

STATES CAN GENERATE GREATER ACCESS TO LOCAL FOODS

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LOCAL FOODS ARE NUTRITIOUS AND KEEP DOLLARS IN LOCAL ECONOMIES

BACKGROUND

Today's consumers are seeking greater agency over, and transparency in, our Nation's food supply. This has resulted in a heightened demand for locally sourced foods and "buy local" policies. Locally sourced foods represent: 1) fresh, nutritious options for consumers with fewer associated transportation costs, 2) greater economic opportunities for local small farmers and, therefore, rural communities, and 3) greater local connections with those who produce our food.

However, states often face barriers when it comes to locally sourced, direct-to-consumer, and home-based sales of local foods. For instance, state procurement policies are often too rigid, filled with red tape, and lack adequate purchasing preferences and/or floors for locally sourced foods. States may also overlook opportunities to incentivize businesses like restaurants and distributors to buy local, like reimbursements for percentages of locally produced purchases. Additionally, producers lack access to capital to produce value-added agricultural goods, especially young and beginning farmers and ranchers.

State policymakers must seize the moment and assess and address these barriers in their respective states. Increasing access to locally produced foods not only supports greater nutrition across America, but it also supports the ongoing, much-welcomed national convergence of U.S. nutrition and agriculture policy.

STATES TAKING ACTION

Maine and Arkansas have acted legislatively to set a specific threshold for local food procurement in schools. Through the Maine Farm and Fish to School Program and the Arkansas Grown School Meal Program, the states now mandate that schools purchase a minimum percentage, or "floor," of their food budgets from state producers, including fruits, vegetables, dairy, proteins (such as seafood), and value-added products sourced directly from farmers, commercial fishers, aquaculture operations, or cooperatives.

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture is promoting a "Local First" nutrition model involving a variety of initiatives. Among the efforts, they are reimbursing restaurants for 15% of all or part of the cost of eligible Kentucky Proud (local) purchases and providing a 2.5% reimbursement of eligible sales to distributors that provide detailed quarterly reports on behalf of participating restaurants. In addition, they are seeking to remove procurement barriers like purchasing authority and complex bid procedures in hopes of making local purchasing easier for local farmers and procurement officials to navigate.

In April 2025, Indiana Governor Mike Braun issued Executive Order 25-58, titled "Making Indiana Healthy Again by Increasing Hoosier Access to Local Foods," calling for a comprehensive study to expand access to locally grown produce, meats, dairy, and other products through direct-to-consumer sales from Indiana farmers. By identifying obstacles to broadening local food distribution, the study aims to shape targeted reforms and demonstrate how future legislative or executive actions can be data-informed.

Further, Governor Braun issued Executive Order 25-59, "Making Indiana Healthy Again by Promoting the Health and Wellness of Hoosier Students," on the same day as the above order, requesting recommendations for expanding farm-to-school programs. These two

orders serve as model blueprints for identifying scalable investments by public institutions and other organizations to prioritize health outcomes, nutrient-dense eating, and resilient local food systems.

COMMON STATE SOLUTIONS

It is anticipated that states will continue to address barriers to accessing locally sourced foods. Below are commonly adopted policies:

- Percentage floors and preferences for local procurement with state dollars.
- Less restrictive state procurement regulations and laws.
- Supplier directories with vendor offerings sourced from within the state.
- State and private partnerships to expand on-farm and local processing capacity near schools and other public institutions.
- Require public reporting on current local food purchasing policies and performance metrics.
- Offering access to capital programs, particularly for beginning farmers and ranchers.

