

House Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee Public Hearing
Room 515 Irvis Office
Harrisburg, PA 17120
October 07, 2025
09:30 AM

Agenda

House Bill 1768 (BURGOS) An Act establishing the Keystone Fresh Program; providing for the Fresh Schools Grant Program, for the Keystone Producer Grant Program, for the Keystone Assistance Grant Program and for the administration of the Keystone Fresh Program by the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture; and establishing the Keystone Fresh Fund.

9:30-9:40 a.m. Call to order and Introductions

- Chairman Eddie Day Pashinski
- Chairman Pete Schweyer
- Chairman Danilo Burgos

9:40-10:10 a.m. Panel One:

- Vonda Ramp, Director Bureau of Food and Nutrition and State Director of Child Nutrition Programs, PA Department of Education
- Caryn Long Earl, Director Bureau of Food Assistance, PA Department of Agriculture
- Q & A

10:10-10:35 a.m. Panel Two:

- Crystal Hampton-Davis, Owner, Davis Grown Farm in Schuylkill County
- Joseph Edmondson, Culinary Arts Instructor and Director of Food Service, Columbia Montour Area Vocation Technical School
- Gage Monroe, Senior at Columbia Montour Area Vocational Technical School
- Q & A

10:35-11:00 a.m. Panel Three:

- Kelly Price, Director of Food Services, Manheim Township School District
- Scotty Miller, Farm Manager, Masonic Village
- Donna Robbins, Chief Operating Officer, Manheim Township School District
- Q & A

11:00 a.m. Adjourn

And any other business that comes before the Committee

Attachments:

- Remarks Agenda 10.7.25

- PDE Testimony - Keystone Fresh Act and Local Food in Schools
- PDA House ARA-Education Joint Hearing Keystone Fresh Testimony
- KFA Testimony_ Hampton
- 2025 House Ag Testimony Edmondson - Keystone Fresh Act
- 2025 House Ag Testimony Monroe - Keystone Fresh Act
- Kelly Price Slide Show KFA 10.7.25
- KFA Testimony_Price
- KFA Testimony_Miller
- D. Robbins The Keystone Fresh Act Testimony - Google Docs
- 10.7.25 - Keystone Fresh Act Testimony - TFT
- 2025.Keystone-Fresh-Act-Supporters
- HB1768 (Keystone Fresh) Testimony_Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
- HVM_Honig_Testimony_KFA
- Keystone Fresh_PFPC
- PFB Supports HB1768 Keystone Fresh Act



House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee & House Education Committee
Joint Hearing on House Bill 1768 – The Keystone Fresh Act
October 7, 2025, 9:30 a.m.
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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**House Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee and House Education Committee
Joint Informational Hearing on the Keystone Fresh Act
Director Vonda Ramp, Bureau of Food and Nutrition, PA Department of Education
October 7, 2025**

Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Pashinski, Chairman Moul, Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and members of the House Agriculture & Rural Affairs and Education Committees. My name is Vonda Ramp, and I am the State Director of Child Nutrition Programs and the Director of the Bureau of Food and Nutrition within the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). On behalf of the department, thank you for the invitation to testify about the importance of fresh, local foods in schools. PDE has an established record of promoting local fresh foods in schools through the provision of educational materials, resources, training, and mini grants.

Overview of School Meals in Pennsylvania

The department's Bureau of Food and Nutrition oversees all federal Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs). This includes three umbrella programs: the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (School Nutrition Programs), the Summer Meal Programs, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Each of these different programs has meal requirements for fruits, vegetables, meat/meat alternatives, whole grains, and milk.

School meals allow students to access nutritious foods and make healthy, balanced meal choices. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service developed the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) to assess diet quality using actual dietary intake compared to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Research shows that, across most income and ethnicity categories, students who participate in the school lunch program have significantly higher HEI scores than non-participants -- meaning that the dietary intake of students consuming school meals aligns with recommended nutrition guidelines more than the students who do not consume school meals.^{1,2} Initiatives that promote the purchase of **local** foods for use in School Nutrition Programs encourage healthy eating habits and benefit both Pennsylvania agriculture and students. The department has made and continues to make a dedicated effort to increase CNP operators' access to fresh, local foods.

During the 2024-25 school year, Pennsylvania schools served approximately 192 million lunches and 93 million breakfasts. School meals are not only an opportunity for students to obtain healthy food during their day, but they are also a laboratory for teaching students about good nutrition, introducing them to

¹ [Differences in Diet Quality between School Lunch Participants and Nonparticipants in the United States by Income and Race - PMC](#). Gearan EC, Monzella K, Jennings L, Fox MK. Nutrients. 2020 Dec 19;12(12):3891. doi: 10.3390/nu12123891. PMID: 33352695; PMCID: PMC7765856.

² [Association of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act With Dietary Quality Among Children in the US National School Lunch Program](#) | Kinderknecht K, Harris C, Jones-Smith J. JAMA. 2020;324(4):359–368. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.9517.

new foods, and educating them on where food comes from and how it is grown. School meals serve as a bridge between classroom education and everyday eating habits.³ As a result of Governor Shapiro's initiative to provide free breakfasts for Pennsylvania's 1.7 million students, there has been nearly a 14% increase in student breakfast participation over the last two years. In addition, the Governor's School Breakfast Challenge has encouraged schools to promote breakfast participation while reducing the number of high-sugar breakfast products, to incorporate local foods into the breakfast menu, and to develop new scratch or semi-scratch recipes. At the end of September, the Shapiro Administration celebrated the 10 schools with the highest increase in participation, which included North Penn School District in Montgomery County. The celebration included a sampling of recipes that schools submitted as part of the Challenge, and students had the opportunity to provide feedback and select their favorites.

The Challenge is a fun way to incentivize and recognize school nutrition operators' diligent work on limited budgets to provide students with creative, healthy meals. The Bureau of Food and Nutrition recognizes its responsibility to provide resources that enable school nutrition operators to develop innovative programs and deliver appealing, flavorful meals to Pennsylvania students.

Farm-to-School Initiatives

In 2009, PDE began a collaborative partnership with Penn State University's Department of Nutrition to develop materials, offer trainings, and provide funding to promote local food sourcing. Through this partnership, the department has conducted information-gathering sessions, presented to industry stakeholders, held farm-to-school trainings, and hosted regional summits to educate school nutrition operators and to provide peer-endorsed best practices on local food sourcing. In 2022, PDE held the first Farm-to-School Summit in conjunction with Ag Progress Days, with nearly 140 school nutrition professionals in attendance. The 2024 Farm-to-School Summit took place at Chatham University with 113 professionals in attendance, and plans are currently in process for the 2026 Summit.

In addition, the department regularly offers trainings throughout the state to provide CNP operators and their staff with professional culinary training opportunities. Since 2023, more than 325 school nutrition professionals have participated in small-group, hands-on culinary trainings led by a professional chef. These trainings increase school nutrition operators' familiarity with Pennsylvania produce and how to purchase, store, and prepare food in the quantities required for a school setting. The department consistently receives positive feedback on these trainings, and operators report that they are more receptive to trying new products and preparation methods after attending the training sessions.

One of the broadest and most used resources that PDE has developed to promote the use of local Pennsylvania foods is Pennsylvania Harvest of the Month, a website highlighting monthly Pennsylvania agricultural products.⁴ The website provides the following for each featured product:

- Standardized recipes for CNP operators and recipes to send home with students
- Fact sheets
- Family newsletters
- Signage for serving lines, walls, and tables
- Preschool activity sheets
- Social media post suggestions
- Short videos that make culinary trainings accessible to school nutrition staff who cannot travel or are not available for full- or multi-day in-person trainings.

³ Academic Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences: [Microsoft Word - family.doc](#).

⁴ PA Harvest of the Month: [Pennsylvania Harvest of the Month | Home](#).

In addition to a monthly agricultural feature, the website includes best practices, recipes, a webpage on gardening for schools and homes, and a webpage for familiarizing local growers with farm-to-school programs. The website has received nearly 19,000 unique viewers in 2025 alone.

Using federal grants, PDE also offers schools mini grants to support taste-testing of local foods, school gardens, field trips, local food education, and chef visits to students and staff. Research demonstrates that children are innately neophobic to foods – which means they can be reluctant to try something new – and it can take up to 15-20 repeated exposures before a child may be willing to taste a new food. Exposing students to new tastes in fun and interactive ways, such as those provided through PDE's mini grants, increases their familiarity and willingness to try new foods. PDE often hears from schools that guest chefs and farmers provide fun, engaging sessions that have a lasting positive impact on students.

All of these efforts have contributed to increasing awareness, involvement, and participation in farm-to-school practices. The USDA conducts a Farm to School Census every four to five years. When comparing results between the 2019 and 2023 censuses, participation in farm-to-school activities in Pennsylvania increased from 75% to 81%, with a total of 645 school food authorities participating in 2023.⁵ This is significantly higher than the national participation rate, which averaged 74% in 2023. The percentage of total food costs schools spent on local products (excluding milk) in Pennsylvania increased from 7.1% in 2019 to 8.9% in 2023. In addition, 49% of respondents who participate in farm-to-school have been doing so for less than three years, demonstrating that many farm-to-school programs are just getting started. Across Pennsylvania, 71% of 794 responding schools indicated they serve local foods, 54% provide food, nutrition, or agricultural education, and 14% have edible gardens.

While PDE continues to support school nutrition operators with sourcing local products, challenges remain. School nutrition operators must find local growers and producers that can provide products in the quantity necessary for an institutional-sized operation, meet delivery needs, and offer low price points. To successfully implement a local food purchasing program, school nutrition operators often report the following needs:

- Information on where to find locally produced foods at the volume necessary to feed students
- Training for food service staff on preparing fresh foods
- Additional funding to purchase and prepare local foods

In addition, local growers and producers are required to learn the procurement and nutrition requirements of school nutrition programs to understand product size, quality, specifications, and necessary price points. Growers require time and resources to respond to large scale requests from schools but may be hesitant to make investments in the necessary resources, such as equipment, storage, and transportation, if the market is not consistent or reliable. However, when good relationships are formed between producers and schools, local food agreements are often mutually beneficial.

