

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

September 27, 2024

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to encourage the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to continue supporting market opportunities and promoting local supply chains for domestic farmers through additional funding for the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA).

Through LFPA, USDA has empowered states, Tribal governments, and territories to develop regional supply chains that connect local producers to food-insecure communities. The program helps address food insecurity by making healthy, local foods available to communities in need and successfully expanded market opportunities for local producers. Through cooperative agreements, local entities purchase a diverse range of specialty crops, meat, and dairy products and distribute them into food banks, pantries, and other community settings. This localized approach has helped meet the needs of isolated communities and allows prioritization of small- and mid-scale farmers.

The LFPA program has exceeded expectations. It generates new revenue sources for farmers and encourages scaling operations and other on-farm investments. Programs currently operate in 54 states and territories and with 80 tribes making purchases from over 6,000 producers. Estimates show the local economic impact of these investments totals more than \$1.5 billion, including:

- In Ohio, over \$14 million has been spent with nearly 180 Ohio producers. The OhioCaN program includes 5 regional food hubs and aggregators to distribute locally produced goods to 12 Feeding America food banks.
- In Colorado, over \$7 million has gone to 299 local producers. These food purchases came from 48 counties and distributed to over 700 unique sites, over three-quarters of which are reported as underserved.
- Michigan's program is connecting with producers in the most remote, rural portions of the state - making purchases from 468 producers, valued at roughly \$3.8 million.
- In Rhode Island, over \$915,000 has been invested into the local food economy, of which over \$540,000 has gone directly to socially disadvantaged farmers and fishers.

These funds have connected around 75,000 in-need Rhode Islanders each month with fresh, healthy, local foods.

- In Maryland, the state has ensured a strong focus on supporting their watermen in addition to local farmers to provide a variety of specialty crops and seafood to communities through their Food Bank networks while spending \$4 million with 65 producers.
- In Pennsylvania, Feeding Pennsylvania has purchased \$13 million worth of local foods from 252 farmers and producers. Minnesota's program recently announced its partnership with 33 organizations across the state designed to meet unique regional needs and connect with a diverse scale of producers.
- Georgia's program has heavily focused on purchasing high quality beef that is allowing local small-scale producers to expand operations, totaling approximately \$8 million to 36 producers with over 70% being underserved.
- In New Jersey, Jersey Fresh for All has focused on farm viability with more than \$3 million invested with 60 producers, over 60% of them are underserved.
- Illinois's program has purchased over \$5 million from 143 producers, all of which are historically underserved.
- Vermont was well poised to select twelve organizations that have purchased roughly \$1 million from 182 small scale producers.
- New York's Food for New York Families Program is focused on building strong networks of 102 food system partners purchasing \$2.2 million worth of fresh produce, meat, dairy, and seafood from 201 producers.

Unfortunately, LFPA funds are currently set to expire in April 2025. Without further funding, our farmers and producers are unsure how to plan the upcoming season. While the Senate has demonstrated its commitment to codifying and authorizing more funding, administrative action is necessary to ensure LFPA funds have the resources necessary to continue supporting local farmers and their communities.

Continued funding is essential to ensure localities have enough time to develop marketing plans that go beyond federal funding sources, to prevent any potential funding gaps that occur with Farm Bill negotiations, and to avoid delays in future funding due to any new authorization. We urge USDA, as it has done before, to identify funding options that will allow this program to continue without pause.

Thank you for your consideration, and we respectfully request a response before November 2024. We look forward to continuing to work together to support our local and regional food systems.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
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United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



John Fetterman
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



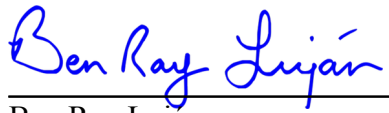
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



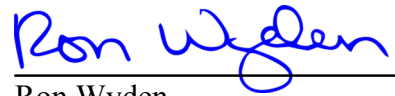
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