



Mr. Robert M. Eadie, Chief  
Policy and Program Development Branch, Child Nutrition Division,  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Department of Agriculture  
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 640,  
Alexandria, Virginia 22302-1594

September 4, 2008

Dear Mr. Eadie:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit recommendations for the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act (CNWR). As the Farm to School coordinator, I am writing these recommendations on behalf of Georgia Organics, a non-profit, member-based organization whose mission is to integrate healthy, sustainable and locally grown foods into the lives of all Georgians.

Farm to School programs empower schools to increase fresh, delicious, locally grown foods into their cafeterias and classrooms through hands-on culinary and gardening activities, taste testings, and field trips to local farms. In the South, our children suffer from the highest rates of both obesity and food insecurity, and consume the least amount of fresh fruits and vegetables. Implementing Farm to School programs is a real solution to reversing these dire statistics.

There are over 8,776 schools and over 2,000 school districts in the United States implementing Farm to School programs. Each of these program demonstrated positive transformations in children's preferences for healthy foods both in and outside the school cafeteria. CNWR provides a key opportunity to support, sustain, expand and institutionalize Farm to School programs and, in turn, the long-term health of our children.

## **Recommendations**

**1) Georgia Organics recommends \$10 million in mandatory funding for Section 122 to increase access to fresh local foods in school meal programs through farm to cafeteria activities.** We were pleased to see "access to local foods" and "farm to cafeteria" and "school gardens" cited in the 2004 CNWR, but we feel it is imperative to provide financial assistance in order to help schools implement these programs.

School food service staff works hard to provide good food for our children. But when the average food item travels over 1,500 miles before it reaches our children's lunch tray, these foods are often less tempting than the unhealthy, over processed alternatives. With over half of Georgia's public school students eligible for free and reduced lunch, we have the responsibility to serve these children the freshest, most tasteful foods we can. Local foods partnered with

garden-enhanced nutrition education presents a balanced plan to provide good food, while ensuring that children will actually eat what is offered. Students will eat tomatoes like they are candy and devour kale and spinach if they have an opportunity to plant it, grow it and harvest it—we've seen this with our students right here in Georgia.

Funding for garden-enhanced nutrition curriculum and increasing access for local foods is needed supports another federal policy—the School Wellness Policy (Section 204). Here in Georgia, several schools have created school wellness policies, but sometimes struggle to stay active when the school meals continue to serve foods that don't reflect the committee's vision of a healthy lunch.

**2) CNWR should make purchasing local foods as simple as possible for school food service directors.** Increased funding and buy-local language for procurement training in Section 115 and Technology Management & Information Systems in Section 125 will help support farm to table safety education for school foodservice staff and directors and help develop relationships with farms to ensure the best quality product.

Many school kitchens often lack space, equipment, adequate training, refrigerators, freezers, and other needs to cook food—not just warm food. However, we know that when food service staff are involved in preparing fresh, delicious foods that children love- their enthusiasm for their work grows. At one of our farm to school sites, a foodservice staff woman was asked how she felt about the extra time needed to prepare the new salad bar every day. She stated that she didn't mind – in all her years serving lunch, she had never seen students so excited about eating vegetables before.

**3) Finally, please incorporate language in existing CNWR feeding programs to include and promote more local food.** Specifically, in the:

- Commodity Distribution Program (Section 117)
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (Section 120)
- Summer Feeding Programs (Section 116)
- Child and Adult Care Feeding Programs (Section 119)
- Nutrition Promotion (Section 101)

In conclusion, beyond all the nutritional benefits of Farm to School, schools represent a huge market for our local farmers. We have a tremendous opportunity to recapture these food dollars, and keep this money circulating in our local communities.

The CNWR presents a distinctive opportunity to improve the health of our children and our communities through the enhanced support of Farm to School programs. Thank you for considering our comments and we look forward to your sincere review in the upcoming months.

Sincerely,

Erin Croom  
Farm to School Coordinator  
Georgia Organics