Pennsylvania Local Food Purchasing Incentive Investigation (2023)

Local Food Purchasing Incentive (LFPI) programs, which involve the allocation of state or federal funds to School Food Authorities for the purchase of locally grown foods to serve in school, have grown in popularity in recent years. Recognizing this, in 2022 PDE commissioned an LFPI study through a USDA Farm to State Agency Grant in partnership with Penn State University. Intending to examine legislative language, funding structures, implementation strategies, and partnerships associated with local food purchasing initiatives that were adopted in other states, the [*Pennsylvania Local Food Purchasing Incentive Investigation*](#) was completed in September 2023. The department collected qualitative data through interviews with state agency employees, CNP operators in Pennsylvania and other states, and

⁵ USDA Farm to School Census: [Home | USDA-FNS Farm to School Census](#).

local food suppliers, resulting in a valuable insight into the best practices for implementing an LFPI program.

A key takeaway from the study was that flexibility and consistency in legislative language and funding are essential to properly implementing an LFPI program. Funding should be flexible and substantial enough to incentivize local school nutrition operators to participate and cover the costs associated with purchasing and preparing local foods. CNP operators may require additional equipment and training on procurement regulations, culinary skills, and food safety to properly process fresh foods. CNP operators reported burdens and concerns about short-term or inconsistent funding as potential barriers to participation. These concerns should be considered if creating a statewide LFPI program.

Additionally, LFPI funding must be reliable and sustainable so that growers and producers can adjust their production to accommodate dependable farm-to-school purchasing relationships, and the reimbursement and reporting structures must be simple and efficient. Program administrators pointed to food hubs as valuable partners who could help connect CNP operators with local producers, assist producers with scaling up to meet the large demand of school nutrition operators, and lessen the burden on producers.

For state agencies, standing up an LFPI program would require either substantial updates to existing administrative systems or entirely new systems to distribute funding and collect the documentation needed to provide proper oversight. Since the work of an LFPI program overlaps with multiple state agencies, consistent feedback from agencies is critical to proper program development and implementation.

PA Partnerships and Future Initiatives

One of the strengths of Pennsylvania's Farm-to-School efforts is the partnerships the department has with organizations that have extensive knowledge in CNP operations, education, agricultural production, public health and food systems, including:

- Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
- Pennsylvania Department of Health
- Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
- Penn State University, Department of Nutrition (Project PA)
- Pennsylvania Farm to School Network
- The Food Trust
- Pittsburgh Food Policy Council
- School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania
- PA Friends of Agriculture Foundation
- Pasa Sustainable Agriculture

Alongside these partners, the department is excited to work to mutually benefit growers, producers, the entire CNP community, and Pennsylvanians at large. Beginning in October 2025, the department will establish a producer directory that collects key data points to assist school nutrition operators, local growers, and local producers in making streamlined connections within and outside of their industries. This directory will also include food aggregators such as Common Market in Southeastern Pennsylvania, produce auctions, and other food hubs throughout the state, which are often an efficient source for both growers and purchasers.

Summary

While Pennsylvania has experienced steady growth in farm-to-school programs, additional resources would enhance opportunities for local partnerships and provide needed support for school nutrition operators. As indicated in the department's 2023 Local Food Purchasing Incentive Investigation, flexibility and consistency in legislative language and funding are essential for the successful implementation of LFPI programs in Pennsylvania. I would like to commend Chairman Burgos on his initiative to provide fresh, locally sourced ingredients for healthy school meals through the Keystone Fresh Act. Thank you again for inviting the department to participate alongside the esteemed panelists included here today. I look forward to working together to better ensure that Pennsylvania's students receive school meals that are fresh, healthy, and local.

Testimony
Caryn Long Earl, Director of the Bureau of Food Assistance
Department of Agriculture
House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee &
House Education Committee
Joint Public Hearing on HB 1786 – The Keystone Fresh Act
October 7, 2025

Good Morning Chairman Pashinski, Chairman Moul, Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and members of the Agriculture & Rural Affairs and Education committees. My name is Caryn Long Earl, and I have served for the past eight years as the director of the Bureau of Food Assistance for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to discuss the important role nutrition, food security, and Farm to School programs play in our schools and in the lives of Pennsylvania children.

On behalf of the department, I also wish to thank you for the opportunity to shine a light on the critical role that Pennsylvania farmers and agribusinesses play in ensuring food and nutrition security. Taking the lessons learned from the COVID-pandemic, our department has recommitted ourselves to strengthening our local and regional food systems and expanding processing capacity for Pennsylvania farmers and agribusinesses, enabling us to further shore up the food supply chain. Implementing policies like The Keystone Fresh Act can play a vital role in strengthening our local food systems by ensuring that state and school dollars can be spent with local producers to provide healthy, nutritious foods to our kids.

Bureau of Food Assistance

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Food Assistance helps to ensure that all Pennsylvanians — regardless of geographic location, demographics, and socio-economic status — have consistent access to healthy, nutritious foods. Using state and federal resources, the bureau works with Pennsylvania's regional food banks, more than 800 school food authorities and child-care centers, and nearly 3,000 local food pantries,

lead agencies, soup kitchens, shelters, and other local nonprofit organizations to distribute critical food supplies and funding.

State and federal food assistance programs administered by the bureau include Pennsylvania's State Food Purchase Program, the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (known in Pennsylvania as the Senior Food Box Program), the WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foods in Schools and Child Nutrition Programs.

The USDA Foods program supports domestic nutrition programs and American agricultural producers through purchases of 100% American-grown and -produced foods for use by schools and institutions participating in child feeding programs like the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) develops product specifications for these USDA Foods and then manages the solicitation and award process in order to procure foods specifically requested from child nutrition program providers from the lowest price, qualified bidder for each destination. Because of the large volume of products being sourced and because of the price points dictated by the federal procurement process, vendors that participate in the USDA Foods program tend to be larger-scale food producers and food processors.

According to USDA data from federal FY2023 — the most recent data available — Pennsylvania producers and food processors sold more than \$276 million worth of foods to the USDA Foods program, ranking our state third in terms of food value provided to these USDA child feeding programs. These products don't just stay in Pennsylvania, but are instead shipped to serve USDA food assistance programs throughout the United States.

Child Hunger in Pennsylvania

These federally funded USDA child nutrition programs are critical resources in helping to meet the needs of some of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable residents — our children. In fact, for some children, meals provided via USDA's array of child nutrition programs may be the only meals that children have consistent and reliable access to. According to "Map the Meal Gap" data published by Feeding America, in 2023, 475,230 children living in Pennsylvania were at risk of hunger and didn't always know the source of their next meal. This number represents 18.1% of all children — that's one in six — living in Pennsylvania.

Research shows that children who don't have adequate access to food face numerous serious short-term and long-term effects. Children who experience hunger early in life are more apt to experience delays and deficits in both physical and cognitive development and to develop mental health challenges. As a result, hunger can change the way a child grows, thinks, learns, and behaves. Childhood hunger also leads to higher risks for certain health conditions, such as anemia and asthma. For school-age children, hunger can have adverse effects on academic performance, as hungry children have more trouble focusing and learning in school, have behavioral challenges, and are more likely to have issues with absenteeism. Further lack of adequate access to food as a child has been proven to have lasting physical and psychological consequences for individuals later in life.

This is why it is critically important to connect children living in households of all income levels with healthy, nutritious foods from their earliest days of life. Working in partnership, our department collaborates with Pennsylvania's Departments of Health, Education, and Human Services to administer an array of critical federal food assistance programs like WIC, the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs, Summer Feeding Programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, among others, to help ensure that all children have the nutrients they need to grow and thrive.

Role of Pennsylvania Agriculture

According to the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, Pennsylvania is home to more than 49,000 farms with a combined farmland acreage of more than 7.3 million acres. This large, variety of diverse farms located throughout the Commonwealth average 144 acres and 95% are considered to be family farms.

In a rich agricultural state like Pennsylvania, especially one with a significant diversity in what our farmers produce, creating greater connections between school meals and Pennsylvania products has been a key emphasis. That's why, since 2017, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has played a key role on the Leadership Team of the Pennsylvania Farm to School Network (PFSN). Through PFSN, under the leadership of The Food Trust, we have been able to join with other state agencies, schools, non-profit organizations, and industry associations engaged in food, farm, and nutrition policy to advance Farm to School opportunities across the state through programming, outreach, and education for school leadership, producers, and community members.

In 2019, as part of the Pennsylvania Farm Bill, the first state-level Farm Bill in the nation, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture launched a "Farm to School" grant program that built off the success of the PFSN. This grant program provides a vehicle for school food authorities to increase local food procurement and launch training programs that help students connect their meals and the farmers who produce it. To date, this grant program has allocated over \$2.8 million to 281 schools.

We have found the success of this program is often greatest in areas identified by USDA as food deserts. Grant programs like Farm to School can play a role in addressing those needs by equipping and empowering schools to create school gardens that can feed the cafeteria or find ways to adjust the school menu to reflect what is in season around Pennsylvania. For instance, the Erie City School District has used state and federal dollars to build out school gardens and host cooking programs for students to understand the types of meals

that can be made from the products they have grown. City schools have also adjusted their menu to reflect the seasonality of locally produced products. These changes mean that students are receiving fresh, nutritionally dense meals, while also understanding the critical role agriculture plays in their lives.

Across Pennsylvania, farmers too are finding success partnering directly with food service directors on special events, such as serving locally grown sweet corn, or coming into long-term contracts to serve school meals. To help facilitate meaningful partnerships between growers and schools, our department for several years has been offering a “Wholesaling to Institutions Workshops and Roundtables” training program. Through these comprehensive trainings, producers in Pennsylvania receive instruction and ongoing technical support and peer-to-peer mentoring so they can be equipped with the knowledge, tools, and best practices to sell to schools and other institutions. To date, 119 producers throughout Pennsylvania have benefited from this intensive training.

These efforts to connect Pennsylvania agricultural producers with Pennsylvania schools appear to be yielding some success. According to the results of USDA’s “2023 Farm to School Census,” 567 school food authorities in Pennsylvania report that are now serving local foods on their breakfast and lunch menus. This number represents a 78% increase when compared to the “2019 Farm to School Census,” when only 318 Pennsylvania school food authorities that reported they were serving local foods.

However, despite these marked gains in participation, more work remains to be done, as Pennsylvania schools self-report that they still spend less than 9% of their total nutrition budgets on foods locally grown in Pennsylvania. While schools report interest in increased local food sourcing, tight school food budgets and lack of available funds often preclude them from expanding their volume of local food purchases. At the same time, family farmers and producers who want to enter the school food market report that they face

barriers to entry due to the complicated nature of understanding and meeting school meal standards and competition from larger distributors.

