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Washington State Senate

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February 13, 2013

The Honorable Andy Hill, Chair
Senate Ways & Means Committee
J.A. Cherberg Building, Room 303
Capitol Campus
Olympia, Washington

Dear Chairman Hill:

We are writing to express our support for the “Farm to School” and “Small Farm Direct Marketing” programs implemented by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA.)

We ask that you please include \$500,000 in the biennial budget to partially restore funding for the Small Farm & Direct Marketing and Farm to School programs.

Even though both programs were recognized nationally for the significant impact they have had in strengthening small family commercial farms in Washington State, their funding was eliminated in 2011.

Washington was a national leader in investing in a local food system. In 2001, the Small Farm & 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 was passed into law 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.)

Combined, these programs have helped Washington’s farm economy and children’s health. 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 the greatest impact on our economy. If funded, the Small Farms Direct Marketing and Farm to School programs will support Washington’s children and famers by:

- *facilitating \$5 million in sales, business investment and economic growth for Washington farmers;
- *creating or supporting at least 35 jobs through sales and economic development;
- *assisting 500 small farms and farm businesses in overcoming regulatory barriers;
- *helping 60 school districts serve healthy, local food in their schools; and
- *leveraging \$500,000 or more in federal grants in Washington State.

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The Farm to School and Small Farm Direct Marketing Programs provide essential services that ensure small commercial farmers can navigate complex regulations so they can get 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,



Steve Hobbs, State Senator
44th Legislative District



Brian Hatfield, State Senator
19th Legislative District



Maralyn Chase, State Senator
32th Legislative District
