

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 Carly Auchey, and I am the Chair of the Adams County Food Policy Council.

I support HB 1768, the Keystone Fresh Act because I've seen the mutual and abundant benefits of Farm to School programming our local school districts. From the farmers, to the food service directors, to the children and their parents, farm to school initiatives are a win-win for everyone involved.

Nick Milone at Gettysburg Area School District has been championing these efforts in our county. By joining Family Consumer Science classes, bringing farmers- like Ben Mearns at Mud College Farms- to wellness events, and putting local food on the menu, Nick is making sure that Adams County kids eat Adams County foods.

I believe HB 1768 will help our other school districts to join these efforts, create more economic opportunities for our local growers, and fill the bellies of children with real, quality foods.

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

Best,

Carly Auchey

Chair, Adams County Food Policy Council



NORRISTOWN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Food Services
Administration Building
401 N. Whitehall Rd.
Norristown, PA 19403

Nicole Melia, Director of Food Services

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Keystone Fresh Act. As the Food Service Director for Norristown Area School District, I oversee meals for thousands of students each day. We purchase Pennsylvania-grown produce whenever possible because we see firsthand how fresh, local foods improve nutrition and strengthen community connections.

I experienced this impact directly when local food funding allowed us to purchase Pennsylvania-grown red and yellow watermelons earlier this fall. Without that support, these unique varieties would have been out of reach. Students were thrilled to see something different on their trays, and many tried yellow watermelon for the first time in school. I have seen students try vegetables they normally would never touch because they learned how it grew or grew it themselves. These moments capture why programs like Keystone Fresh matter — funding makes it possible to bring farm-fresh produce into the cafeteria, sparking excitement and building lifelong healthy eating habits.

Pennsylvania schools represent hundreds of millions of dollars in food purchases, yet only a small fraction goes to Pennsylvania farmers. Redirecting even a portion of that spend creates stable, reliable markets for local producers while delivering nutritious foods to children. Farm-to-school programs have been shown to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and improve perceptions of school meals.

The Keystone Fresh Act is more than farm policy — it is school nutrition, economic development, and equity policy. For the benefit of our children, our farmers, and our communities, I urge you to support and fund this bill.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Nicole Melia
Food Service Director
Norristown Area School District



Pennsylvania State Grange

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October 1, 2025

Testimony of Matthew D. Espenshade
President, Pennsylvania State Grange
In Support of the *Keystone Fresh Act* - House Bill 1768

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Pennsylvania State Grange in strong support of the *Keystone Fresh Act*. My name is Matthew Espenshade, and I am honored to serve as President of the Pennsylvania State Grange. I am also a dairy farmer from Lancaster County, where my family has worked the land for seven generations.

The Grange has always stood for policies that strengthen family farms, build rural communities, and connect Pennsylvanians to local food. The *Keystone Fresh Act* is an important step forward in placing more Pennsylvania-grown and Pennsylvania-produced foods onto the plates of our children in schools. When we invest in programs that bring local fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy into school cafeterias, we are investing not only in farm families but also in the health and well-being of our students.

From my perspective as a dairy farmer, I am especially encouraged by the Act's support for dairy products such as yogurt and cheese. Children across Pennsylvania have access to fluid milk on a daily basis in their school meal programs. Federal programs through USDA currently incentivize fluid milk, but not these other dairy products. That leaves a gap for schools that want to source Pennsylvania-made yogurt and cheese, even though these are wholesome, nutrient-rich, and kid-friendly foods. The *Keystone Fresh Act* closes that gap, giving schools access to products they currently struggle to obtain and creating new markets for Pennsylvania's dairy farmers and processors.

But the benefits go far beyond dairy. This legislation strengthens opportunities for all Pennsylvania farmers—fruit and vegetable growers, livestock producers, grain farmers, and more—by helping schools purchase fresh, local products. At the same time, children are introduced to foods grown right here in their own state, connecting them to where their meals come from and reinforcing agriculture's central role in Pennsylvania's economy and daily life.

The *Keystone Fresh Act* is a win for schools, a win for families, and a win for Pennsylvania agriculture. On behalf of the Pennsylvania State Grange, I respectfully urge your support for this legislation. Together, we can ensure that Pennsylvania's farm products feed Pennsylvania's children—nourishing both their bodies and the future of our agricultural communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew D. Espenshade
President, Pennsylvania State Grange

The Pennsylvania State Grange supports the local Granges to promote family involvement, help members grow as individuals, unify their communities, and create opportunity through legislation and service.

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

My name is Jeremy Bergman, and I am the Food Service Director of the New Castle Area School District in New Castle, Pennsylvania. I also serve as the School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania's Public Policy and Legislation Chair.

I support HB 1768, the Keystone Fresh Act, because I believe supporting local farmers, dairies, and butchers is necessary to contribute to the betterment of our communities. As a Food Service Director, my job is not just to provide our children with healthy meals, but to educate them about our food system as well. One way I do this is through partnerships with local vendors.

My school district is proud to work with the PA Beef Council, Marburger's Dairy, and the Apple Castle, just to name a few. In my experience, children get excited about eating when they can identify where their food is from. Our children know these names and have visited their facilities with their families. Marburger's, a local dairy farm of one hundred and thirty cows, provides milk for the entire district. Our kids know our milk comes from Marburger's just as well as they know that the Apple Castle is the best place in the area to get fresh produce. We had a student exclaim, "I have been there, my grandma took me to pick out pumpkins last year." There is a sense of comfort that comes with knowing where your food comes from. Providing children with the opportunity to experience this in my schools wouldn't be possible without the Keystone Fresh Act.

I believe HB 1768 will help school nutrition programs deliver more fresh, scratch-made, and local foods to our children. Schools in Pennsylvania serve more than 157 million lunches per year, yet only 2% of total food purchases are from PA. Research has shown that students consume 37% more vegetables and 11% more fruit when there is a farm-to-school program in place. Farmers who are engaged with schools typically see a 5% increase in revenue. Both schools and farmers want to work together, but there continue to be many barriers to that. The Keystone Fresh Act aims to eliminate unnecessary obstacles and provide both farmers and schools with the tools they need to create better communities.

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

Respectfully,

Jeremy Bergman

Public Policy & Legislation Chair

School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania



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

I am the Executive Director of the PA Veteran Farming Network, the non-profit organization for veterans, military, and their spouses who farm.

We support state programming which enhances access to fresh, locally grown and produced food, and provides a market opportunity for those who have served and now feed the communities.

Forging connections among consumers and producers not only positively impacts healthy diets, but is vital in helping the next generation of Pennsylvanians know where their food comes from. Creating linkages for school children to understand the importance and role of Pennsylvania agriculture in their lives helps everyone.

Further, farm to school programs create local market opportunities for very small farmers, a demographic representing many of our Network veterans who farm.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Respectfully,

Mimi Thomas-Brooker
PAVFN Executive Director