Local Food Purchase Incentive Programs

Local Food Purchase Incentive (LFPI) programs are government-funded programs that help schools, institutions, and charitable feeding organizations, like food banks, buy local food, strengthen local economies, improve food access, and build resilient food systems. These efforts often provide funding for food purchases, technical assistance, and infrastructure support for farmers and food distributors, aiming to benefit small, beginning, and underserved producers.

A good example of a federally funded LFPI that, until its abrupt cancellation this past spring, was operating in Pennsylvania and being administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture is USDA's Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA). Over the three years that LFPA operated in Pennsylvania, the department used approximately \$28 million to source nearly 30 million pounds of locally sourced food from 189 Pennsylvania producers. These healthy nutritious foods were then supplied to 14 large, regional food banks who, in turn, distributed them to over 5 million Pennsylvania households facing food insecurity in all 67 counties.

Indeed, LFPA was lauded as a success by those farmers participating in the program, several of whom were struggling to find markets for their products in the wake of COVID-related business closures, as well as by the food banks who were facing ever increasing demands for emergency food assistance, and by our food insecure neighbors in Pennsylvania who found dignity and appreciation in being able to access fresh, local foods. The cancellation of that program, as well as the similar Local Foods for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program, at the federal level represent significant steps backwards in our national progress on both fighting food insecurity and improving food quality.

HB 1768, “The Keystone Fresh Act,” provides an opportunity for this same type of win-win-win approach as seen with LFPA. By creating and funding a local food incentive for schools, Pennsylvania could realize the same benefits seen through programs that connected farmers to food banks. Our school food authorities, who operate on tight fiscal margins, would have access to funds that would enable them to engage in more local food sourcing as well as funds for technical assistance. Small, local Pennsylvania producers would be provided with increased opportunities to sell to schools, along with funds for technical assistance, equipment, and marketing that would further enable them to reach the school food market. And perhaps most importantly, our children would have access to an increased array of fresh, healthy, Pennsylvania-grown foods to help sustain and nourish them throughout the school day.

The Keystone Fresh Act, if passed into law and funded, would build upon the successes already achieved with Farm to School programming and local food sourcing by the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Agriculture in partnership with non-profit organizations and industry associations, Pennsylvania producers, and Pennsylvania schools. Moreover, the Keystone Fresh Act provides an opportunity to make a real investment in two of Pennsylvania’s most critical resources — our rich agricultural industry and our children.

Thank you for providing the Department of Agriculture with the opportunity to appear before both of your committees today to discuss these important issues and this legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



Here at Davis Grown we have a drive to partner with schools and participate in not only providing local foods but also educating them about agriculture. My husband and I both grew up on farms. We both also pursued education in college. I went on to teach for 6 years and be an administrator in education for 6 years, so Farm to School is combining both of my backgrounds.

Our interactions with the community began when we started selling at a local farmer's market. We ran into the issue of ground beef not moving as quickly as other cuts. We were looking at ways to move the ground beef, restaurants, caterers, etc. The opportunity came up to attend a farm to institution workshop a few years ago. I attended the farm to institution workshop in Harrisburg. There I learned that we can be supplying schools with meats and produce. While still at the training, I reached out to our school district to see if they would be interested. My drive to partner with schools wasn't only to move our product but also to get healthier, local items on the menu. My oldest child started attending kindergarten that same year. Within a few months of starting school, I noticed his clothes fitting snugger. Also, the district is a low-income district so also made me question what foods the students were getting at home. All these drove me to want to partner with as many schools as possible in the area to provide higher quality foods for students to consume during the school day.

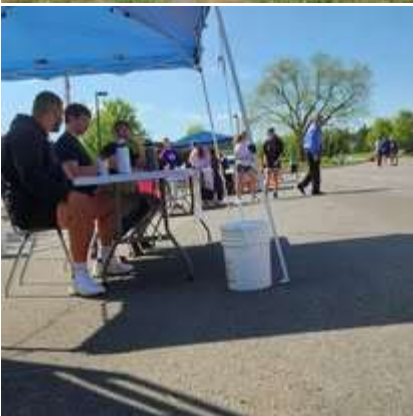
We began working with Bloomsburg School district, supplying ground beef, beef tips, and sweet corn. Ground beef was a monthly item, while beef tips and sweet corn were one-offs. The ground beef was supplied with the partnership from PA Beef and the grant funds they had received. The district then applied for the PA Farm to School Grant and were awarded funds to continue our partnership that is still going on this school year. They have now expanded to acquiring eggs as well.

Danville Child Development Center, Columbia Montour Area Vocational Technical School, and Columbia County Christian School were added a few months after Bloomsburg started participating. Columbia County Christian partnered for two years with PA Beef to get ground beef. Danville Child Development also participated with the help from PA Beef and they acquired a PA Farm to School Grant that helped expand their acquisitions. Danville Child Development Center started getting pork products using their grant funds. Columbia Montour Vocational Area Technical School took advantage of the PA Beef grant funds and attained ground beef monthly. Columbia Montour Vocational Area Technical School also took advantage of funds from PA Pork and purchased half a pig. Being a vocational school the students get to work with our products, not just consume them for lunch. They took the half of pig in primals and broke it down into usable cuts.

We have also gone into all of these schools plus more and other venues and events to educate about agriculture. We have hatched eggs in the classrooms, husked sweet corn with students, pressed apple cider, discussed employment opportunities for students at Career Day, participated in Ag Awareness Day for the community, read books and have done information sessions with PowerPoints in the classrooms.

All the above is feasible for the schools when grant funding is available. Only one of the four schools is still getting ground beef monthly and that's only because of the grant runs for two years. One of the schools is now purchasing eggs and some sweet corn but has dropped the beef due to the cost.

We hope to continue our partnerships with these schools in hopes to provide local, fresher, more nutritious menu items for the students. In the time we have provided farm raised items to the schools, the schools have seen an increase in student purchased lunches on those days. There has been positive feedback from students, school personnel, and the community with providing local foods for the schools.







Columbia County Farm Provides
Food and Education to the Local Community





ry 27	Wed., February 28	Thursda
and Milk Toast Sticks	Breakfast Choice of Juice, Fruit and Milk Cold Cereal with Toast or Bagel with Cream Cheese	Br Choice of Ju Cold Ce or
gie sandwich wich ound Roll	PA Preferred Lunch Beef Tips in Mushroom Gravy over Egg Noodles Grilled Chicken Sandwich PB & J Sandwich Chef Salad with Graham Crackers	Toasted Pulled Po PB & Chef Sala
ns /Fresh d Milk	Sides: Cooked Carrots/ Fresh Veggies Fruit and Milk	Tomato S Fr Fr

PA Harvest Day!
 Davis Grown Roast Beef over
 Noodles and Roll
 Grilled Chicken Sandwich
 PB & J Sandwich
 Chef Salad with Round Roll
 Sides: Corn / Fresh Veggies
Moore's Fresh Apple



SCHOOL DISTRICT
Columbia County, PA



Crystal Bantz is committed to bringing her family farm and the traditions of the Bloomsburg Area School District. Crystal is passionate about getting high-quality, local foods to schools and has been working with the Bloomsburg school district to do so since the beginning of the 2021 school year.

When Crystal's children were attending elementary school, she became more interested about the quality of food served in the cafeteria. In December of 2020, Crystal attended the PA Department of Agriculture's workshop, *Wholesome for Institutions*. It was here she learned about the fact to school improvement and was committed to get quality, local food into the Bloomsburg school district's cafeteria.

While still at the workshop, Crystal contacted **Believe FoodShare**, Bloomsburg school district's food service director, and the two began working on getting Davis Grown meat and produce into school lunches. Bloomsburg School District is no stranger to purchasing local food. Melissa has been sourcing from local farms for over five years and worked with local farmers to supply seasonal produce like tomatoes, peppers, and watermelons until 2020. After taking a pause for the last few years due to the pandemic and an abundance of government provided food, Melissa was ready to bring back local food in 2021.



For their first featured produce item, Crystal suggested sweet corn. Initially, Melissa was unsure if the school could serve local sweet corn, which needed to be shucked and cleaned before it was cooked, a time-consuming task considering the district serves over 1,800 meals per day. Davis Grown helped solve this problem by shucking most of the corn, and together, Crystal and Melissa overcame this challenge and turned it into an engaging activity for the kids by having the 5th grade class at Beaver Main Elementary shuck 60 ears of corn for the school. The activity was a hit, and it is still talked about months later.




In October, Crystal and Melissa decided to serve Davis Grown beef. To accommodate the cafeteria staff's limited time, Crystal supplied cubed beef and the students were able to fry beef themselves. To celebrate Harvest Farm to School Month and the district's PA Harvest Day, Beaver Main Elementary treated the Mayor, Justin Hummer, and the school board president, Stephanie Ambrosio, to join 5th- and 6th-grade classes for their locally sourced lunch.

Melissa is excited about working with local farmers and will continue to do so in the future. "It's a win-win," Melissa said about local food purchasing. "The food is better, the kids can learn more about local food, and the farmers earn more!" Melissa plans to keep working with Davis Grown and plans on working with other farmers. Crystal also has plans to keep working with the Bloomsburg School District to provide local meat and produce and hopes to work with more districts in the future.



COLUMBIA-MONTOUR

Area Vocational-Technical School

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Joseph Edmondson

Culinary Arts Instructor & Director of Food Service
Columbia-Montour Area Vocational-Technical School

Pennsylvania House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and Education Committee
Hearing on House Bill 1768 – The Keystone Fresh Act
October 7, 2025

Good morning Chairpersons, members of the Committees, and fellow participants.

My name is Joseph Edmondson, and I serve as the Culinary Arts Instructor and Director of Food Service at Columbia-Montour Area Vocational-Technical School. I am here today with my student, Gage Monroe, and local farmer Crystal Hampton to voice our full support for House Bill 1768, the Keystone Fresh Act.

Every day, I see firsthand the power of food in our schools. It is not just calories on a tray; it is an investment in our students' health, our farmers' livelihoods, and the strength of our local economy. Right now, far too many of our dollars flow out of Pennsylvania to purchase food from across the country and overseas. That is money we will not get back, and it leaves our farmers, food producers, and students shortchanged.

