Department of Agriculture to continue investing in our local and regional food systems and our domestic farmers through the Local Food Purchase Assistance program (LFPA).

The Local Food Purchase Assistance program uses cooperative agreements with states, Tribal governments, and territories to support the procurement and distribution of locally and regionally grown foods to increase nutritious offerings in food access programs. Thanks to your leadership, this has so far included an investment of up to \$900 million to help connect local producers and underserved farmers to food banks, schools, and other organizations that reach food insecure communities.

This program has been exceedingly popular and impactful, as the USDA has entered into over 80 cooperative agreements and has supported over 6,000 unique farmers and producers nationwide. Estimates show the local economic impact of these investments will be more than \$1.5 billion. This includes a few highlights:

- In Colorado, over \$9 million has gone to 220 local producers. These food purchases came from 48 counties and were distributed to over 700 unique sites, over three-quarters of which are reported as underserved.
- Over \$20 million is expected to reach North Carolina, where \$2 million has so far been spent with nearly 350 producers. By coordinating purchases from 18 food hubs, Carolina FarmsSHARE is distributing NC-grown product in 76 counties.
- In Ohio, over \$11 million has been spent with nearly 180 Ohio producers. The Ohio CAN program includes 5 regional food hubs and aggregators to distribute locally produced goods to 12 Feeding America food banks.
- Over \$5 million will reach Iowa, where close to \$3 million has so far been spent with around 250 producers. The Iowa LFPA program is a partnership between Iowa, the Meskwaki Nation, 8 food hubs, and 6 food banks to serve 95 counties.

As Farm Bill negotiations continue, we are committed to seeking a path through the Farm Bill that codifies and authorizes more funding for the LFPA. However, currently, these funds are set to expire in April 2025 and some states have fully allocated their current funds. Moreover, we know that many LFPA grantees cannot continue this work without LFPA funds. Administering state agencies estimate that the quickest they could enter into new LFPA agreements with grantees would be a minimum of 12 months after Farm Bill passage, indicating that all states will

face a funding cliff. Without further funding, our farmers and producers are left unable to properly plan for the upcoming seasons and our local partners are scrambling to fill gaps in funding.

As such, we request the answer to the following questions about USDA's plans regarding LFPA:

- Does the Department intend to work with partners to help maintain and sustain programming past April 2025?
- If so, can you share specifics on your plans and timeline?

As the Farm Bill continues to be negotiated, we urge the USDA to explore funding solutions that will allow this program to continue without pause to support the diverse small to midsize farmers that have been providing local products to their communities.

Thank you for your consideration, and we respectfully request a response by the end of October 2024. We look forward to continuing to work together to support our local and regional food systems.

Sincerely,



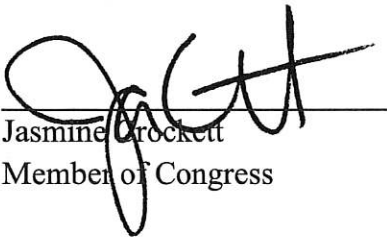
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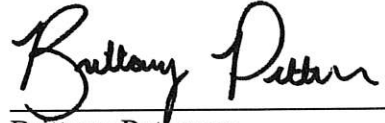
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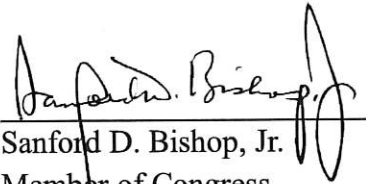
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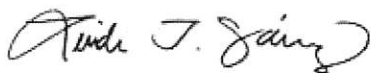
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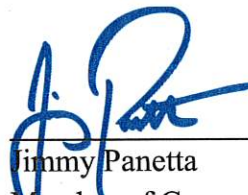
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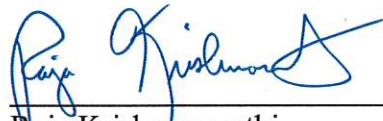
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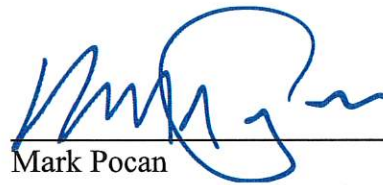
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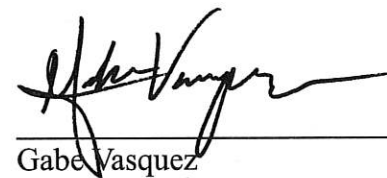
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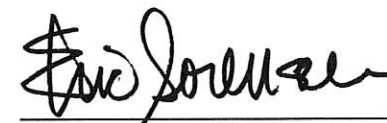
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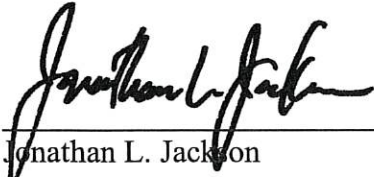
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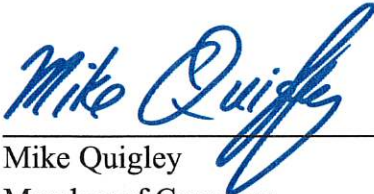
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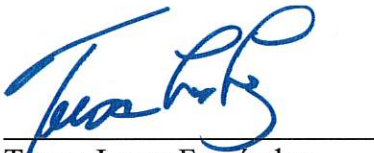
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