

# **The Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013**

## **Sponsored by Representative Chellie Pingree and Senator Sherrod Brown**

### **Summary**

The Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act will support job creation by improving federal farm bill programs that support local and regional farm and food systems. This legislation will help farmers and ranchers engaged in local and regional agriculture by addressing production, aggregation, processing, marketing, and distribution needs. This legislation will also assist consumers by improving access to healthy food and direct and retail markets. Of utmost importance, this legislation will provide more secure funding for critically important programs that support family farms, expand new farming opportunities, and invest in the local agriculture economy.

### **The Benefits of Local and Regional Food Systems**

Local and regional agriculture is a major economic driver in the farm economy. While in 1970 farmers markets were few and far between, there are now almost 8,000 farmers markets throughout the United States. On the heels of that expansion, we are witnessing the rapid growth of local food markets that have scaled up beyond direct marketing and a renewal of mid-tier regional food system enterprises. According to USDA, local food sales now account for \$5 billion annually. Together these markets represent important new job growth and economic development opportunities.

### **The Local Farm, Food, and Jobs Act will:**

#### **Expand Access to Healthy Foods for Consumers by:**

- Improving SNAP participant access to farmers markets, CSAs, and other direct marketing outlets by creating a level playing field for electronic benefit transfer among vendors.
- Piloting the use of mobile technologies to redeem SNAP benefits at local food markets.
- Allowing SNAP benefits to be redeemed at CSAs.
- Providing \$20 million in annual funding for SNAP incentive programs, which will increase the consumption of local fresh fruits and vegetables by families using nutrition assistance.
- Allowing small school districts the option of using their school lunch commodity dollars for the purchase of local and regional foods, and directing USDA to conduct farm-to-school demonstration projects.
- Increasing funding for the Community Food Projects program from \$5 million to \$10 million annually and increasing the maximum grant term from three years to five years.
- Funding the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program at \$25 million annually.
- Providing \$5 million a year for a Food and Agriculture Service Learning Program to advance children's nutritional health and education in rural and urban underserved communities by increasing the number of national service members working in K-12 schools

### **Boost Income and Opportunities for Farmers and Ranchers by:**

- Ensuring that lenders associated with the Farm Service Agency and Farm Credit System have systems in place to serve local farmers.
- Directing the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to develop a “whole farm diversified risk management insurance plan” to serve diversified producers who do not currently have access to revenue insurance geared to their farming systems.
- Directing RMA to offer organic crop price election for all organic crops within three years.
- Providing RMA with renewed authority to develop products for underserved crops.
- Consolidating and providing stable funding for the organic cost share certification program for farmers and handlers at \$11.5 million per year.
- Funding Value-Added Producer Grants at an annual amount of \$20 million a year and expanding the program to include food aggregation and distribution networks and targeted outreach to underserved states and communities.

### **Improve Local and Regional Food System Infrastructure and Markets by:**

- Providing authority for local and regional food system projects under Regional Business Opportunity Grants, Community Facility Grants and Loans, and Rural Business Enterprise Grants programs.
- Making improvements to Business and Industry direct and guaranteed loans to benefit producers of local or regionally produced agricultural food products.
- Expanding the Farmers Market Promotion Program to include the full gamut of local food marketing as the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program and funding the revised program at \$20 million annually.
- Directing Specialty Crop Block Grants to be used to improve farm profitability and sustainability, improve distribution of local and regional food, and increase the domestic consumption and affordability of fruits and vegetables in low-income communities.
- Providing food safety and inspection outreach, technical assistance, and training to small meat and poultry establishments.
- Providing customer-friendly electronic access to meat labels.

### **Enhance Agriculture Research and Extension by:**

- Including a national program within the Agricultural and Food Research Initiative program for local and regional farm and food systems research and for conventional plant and animal breeding research.
- Establishing a local and regional farm and food system enterprise facilitation initiative to increase training and technical assistance for local food systems through Extension.
- Providing \$5 million in funding for USDA to collect local food production data and evaluate federal programs designed to support local food systems.