The Keystone Fresh Act is not just a bill. It is a bold statement of values. It says that Pennsylvania will choose to invest in its own people, its own farms, and its own communities. When we spend tax dollars on school meals, those dollars should circulate right here in our Commonwealth, building jobs, strengthening rural economies, and providing our students with fresh, local food they can be proud of.

At Columbia-Montour AVTS, we place a high value on sourcing local foods because we believe that every dollar spent on Pennsylvania products strengthens both our meals and our community. Since 2023, we have proudly partnered with Davis Grown to purchase ground beef for our school lunches, and this relationship has continued to grow. This year, we also bought their sweet corn for our cafeteria. They helped raise a pig that our culinary students processed as part of their training, and they are now providing fresh eggs for our program as well. We work with local bakeries for bread products and rely on a Pennsylvania produce supplier to keep fruits and vegetables on our menu. These partnerships are not just transactions. They are investments in our students, our farmers, and the regional economy. My cafeteria staff and I pride ourselves in preparing a meal that is made from scratch, not from a bag or frozen in a box. By choosing local, we keep money circulating in Pennsylvania while giving our students food that reflects the quality and pride of our agricultural heritage. To highlight these partnerships, I have included screenshots from Davis Grown's social media accounts, where we share stories and images of Davis Grown beef, sweet corn. These posts generate tremendous pride among our students and community, and they demonstrate the real-world impact of investing in local agriculture. Every school in Pennsylvania should have the opportunity to showcase similar partnerships and celebrate the farmers who feed our students.



This Act gives School Food Authorities the tools they need to comply with the USDA's Buy American requirements. These mandates are clear: schools must prioritize U.S.-grown products. But for many districts, especially rural or underfunded ones, compliance is a struggle. Keystone Fresh helps level the playing field. It makes compliance possible while ensuring those purchases support Pennsylvania farmers, not just farms somewhere else in the country.

As an educator, I also see the immeasurable learning value in connecting students directly to their food sources. Imagine your local cafeteria serving apples grown in Adams County, dairy from Lancaster County, or beef raised just a few miles from the school itself. Students do not just eat better; they gain state pride, environmental responsibility, and an understanding of the economic importance of keeping dollars local. That lesson will stay with them far beyond the lunch line.

House Bill 1768 is common sense, but it is also urgent. Our farmers are facing mounting pressures from competition, supply chain disruptions, and rising costs. Our schools are fighting to feed students healthy meals on tight budgets. School cafeterias operate as self-supporting enterprise funds, separate from the general school budget. This means they do not receive local property tax revenue like the academic side of education. Instead, cafeterias must generate their own income primarily through federal reimbursements for meals served under the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, student meal payments, and limited a la carte sales, with occasional state or grant support. From this revenue, cafeterias are responsible for covering all costs, including food, labor, supplies, equipment, professional services, and indirect expenses such as utilities and insurance.

CMAVTS serves a population where around 40 to 50 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. For those students, I receive between \$4.20 and \$4.60 per meal. For the remaining 60 percent, I receive \$3.89 per meal from NSLP reimbursement combined with the price they pay. Serving about 400 students a day means I need to produce a meal at the cost of approximately \$4.10 per plate. The partnerships I have with local providers show what is possible when schools and farmers work together, but the reality is that operating at just \$4.10 per plate makes it extremely difficult to consistently buy Pennsylvania-grown products. This Act would give cafeterias like mine the breathing room to turn these local purchases from occasional successes into standard practice, supporting both students and farmers every single day. To help illustrate this, I have included a chart of the federal reimbursement rates for the 2025–26 school year. These are the exact rates schools like mine receive for each free, reduced-price, and paid lunch served.

[Expressed in dollars or fractions thereof; effective from: July 1, 2025–June 30, 2026]

National School Lunch Program ¹	Less than 60%	Less than 60% + 9 cents ²	60% or more	60% or more + 9 cents ²	Maximum rate	Maximum rate + 9 cents ²
Contiguous States:						
Paid	0.44	0.53	0.46	0.55	0.52	0.61
Reduced Price	4.20	4.29	4.22	4.31	4.37	4.46
Free	4.60	4.69	4.62	4.71	4.77	4.86
Alaska:						
Paid	0.71	0.80	0.73	0.82	0.83	0.92
Reduced Price	7.05	7.14	7.07	7.16	7.31	7.40
Free	7.45	7.54	7.47	7.56	7.71	7.80
Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands:						
Paid	0.57	0.66	0.59	0.68	0.67	0.76
Reduced Price	5.58	5.67	5.60	5.69	5.79	5.88
Free	5.98	6.07	6.00	6.09	6.19	6.28

School Breakfast Program	Non-severe need	Severe need
Contiguous States:		
Paid	0.40	0.40
Reduced Price	2.16	2.54
Free	2.46	2.94
Alaska:		
Paid	0.62	0.62
Reduced Price	3.65	4.43
Free	3.95	4.73
Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands:		
Paid	0.51	0.51
Reduced Price	2.88	3.51
Free	3.18	3.81

This structure creates a constant break-even challenge. When meal participation declines or food and labor costs rise, revenue falls while expenses remain, leaving little to no room to cover shortfalls. In effect, every reimbursable meal sold is not only nourishment for students but also the financial lifeline that keeps cafeteria operations viable, staff employed, and food service programs sustainable. At the same time, our communities are searching for ways to keep young people engaged in agriculture and invested in their local economies. Keystone Fresh delivers on all of these fronts.

I urge you to support and pass this legislation. It is not simply about food; it is about economic justice, educational opportunity, and the future of Pennsylvania agriculture. By enacting the Keystone Fresh Act, you will show students, families, and farmers that this state is serious about investing in its own people.

Thank you for your time, and I would be honored to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Edmondson
Culinary Arts Instructor & Director of Food Service
Columbia-Montour Area Vocational-Technical School



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Gage Monroe

Columbia-Montour AVTS Student & PA FCCLA State President
Columbia-Montour Area Vocational-Technical School

Pennsylvania House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and Education Committee

Hearing on House Bill 1768 – The Keystone Fresh Act
October 7, 2025

Good morning, Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

My name is Gage Monroe. I am a senior at Columbia-Montour AVTS in Bloomsburg, currently enrolled in our Culinary Arts Program. While I've studied Culinary Arts for three years, my experience in the kitchen goes back much further. For as long as I can remember, I have been in a kitchen. For example, when I was three, my dad taught me how to make an omelet, and when I was five, I would bake with my grandmother after church. When I was ten, I entered my first baking competition at the Bloomsburg Fair and took second place in the PA Preferred category with my zucchini and carrot brownies with a pineapple glaze. I come from pretty large families on both sides, and one thing they both had in common was food. It brought us together. My dad's side is majority Italian. Growing up in that culture, I learned the true importance of locally sourced ingredients and how significantly they can impact the flavors of a dish.

As I moved into the Culinary Arts program, I began to see firsthand how locally sourced ingredients elevate both the flavor and presentation of my dishes. Having seen the difference in both taste and presentation of my dishes when using locally sourced products, I can confidently say that there is a difference.

Mr. Edmondson always says that consumers eat with their eyes. Before a meal ever touches silverware, the customer will always inspect their dish, whether they realize it or not. Local ingredients don't just taste better — they make food look more vibrant and appetizing. Locally sourced ingredients are less processed, which allows for the natural beauty of them to truly come to light and elevate a dish's presentation.

The importance of buying local stems far from just the appeal. Buying locally grown foods is not only better for the consumer, but also better for the rural economy. Where I come from, many students have worked on, or their families own farms. For many farmers in my community, finding reliable markets for their produce can be challenging. Samantha Ayoub, an Associate Economist, wrote for the American Farm Bureau Federation, "The U.S. Courts report that 216 farm bankruptcies were filed in 2024, up 55% from 2023." A data graph from the same article shows the distribution of the 216 bankruptcies between the 50 states. This graph shows Pennsylvania as having two bankruptcies. While two may not seem like a large number, each represents a family forced to uproot their lives, and workers left without jobs.

In addition to rural economic reasons, local foods in our schools encourage students to buy local foods in the future. Bringing locally sourced ingredients into our schools gives students the chance to experience the difference between frozen government commodities and fresh, local produce. Having the opportunity to experience this difference at a young age can encourage students to pursue healthier diets through less processed and locally sourced foods. At my school, the Culinary Arts students help prepare and serve lunches for the 617 students at CMAVTS. I have been serving on our lunch lines at least once a week for three school years, and I cannot recount the number of times I have heard jokes about school lunches. A lot of these jokes revolve around "mystery meats." Mystery meat refers to meat of unknown origin or content — and too often, that's how students feel about what's on their lunch trays. When students make these jokes, I do not have the ability to inform them because I am not sure of the exact origin of our government products either.

However, with the Keystone Fresh Act that we are here advocating for today, I could tell my fellow students that not only is this food truly fresh, but I can tell them it came from a farm in our area. One of those farms is Davis Grown Farms.

My school has a growing partnership with Davis Grown Farm, where we get products such as ground beef, eggs, pork cuts, and corn. We hope that our partnership can continue to thrive with the help of this bill. More importantly, we want all students across Pennsylvania to have the same opportunity to eat healthier, fresher foods — and we hope this bill will allow them to do just that, giving more schools the opportunity to build partnerships with local farms, just like ours has.

The Keystone Fresh Act will strengthen Pennsylvania's agricultural economy, improve student health, and give parents peace of mind about what their children are eating. As someone who has spent their entire life surrounded by the benefits of quality meals, I can say that buying local is important for the quality of our food. It allows cafeteria staff to take pride in what they serve, students to feel proud of what they eat, and you — our legislators — to take pride in making a lasting difference. Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gage Monroe
Columbia-Montour AVTS Student
PA FCCLA State President

From Farm to School

Supporting Local, Nourishing the Future

Kelly R Price MS, RD, LDN
Food Service Director
Manheim Township School District



When students visit farms, healthy habits take root



Visting Local Farms

Learning does not stop at the classroom



Connecting the community

Using social media to be transparent to families of what we are doing on daily basis



Educational materials

Using signage to educate students on where particular foods come from





**Learning doesn't stop at the classroom door..
it grows in the fields!**



Farm visits spark curiosity, but the learning doesn't stop there. We bring those lessons back to the classroom to deepen their understanding



Farms you will find in the breakfast & lunch lines!

