

February 11, 2013

Representative Hunter  
House Appropriations Committee Chair  
Washington State Legislature

We are writing in support of funding for the Farm to School and Small Farm Direct Marketing Programs at the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). **Please include \$500,000 in the biennial budget to partially restore the Small Farm & Direct Marketing and Farm to School programs within the State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).**

Even though both programs were recognized nationally for the significant impact they have had in strengthening small family commercial farms in Washington State, they were eliminated in 2011. Washington was a national leader in investing in a healthy, vibrant local food system. In 2001, the Small Farm and Direct Marketing Assistance Program (RCW 15.64.050) was created to assist farmers selling directly to consumers. In 2008, the Local Farms Healthy Kids Act created ground-breaking legislation to invest in new markets for Washington farms while increasing access to healthy foods by forming WSDA's Farm to School program (RCW 15.64.060), a nationally-recognized program. Combined, these programs have helped Washington's farm economy and kids stay healthier in tough times. To date, WSDA's Farm to School program enhanced healthy food access in 127 school districts and supported 144 farms as they enter the school market. As a result of both programs, WSDA's support for farm businesses directly assisted millions of dollars in small farm sales.

Small Farm Direct Marketing and Farm to School help farmers have a greater impact on our economy. According to a recent United States Department of Agriculture study, farmers that sell to local markets support 4 times as many jobs as those not engaged in direct and local sales. As a part of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act, passed by Congress in 2010, schools are now required to offer more fruits and vegetables as a part of the National School Lunch program. Farm to school staff at WSDA are there to help ensure that as much of that produce as possible is grown in Washington. An investment in these two critical programs will help grow our agricultural economy and support healthy eating in schools across Washington.

If funded, the Small Farms Direct Marketing and Farm to School Programs will support Washington's children and famers in the following ways:

- Facilitate \$5 million in sales, business investment and economic growth for Washington Farmers
- Create or support at least 35 jobs through sales and economic development
- Assist 500+ small farms and farm businesses in overcoming regulatory barriers
- Help school districts across the state serve fresh, local food in their schools
- Leverage \$500,000 or more in federal grants in Washington State

The Farm to School and Small Farm Direct Marketing Programs ensure that small commercial farmers have access to information and help to navigate new markets for their products. This will bring the best of Washington's bounty into homes, restaurants, many grocery stores, hospitals and school cafeterias across the state. Since the cuts in 2011 both programs have maintained some of the critical services they provide with funding from competitive grants through USDA, but those grants are running out. If the legislature doesn't act quickly these programs will be lost for good. **We urge you to include \$500,000 in the biennial budget for Farm to School and Small Farms Direct Marketing.**

Respectfully,