

New State Policy Report Details Growth in Farm to School Movement Nationwide

Latest edition of a handbook for farm to school advocates highlights policies supporting BIPOC producers, universal meals, and responses to COVID-19.

SOUTH ROYALTON, VERMONT, UNITED STATES, July 27, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today

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Vermont Law School's [Center for Agriculture and Food Systems](#) (CAFS) and [National Farm to School Network](#) (NFSN) released the [State Farm to School Policy Handbook: 2002-2020](#). This comprehensive, state-by-state resource summarizes and analyzes every proposed farm to school bill and resolution introduced between 2002 and 2020 from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories.

The resource allows advocates, policymakers and staff, state agencies, school districts, and others to search bills

by both jurisdiction and topic. Users can learn about the wide variety of existing policies, compare one state's farm to school policies with another, leverage knowledge of farm to school options to promote new state policies, and access the full text of legislation to assist with legislative drafting.

The report reveals that since 2002, state legislators have introduced 546 bills and resolutions to support farm to school activities, with 43 states, Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands passing legislation.

“Since 2002, support for farm to school activities has grown exponentially across the country,” said Jenileigh Harris, program associate at NFSN. “Lawmakers are increasingly acknowledging the importance of how kids eat, grow, and learn about food in school and early care settings, and introducing policies that support this movement in order to build more just and equitable food systems.”

The new handbook builds on a survey that was originally released in 2011 and updated in 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2019. Like previous iterations, it focuses on policies that directly advance the core elements of farm to school: local procurement, school gardens, and food and agriculture education. The new edition also includes a focus on policies that support Black, Indigenous, and

people of color (BIPOC) producers, establish universal school meals, and respond to COVID-19.

The handbook highlights legislation that can advance racial equity, such as bills that focus on school food procurement practices, targeted farm to school training, and resources for BIPOC farmers. It also includes a comprehensive case study on key strategies to support Native food and Tribal sovereignty through farm to school policy. “A handful of states now have farm to school policies that address the historical and ongoing inequities between BIPOC producers and their white counterparts,” said Lihlani Nelson, associate director of CAFS. “We hope that highlighting them will spur other states to take similar action.”

The report also identifies universal school meals policies—through which all students enrolled in public and participating private schools in a given state receive free meals regardless of income eligibility—as an emerging strategy for advancing equity-centered farm to school practices. Between 2019 and 2020, nine universal meals bills were introduced, including two with a local procurement component. Earlier this summer, California and Maine became the first states to adopt universal school meals, providing free breakfast and lunch to all K-12 public school students.

“State-level policy work has been effective at driving the expansion of farm to school across the country, but there is still work to be done to ensure equitable access to the opportunities and benefits of these programs” said Harris. “The goal of every state and territory should be to pass comprehensive legislation that supports farm to school activities to advance racial equity and benefit those most impacted in their communities. We hope that this resource will aid advocates and policymakers in developing the laws needed to facilitate strong, equity-centered farm to school programs.”

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