Kauffmans

- Apples
- Plums
- Peaches
- Pears
- Cider



Harvest Lane

- Cucumbers
- Tomato
- Cantaloupe
- Peaches
- Basil



Masonic Village- Beef

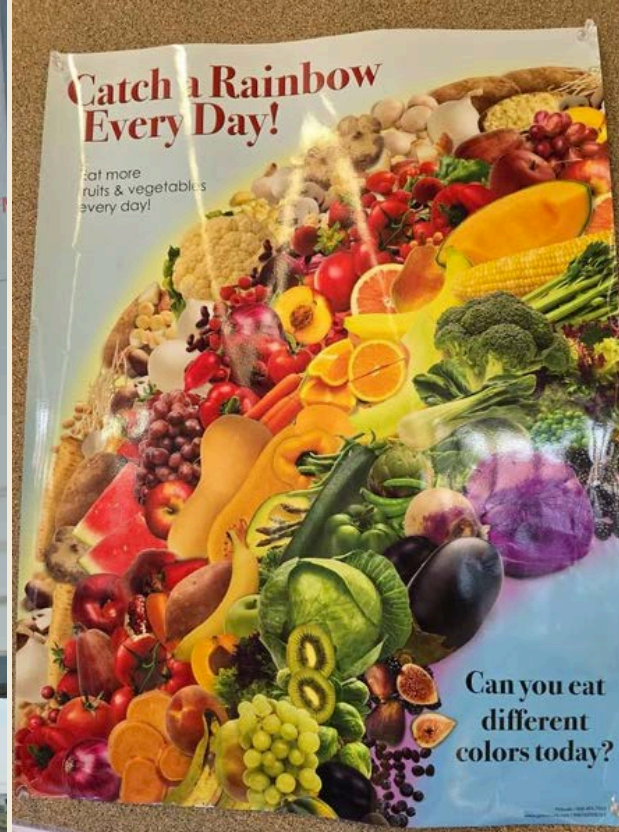
- Ground Beef
- Roasts
- Beef Cubes



Local Produce Auction

- Watermelon
- Cantaloupe
- Broccoli
- Peppers
- Zucchini
- Ground Cherries
- Potatoes
- and more!





Kauffman's Orchard



Harvest Lane Farm in the district

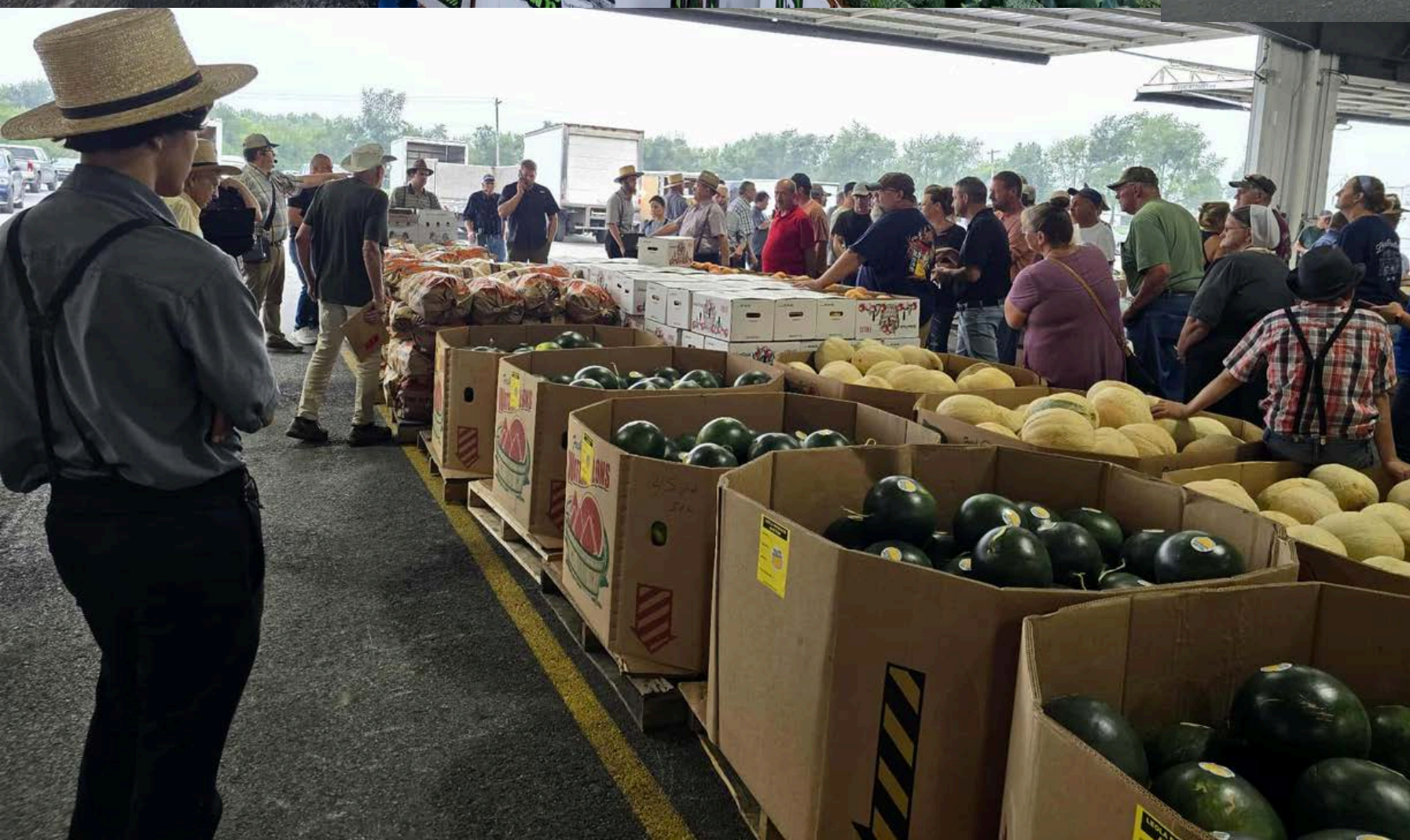


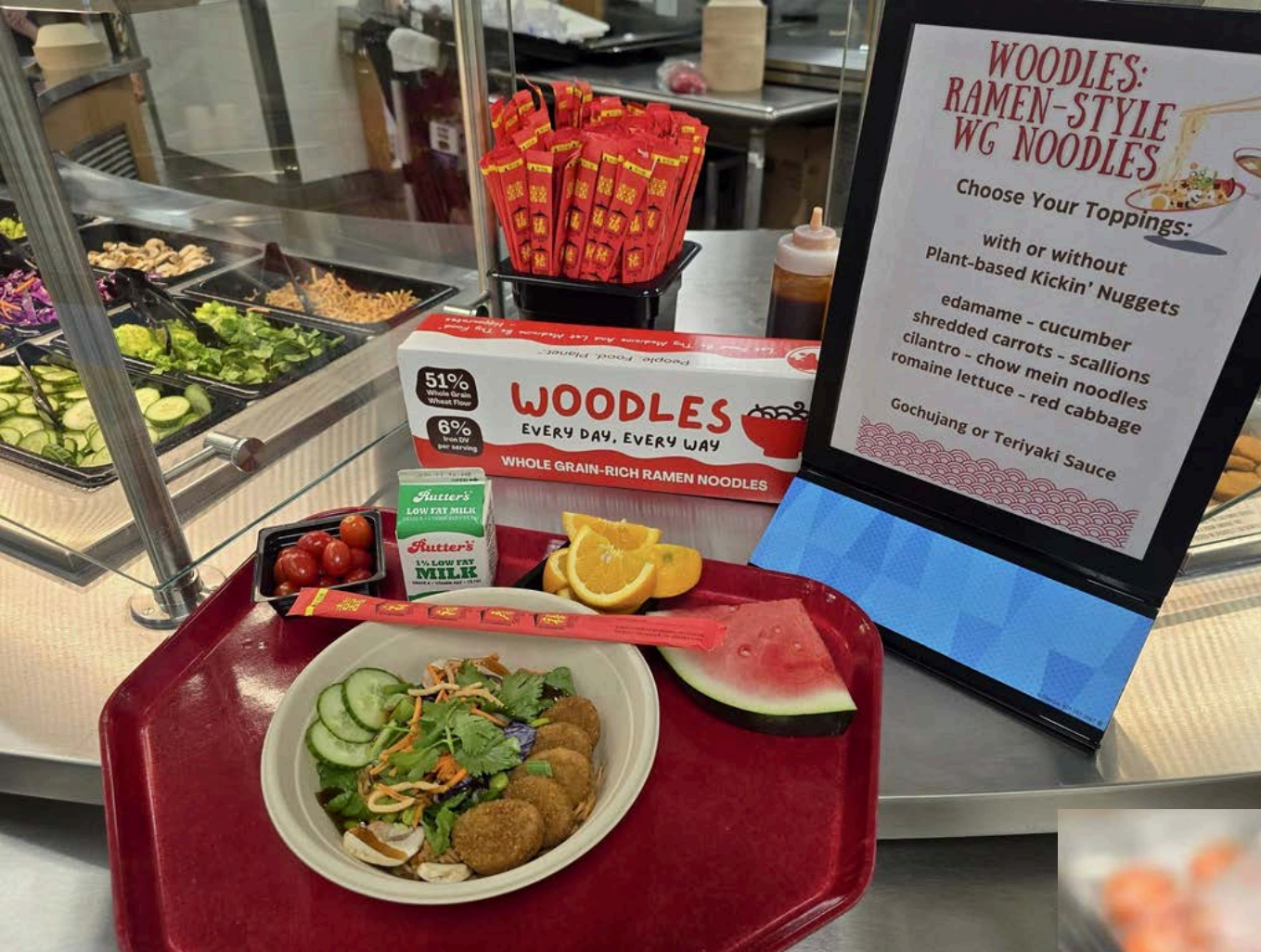


Direct from farmers at the auction

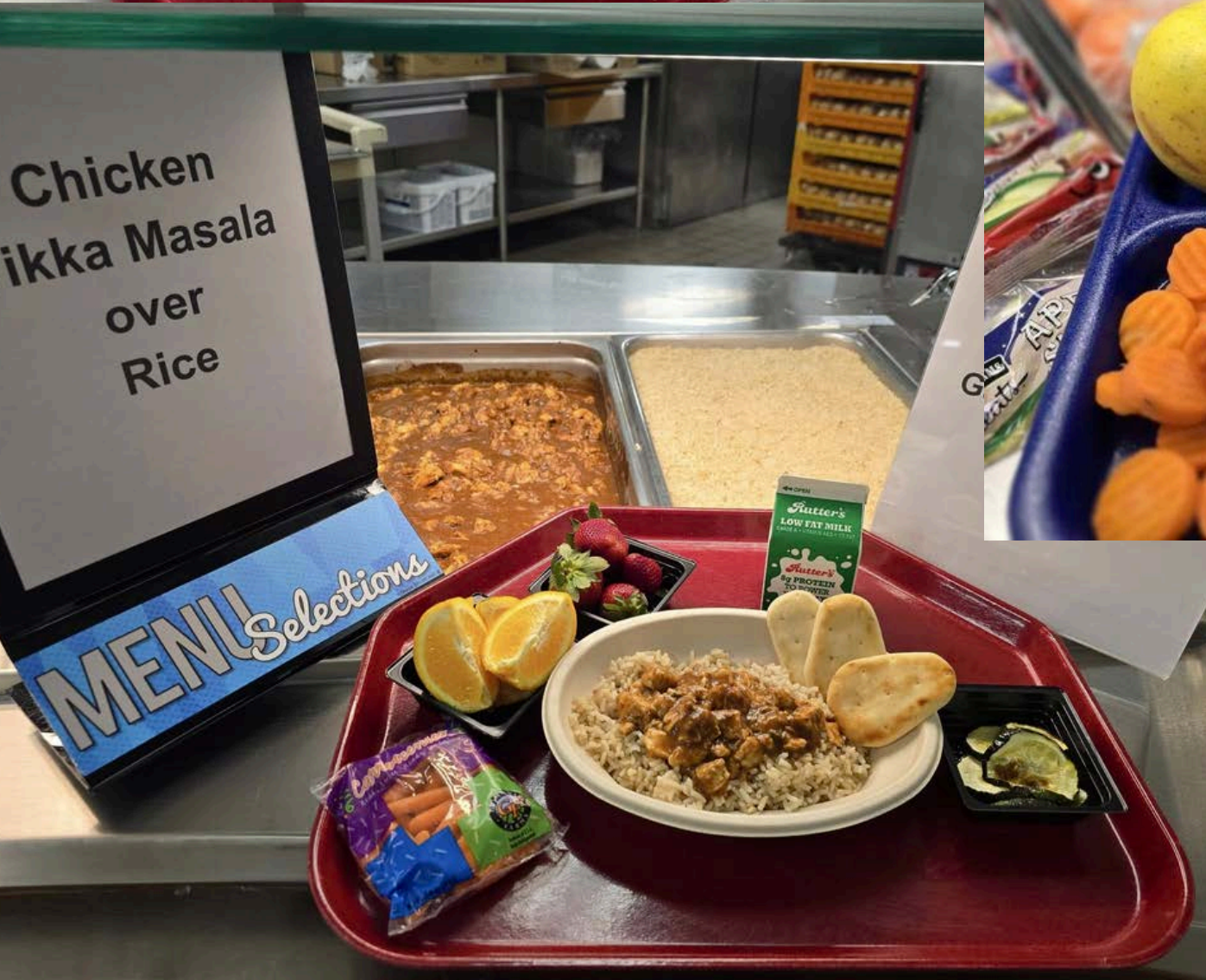


Challenges





From Seed to Success!





Questions?

Kelly R Price MS, RD, LDN
priceke@mtwp.net
Food Service Director
Manheim Township School District

Follow us on Facebook
"Manheim Township School Food Service"



Follow us on Instagram
"mtschoolfodservice"



Written testimony from Kelly Price, Food Service Director Manheim Township School District

Slide 1:

Opening:

Good Morning everyone, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of The Pennsylvania Keystone Fresh Act.

As the Food Service Director for Manheim Township School District I am passionate about connecting students to fresh, local foods through the Farm to School program, making it a core part of our meal programs daily. This program ensures we bring fresh, locally grown food directly to our students' plates. I am both a registered dietitian and trained in culinary arts. Because of this I think a lot about how to balance nutrition with getting kids to actually eat what we serve.

Slice 2:

I'm here today to highlight how Farm to School is transforming our lunch program—not just by changing what's on the plate, but by changing how students connect with their food, their health, and their community. We accomplish this by visiting local farms, continuing conversations in the classrooms, connecting with the community through social media and developing educational materials for student engagement in the breakfast & lunch lines. Community... is just that. It means everyone needs to be a part of the farm to school initiative.

Our goal for our district this year is a million meals (breakfast and lunch combined). With that being said, parents, staff, community members trust us to feed the students, and we use our social media pages to be transparent about what is happening daily in the cafeteria as well as gain the community's support.

Slide 3: One of my favorite parts of my job is creating a "Farm to Tray" experience by connecting kids to the food system. This occurs when events such as farm visits, cooking clubs, and eating what we learned about at the farm in the cafeteria are impactful. I truly love teaching kids where their food comes from, especially here in Lancaster PA where we are surrounded by local farms. Hands-on visits like this at the farm helps to get students engaged and excited!

- Talking about Beef Farm Tour
- Heritage Creek

Slice 4: Farm visits spark curiosity, but learning doesn't stop there. We bring those lessons back to the classroom to deepen their understanding.

Examples

- Cooking Clubs with students
- Farmer visits to talk during assembly
- Farmer visits to talk to other school food service staff to network and connect to purchase.

Slide 5: What does farm to school look like for our district?

- Farms you will find in our lines
- Kauffmans- Kids eat with their eyes first, so offering a rainbow of colors on the plate makes healthy eating more appealing and fun.
- Harvest Lane- A manheim township farm- It is amazing to see how excited students get when they spot a name of a farm they know from home- it turns the meal into something personal and meaningful which strengthens their connection to both their food and their community.
- Masonic Beef - PA Beef to PA schools grant. I use this example as my “gateway farm”. Once we were able to bring in beef it opened so many connections and doors to other farms. The students loved visiting that farm and then knowing the beef was being served to them at school. This example was a true “full circle moment”. Visiting the farm→ Beef for lunch→ Provided by a graduate of the district they are currently attending.
- Produce auction- The local produce auctions give us direct access to farm-fresh products sourced right from the growers. When we are able to go to the local auctions, we are not just picking up the product, but we are building relationships with farmers and bringing the fresh, local produce straight to the students.

Slide 10: Challenges

- While sourcing directly from farms gives us incredible freshness, it also presents challenges. For example: when food comes from the local farms it often comes by wagon to the auctions and in very large bulk bins. The farmers typically don't have resources to wash, peel or process it the way we would need for school kitchens. We have very limited staffing hours to be able to do indepth processing to be able to get the food ready for students during the day. Part of the Keystone Fresh Act would help with equipment and support to PA producers to meet the needs of school districts.

Slide 11: From Seed to Success

- At the end of the day, Farm to School is about more than just where our food comes from- it's about what it looks like on the plate, and what it means to our students. When you walk into our cafeteria and see bright colors that are all grown by local hands- you see more than just a meal. Students and the community see the connection between where their food comes from and the nutrition value it provides.
- Just look how amazing these meals are- Just stunning ! Students are now excited to make healthy choices and try a variety of different foods- That truly is the power of Farm to School.

Slide 12: Questions.



Written testimony from Scotty Miller, Farm Manager, Masonic Villages.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of the Pennsylvania Keystone Fresh Act.

I am Scotty Miller, Farm Manager for Masonic Villages of Elizabethtown. I am married and have 3 children we also own a farm right outside of Elizabethtown PA. When my children were in school and looking back to when I was in school and thinking of what the school lunches consisted of, I was worried about what we were feeding our kids who ate at school. Also those kids that may get free meals at school, they be should given the opportunity to receive the best possible local food and ingredients possible.

I manage the farm for Masonic Villages, we are a cow calf and feeder finisher operation. We are nestled among 1800 residents on 1700 acres. We grow our own crops on 500 acres, that we use to sustain our herd and the feeder cattle. We currently run 175 cows that we calve out in the spring and the fall. We also have our own herd bulls that we use for natural breeding. So we really have pretty good control over our animals from the beginning to the end.

We Market our beef either by selling whole, halves or quarters. We also sell by the piece through our Farm Market on Campus which is opened 4 days a week. We also supply our own Food Services Department with our beef which is bred, born and raised right on campus with food that we grow on campus to feed the cattle—full circle! We know what is going into the cattle and what we are going to get out.

This idea of knowing what goes into and what is going to be produced from that, a great product to serve at special occasions but also something that every school should have the opportunity to serve to our children to help fuel their minds and bodies for growth and development, especially in their formative years.

We currently raise more cattle than what we need to feed our residents and what gets sold through the farm market. Plus when we harvest and process an animal you tend to end up with maybe more ground beef than other cuts, so over time ground beef can add up. This can lead to a time where we have to slow down harvest to be able to utilize the ground beef before harvesting more. Through a current program run by the PA Beef Council- PA Beef to

PA Schools, which is a grant match program, they pay for half of the cost of the beef to the schools. This allows up the opportunity and to be able to move ground beef and to keep all of our beef fresher for everyone. Plus its going to local schools one of which I had graduated from so its really neat to go full circle there as well. I really wish that some of the meals the children get to eat at school now, I would have been able to eat when I was there!

Through this Keystone Fresh Act, I feel this will open up for more schools to be able to take advantage of Local products to feed to the children. Some impacts that have happened for us that I didn't realize before getting into this. Communication directly with the school administration- I have been asked to come into the schools to read books and give talks on what farms do and what we do specifically and that we supply their school with great quality beef, and that they can go and visit our farm. Its not coming from a big name that trucks from miles and miles. This also opens up conversations about farming with children and one that they take home to their parents and can share with them. It also gives a face or name for all of these folks to be able and ask questions if they have them instead of turning to google or the internet.

Through the current program, we are able to support a local USDA processing facility on a regular basis, which is a win for us and a win for them. It also means I do not have to truck a lot of "extra cattle" farther to sell them, which helps the local economy.

Through doing this I know there are many more schools who really want to be able to serve good local products especially beef, but they may not have the funds to do so. This would bust those doors wide open and be a huge win for ALL of Pennsylvania.

I urge you to support HB 1768, the Keystone Fresh Act, so that we can continue working with these local school food service departments so they can help their students have the best learning experience.

Scotty Miller

Farm Manager

Masonic Villages.

717-383-8634

**House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee & House Education Committee
Joint Hearing on House Bill 1768 – The Keystone Fresh Act October 7, 2025, 9:30
a.m. 515 Irvis Office Building**

Written Testimony from Donna Robbins, Chief Operating Officer, Manheim Township School District

Opening:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Pennsylvania Keystone Fresh Act. As the Chief Operating Officer for a district with over 6,000 students, I have seen firsthand the impact that nutritious, locally sourced meals can have on students' health, focus, and overall success in the classroom.

One important point I want to emphasize is that a school district's food service program is structured as a *proprietary fund*. This means it is completely separate from the district's general operating fund. It is designed to be self-sufficient, relying primarily on student participation and federal reimbursements to sustain operations. By law, food service funds cannot be used to cover educational expenses, nor can educational funds be diverted to support the food service program.

Because the food service fund stands alone, any initiative that increases access to fresh, local foods, like the Keystone Fresh Act, provides a direct and meaningful benefit to students without creating additional burdens on local taxpayers or district operating budgets. Strengthening these programs not only supports Pennsylvania's farmers and local economies, but it also ensures that our children are receiving the healthy meals they need to succeed.

The current PA Farm to School Program

The Pennsylvania Farm to School Grant Program has been a strong first step, but its limited funding and reach prevent it from serving all schools. At Manheim Township, we want to purchase more local foods, but the resources simply aren't there. With greater support, we could make local food a consistent part of our daily meals rather than an occasional purchase for special events. The Keystone Fresh Act builds on this foundation by expanding reach and moving beyond one-time grants to create sustainable, ongoing partnerships.

Alignment with State Priorities

The Keystone Fresh Act supports the missions of both the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture. It provides healthier, fresher meals that improve student outcomes while also strengthening the local agricultural economy and connecting family farms to stable buyers.

Addressing the Challenges of Local Procurement

There is no question that local procurement requires additional time, staff coordination, and training. The Keystone Fresh Act helps districts by providing resources to:

- Hire and train staff to manage local sourcing.
- Navigate food safety requirements, procurement laws, and vendor relationships.

Economic Impact

The Keystone Fresh Act strengthens Pennsylvania's local economy. Every dollar invested in local food stays in our communities by supporting family farmers, food processors, distributors, truckers, and local markets. These dollars recirculate, creating jobs and sustaining small businesses. This Act is not only about providing students with fresher, healthier meals, it is also about fueling local economic growth and keeping Pennsylvania's agricultural economy strong.

Student Outcomes

Students learn more when they eat better. Fresh fruits and vegetables have been shown to improve focus, attendance, and behavior. Farm to School and local food incentives also create teachable moments, directly connecting nutrition, agriculture, and sustainability to curriculum goals. At Manheim Township, our students are engaged in this work as well. For example, our new student-driven sustainability group, *Toucan You-Can*, is exploring how food choices affect the environment and the broader community.

The Demand Exists

- Our food service team wants (and is) buying local.
- Our students prefer local fresh foods
- Our community values supporting PA local farms

Conclusion

As the Chief Operating Officer of a large district, I evaluate every initiative through the lens of operational feasibility. The Keystone Fresh Act is not only visionary, it is implementable. It gives districts the tools, training, and structure to make local food procurement both practical and sustainable.

In our district, stronger participation in school meals has improved our bottom line. Investing in local food is financially sustainable, beneficial to students, and a win for the entire community.

I urge you to support the PA Keystone Fresh Act for the health of our students and the future of our communities.

House Bill 1768 – Testimony from The Food Trust

Submitted to the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee & House Education Committee
Joint Hearing on House Bill 1768 – The Keystone Fresh Act
October 7, 2025

Chairmen Pashinski, Moul, Schweyer and Cutler and members of the committees,

On behalf of The Food Trust, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1768, The Keystone Fresh Act. For more than 30 years, The Food Trust has worked to ensure that nutritious food is accessible and affordable to everyone. We have seen firsthand the transformative impact that connecting Pennsylvania's farmers with our schools and communities can have on children's health, the health of economies, and local food systems.

The Food Trust is proud to serve as the coordinating agency of the Pennsylvania Farm to School Network — a collaborative of more than 1,900 members representing all 67 counties. The Network brings local leaders from communities across the Commonwealth to the decision-making table: farmers, growers, educators, school food service professionals, early care program operators, superintendents and more — the Pennsylvanians who are in our fields, schools and communities working every day to meaningfully connect children to thriving local food systems. Those community members are passionate about incorporating Pennsylvania-grown products in school meals — and they want local food to be the standard, not the exception.

The Food Trust recently administered a two-year local food purchasing incentive pilot project called Quarter Back for Local, which provided Early Care and Education (ECE) sites with a \$0.25 incentive for each meal or snack that included Pennsylvania-grown fruits and/or vegetables. The participating ECE programs served more than 150,000 meals with Pennsylvania-grown produce to 681 children, supported by over \$40,000 in reimbursements. An [evaluation](#) of the program demonstrated not only increased local procurement through new relationships with farmers, but also improved children's willingness to try and eat new fruits and vegetables, with families reporting they purchased and consumed more local foods at home. ECE staff and parents described noticeable improvements in children's diets and stronger connections to Pennsylvania agriculture.

These outcomes illustrate what is possible when schools, farmers, community-based organizations and state leaders have access to coordinated infrastructure and funding to make purchasing local food the easy choice for institutions.

House Bill 1768 offers a pathway to scale what we know works. By providing sustained support and infrastructure, the Commonwealth can ensure that farm to school is not a luxury program, but a core element of education, agriculture and health policy. This legislation positions Pennsylvania as a leader in advancing equitable food access and resilient agricultural economies at a time when both are urgently needed.

Recent federal funding cuts are already undermining Pennsylvanians' ability to access nutritious, affordable food. This includes the loss of over \$1 billion for local food purchasing programs, as well as the complete elimination of SNAP-Ed — the nutrition education and obesity prevention arm of the SNAP program. In

Pennsylvania, much of our farm to school programming is either directly funded by SNAP-Ed or strengthened through the partnerships it supports, engaging more than 1,700 community organizations and reaching over 600,000 residents each year. For three decades, SNAP-Ed has been far more than a nutrition education program; it has been a catalyst for agricultural growth, economic opportunity and healthier communities across the Commonwealth.

Countless community members and support organizations like The Food Trust and our many valued partners are tenaciously working to overcome these financial changes, and we strongly urge our state legislators to lead alongside us to build thriving and resilient food systems.

We ask the committee to advance the Keystone Fresh Act and affirm Pennsylvania's commitment to nourishing its children and supporting its farmers. The Food Trust stands ready to share our expertise, partnerships and program models to ensure its successful implementation.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Mark Edwards
President & CEO, The Food Trust

We Support the Keystone Fresh Act!

Dear PA legislators,

We, the over 80 organizations, associations and businesses named here, are writing in support of [House Bill 1768 \(Rep Burgos\)](#), The Keystone Fresh Act. This legislation would provide Pennsylvania family farmers with more stable economic prospects and ensure that schools have access to fresh, locally sourced foods. Implementing and funding this legislation will make a positive and meaningful impact in the lives of Pennsylvania’s children, farmers and communities.

Schools across Pennsylvania serve more than [157 million lunches per year](#), providing critical nutrients to children across the Commonwealth, and making them one of the largest potential markets for agricultural producers from across the state. Despite having a child nutrition budget of more than \$729 million per year, [schools self-report that they spend less than 2%](#) of those funds on PA grown foods. [Local food purchasing incentive \(LFPI\) legislation](#), like the Keystone Fresh Act, would address this problem by establishing a grant program incentivizing schools to purchase, promote and serve local foods in their meal programs.

[Similar LFPI programs](#) in 16 other states have been an effective and innovative strategy, increasing the quantity of local foods served in school meals and creating an essential market for farmers. [Research has shown](#) LFPI programs generate a local multiplier effect of \$1.4 for every dollar spent – keeping local dollars circulating in local economies.

Changing procurement practices takes technical assistance and resources, which is why the Keystone Fresh Act would also provide funding for farmers to purchase equipment or marketing materials that meet school food market needs. Additionally, it would allocate funding for technical assistance providers to offer training for schools, farmers, and distributors making this food systems shift.

This initiative is a win-win-win scenario, fostering economic growth, improving public health outcomes, and nurturing stronger communities, all while nourishing Pennsylvania's children with the nutrition they require to thrive. We are proud to offer our support of House Bill 1768 and call on the state Assembly to pass this initiative before the end of the 2025-2026 legislative session.

Thank you in advance for supporting this important proposal, and helping improve the lives of Pennsylvania’s children, farmers and communities.

- The PA Farm to School Network
- Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
- Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
- The School Nutrition Association of PA
- PA Cattlemen's Association
- Feeding Pennsylvania
- Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania
- The Pennsylvania State Grange
- Conservation Voters of PA
- Partnership for Better Health
- The Food Trust
- Philabundance
- Pittsburgh Food Policy Council
- Just Harvest
- The Food Dignity Movement
- Chef Ann Foundation
- FoodCorps
- Happy Valley Meat Company
- Heritage Creek Farm Camp
- Harvest Lane Farm Market
- Frecon Farms
- Jefferson Einstein Health
- Greener Partners
- Allies for Children
- York County Food Bank
- Adams County Food Policy Council
- Westmoreland Food Bank
- Wayne County Community Foundation
- The Common Market
- The GIANT Company
- Three Rivers Grown
- Moin Halal Meat LLC
- Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
- Wayne Communities Food Alliance
- Clarion River Organics
- Plant it Forward
- Hilltop Urban Farm
- Central PA Food Bank
- Nutritional Development Services, Archdiocese of Philadelphia
- School District of Philadelphia
- Armstrong School District
- Seneca Valley School District
- Octorara Area School District
- UpstreamPgh
- Cousins Fresh Market
- We The People - Pennsylvania
- Buttonwood Farms/Delta School
- Spring Grove Area School District
- Potter’s Farm
- Stacey Woodson, LLC
- Grow Pittsburgh
- Kiddie City Early Learning Center, Inc.
- Bellwood-Antis Public Library
- Quaker Valley School District
- Cheder Menachem Inc
- Steelton-Highspire School District
- Mount Washington Children’s Center
- Cocalico School District
- Upper Moreland Township School District
- Big Spring School District Food Service
- Fairview School District
- Colonial School District
- Central Counties Youth Detention Center
- Franco Harris Pittsburgh Center at Penn State
- Reinford Farms Inc
- Edinboro Market, Inc.
- Highlands School District
- Browns Family Childcare, LLC
- Thompson Farms Volant, LLC
- Davis Grown
- Green Trees Early Learning Center, inc.
- Gettysburg Area School District
- Pittsburgh Regional Food Service Directors
- Forest Hills School District
- Kidz Kingdom Early Learning Center
- Baytree Farm
- Lifespan school & daycarebe.wild.er farm
- FamilyFarmDirectLLC
- The Best Route--My Mobile Market

Supported by a variety of groups across sectors, including...



“Programs like this allow school food service programs to prioritize locally grown products in their school meals. They bring awareness to our students about where food comes from and supports our local growers. This is a win for everyone.”

–Nicole Melia, Public Policy and Legislative Chair at School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania (SNAPA)

“This is a great opportunity for our students to get fresh wholesome food that is produced by Pennsylvania farmers. It creates a connection between the students and the farmers who produce their food locally.”

–Chris Hoffman, President of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

“As a director and dietitian, I can't express enough how important it is that buying local products is supported by Pennsylvania. It's a direct support of PA agriculture, teaches our students what is directly available to them in their bountiful state, and offers our students fresh, delicious foods at breakfast and lunch!”

–Melissa Freestone, Nutrition Services Manager at Spring Grove Area School District, York County

“Local food systems and relationships help to strengthen ties between producers and consumers (farmers and kids) and between rural and urban areas. Local food production, short supply chains and a greater degree of self-sufficiency in PA is key.”

–Lindsay Jacob, Manager at Clarion River Organics, Clarion County

“I have worked with the Erie, PA Farm to School team since 2018 to include more local products in the District's meals. Their food service provider, Metz Culinary, has said multiple times that a program like the Keystone Fresh Act is the ONLY way they can afford to incorporate local produce, meats, etc.”

–Marti Martz, Executive Director of Edinboro Market, Inc., Erie County



Learn more:
pafarmtoschool.org/keystone-fresh-act

The Pennsylvania Farm to School Network, coordinated by The Food Trust, is a resource and advocacy collaborative bringing together representatives from state agencies, non-profit organizations and industry associations that actively support farm to school interests and activities throughout the Commonwealth.

October 7, 2025

Testimony on House Bill 1768 – *The Keystone Fresh Act*

Submitted to the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee & House Education Committee

Chairs Pashinski, Moul, Schweyer and Cutler and members of the committees,

My name is **Allison Boyd**, and I am a **Farmer Outreach Specialist with Pasa Sustainable Agriculture (Pasa)**, where I provide farmers with training and technical assistance opportunities to expand into wholesale markets, including K-12 schools.

Pasa Sustainable Agriculture supports the Keystone Fresh Act (HB 1768) because local food in schools is a win-win partnership that should be the norm, not the exception. Schools across PA serve more than 157 million lunches per year. While over 57% of PA schools report purchasing some products grown in PA, those local food sales (excluding liquid milk) make up **less than 2%** of their total lunch program budget. Both schools and farmers want to buy/sell more local foods, as evident by PDA's popular Farm-to-School Grant program. That program is 5x over-applied and its small award dollars don't have lasting impacts in schools. Schools and farmers also face other significant barriers, like lack of training, staff capacity, equipment and infrastructure. The Keystone Fresh Act is designed to equip schools and farmers with the tools to overcome those challenges.

In my experience, farmers benefit greatly from partnering with schools, and are eager to increase their sales to schools. There are several mutually beneficial outcomes that are achieved when local products are featured on school lunch menus. Farmers are able to offload large quantities of products in single orders to meet the demands of school procurement, giving them the opportunity to make large and predictable sales, while many retail sales outlets remain volatile and uncertain. Additionally, farmers have the opportunity to have facetime with students both by visiting the cafeteria or hosting farm field trips, which not only educates the next generation about agriculture, but also inspires future healthy eating and buying habits in young folks, which will have lasting impacts on the agricultural economy.

Additionally, farms of all sizes, including small and mid-size, are able to participate in selling local products to schools. School districts have the ability to make micro-purchases, feature local produce in salad bars and other unique or seasonal offerings, and utilize fresh fruits and vegetables in smaller quantities in their Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Programs (FFVP), cafeteria taste tests, or cooking demonstrations. This allows smaller farms the opportunity to scale up production over time to meet demand, diversify revenue streams and increase overall profitability and sustainability.

Farmers in Pasa's network believe HB 1768 will help create vital new revenue streams for farmers, while providing the Commonwealth's schoolchildren with healthy and engaging meals. Pennsylvania is blessed with an abundance of delicious and nutritious agricultural products, and our kids deserve to be a part of a thriving local food system.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your leadership on this important issue.

Respectfully,

Allison Boyd

Farmer Outreach Specialist

Pasa Sustainable Agriculture



Happy Valley Meat Co.

Testimony on House Bill 1768 – The Keystone Fresh Act

October 7, 2025

Chairmen Pashinski, Moul, Schweyer and Cutler and members of the committees:

My name is Dan Honig, and I am the owner of Happy Valley Meat Company. We work with a collective of small PA cattle growers to sell PA beef into restaurants and schools.

I support HB 1768, the Keystone Fresh Act, because while there is great excitement for farm to table, it needs policy help to really succeed.

I know this because while half of my business works with PA farmers and schools, the other half works with NY farmers and schools. The students, families and school food authorities in both states care equally about supporting small local farms. We see the same excitement when we go into the schools to talk to the students and faculty for educational demonstrations and tastings.

While the desire is the same in both states, NY has passed legislation to help schools make sourcing local food consistent, affordable and accessible. Our NY school partners are putting out contracts that provide stability for our NY farmers. The resources from Albany have put immense pressure on us as a provider to source more NY cattle to meet the demand, and we are. While in PA, our school partners have to scrape together valuable resources to plan special local meals.

I believe HB 1768 will help more PA students eat high quality PA grown food. It will help schools provide consistency to PA growers, allowing them to plan and grow their businesses. And importantly, it will greatly increase the demand for PA agricultural products, like we have seen in NY.

Eating well is a skill that future Pennsylvanians must be taught. There is no one better to teach them than the PA farmers, educators and school lunch authorities who want to do just this. We just need some help to make it our policy.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your leadership on this important issue. Please feel free to contact me about this or any other matter.

Respectfully,

Dan Honig

Owner
Happy Valley Meat Company
Dan@happyvalleymeat.com
929-352-0570



Testimony on House Bill 1768 – *The Keystone Fresh Act*

Submitted to the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee & House Education Committee
October 7, 2025

Chairmen Pashinski, Moul, Schweyer and Cutler and members of the committees,




My name is Sarah Buranskas, and I am the Regional Food Economy Project Manager at the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council. I support HB 1768, the Keystone Fresh Act, as a long-term and high-impact investment in Pennsylvania farmers, students, and communities. We convene over 80 member organizations, representing growers, community groups, government agencies,, distributors, and institutional buyers (such as K12 schools, universities, etc), that collectively work towards policies and programs that expand access to resources and strengthen our food system. Ensuring a connection between our youngest ‘eaters’ and the Pennsylvanians that grow food, as well as a substantial market channel for those growers, is a vital part of that mission.

We recently partnered with regional partners as part of a USDA grant to determine barriers to local purchasing, which included surveys of K12 food service directors (FSDs), Southwest PA farmers, and other large institutional buyers (healthcare, higher education). We saw similar challenges across groups (lack of staff time to process local foods, lack of local product, and seasonal availability), but also found that there were challenges unique to each group, notably that ***K-12 institutions have much more restricted budgets for food, and report the expense of local products as their top barrier.*** Surveys from farmers interested in ‘farm to institution’ sales, identified not knowing how to work with institutional buyers as a top issue. Many of these barriers are clearly addressed by the Keystone Fresh Act, which includes grant programs that offset costs, and increase grower readiness to meet new market standards.

Despite these barriers, I have seen firsthand the enthusiasm for local purchasing within food services across SWPA. FSDs shared clear goals for local food purchasing, from specific percentages as high as 25%, to broad statements like “as much as we can logistically and financially incorporate”. I believe HB 1768 will help schools to increase their local food purchases, help farmers to grow their businesses, and provide the necessary tools to navigate barriers that we know exist.

Our mission is to build a food system that benefits our communities,
economy, and environment in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable.

PO Box 81731 | Pittsburgh PA | 15217

pittsburghfoodpolicy.org |  @PittsburghFoodPolicyCouncil |  @BurghFoodPolicy |  @pittsburghfoodpolicy






Thank you for considering my testimony and for your leadership on this important issue.

Respectfully,

Sarah Buranskas
Regional Food Economy Project Manager
Pittsburgh Food Policy Council

Our mission is to build a food system that benefits our communities,
economy, and environment in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable.

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Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

510 S. 31st Street, P.O. Box 8736 | Camp Hill, PA 17001-8736 | 717.761.2740 | www.pfb.com

October 7, 2025

Submitted to the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee & House Education Committee

Dear Representatives,

My name is Mitchell Kurek, and I serve as the State and Local Affairs Specialist for Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, the state's largest general farm organization representing more than 27,000 farm and rural families.


I am here in support of HB 1768, the Keystone Fresh Act. This legislation creates a real opportunity to connect Pennsylvania's farmers with commonwealth schools and students, ensuring that the food served in cafeterias is not only fresh and nutritious but also grown right here Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania schools serve more than 157 million lunches per year, yet local foods, excluding liquid milk, make up less than two percent of that program's spending. Both schools and farmers want to increase local purchasing, but they face barriers that the Keystone Fresh Act directly addresses. By establishing the Fresh Schools Grant Program, the Keystone Producer Grant Program, and the Keystone Assistance Grant Program, this bill provides the tools schools and farmers need to overcome those barriers.

Investing in the Keystone Fresh Act is a win for our children, our farmers, and for our local economy. Research shows farm-to-school programs increase student consumption of fruits and vegetables, farmers working with schools see revenue growth, and local purchasing generates a multiplier effect that strengthens our communities.

On behalf of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau members, I urge you to support HB 1768 and the opportunities it will create for farmers, schools, and students alike.

Respectfully,



Mitchell Kurek
State and Local Affairs Specialist
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau