The Keystone Fresh Act: FAQ

Q: What is the PA Farm to School Network?

A: The PA Farm to School Network, formally established eight years ago, is a resource and advocacy collaborative that includes representatives from state agencies, non-profit organizations and industry associations that actively support farm to school interests and activities throughout the Commonwealth. The Network is steered by a leadership team of eleven individuals/entities and 65 active working group members and engages hundreds of general members from all of PA's 67 counties.

Q: Who supports the Keystone Fresh Act HB 1768?

A: The Keystone Fresh Act HB 1768 was introduced by Representative Danilo Burgos and co-sponsored by dozens of PA legislators from both the Democratic and Republican parties. Along with the PA Farm to School Network, over 80 PA based organizations, associations and businesses support this bill, including: The PA Farm Bureau, Pasa Sustainable Agriculture, The School Nutrition Association of PA, PA Cattlemen's Association, Feeding Pennsylvania, family farms, school districts, food banks, food distributors and food aggregators.

Q: What local food products are eligible expenses for the Keystone Fresh Act grants?

A: Whole and minimally-processed fruits, vegetables, herbs, meat, seafood, yogurt, cheese, legumes and grains that are grown, harvested, raised or minimally processed in Pennsylvania.

Q: How many schools in PA already purchase local food for school meals?

A: Pennsylvania has a long history of interest in Farm to School programs with more schools participating each year. Almost half of the school districts in PA report participating in some level of farm to school activity,[1] including serving local food products in their school meals. Despite this growth and interest, barriers prevent many PA family farmers from accessing the PA school food market which serves more than 157 million lunches annually![2]

Q: What are the barriers to purchasing and serving local food for school meals?

A: First, family farmers and producers struggle to access the school food market due to school meal standard requirements and competition with larger distributors. Second, sourcing, affording, and preparing local products can be challenging for school districts limited by federal funding and kitchen infrastructure for scratch cooking. As a result, less than 2% of the National School Lunch program funds spent by PA schools are used to purchase local PA foods.[3]

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1 USDA 2019 Farm to School Census
2 Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition, Child Nutrition Programs
3 USDA 2019 Farm to School Census and Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition, Child Nutrition Programs

Q: How will the Keystone Fresh Act address the common barriers to purchasing and serving local food for school meals?

A: The Keystone Fresh Act will provide three specific grant opportunities to address common barriers: 1) The Fresh Schools Grant Program will reimburse school districts for the purchase of local food used in school meals, incentivizing the purchase of PA food products 2) The Keystone Producer Grant Program will award grants to participating farms, food hubs and local food aggregators for equipment and marketing needed to meet school meal standards, and 3) The Keystone Assistance Grant Program will award technical assistance grants to PA-based nonprofits and institutions of higher education to foster connections between PA family farmers/growers and school districts and ensure that both parties can best utilize the funds.

Q: How did the Keystone Fresh Act (PA's Local Food Purchasing Incentive) utilize lessons learned from existing programs in other states?

A: Information reviewed from a comprehensive research assessment[4] of the 16 existing state Local Food Purchasing Incentive policies and an investigative report[5] completed by the PA Department of Education and Project PA helped inform the Keystone Fresh Act.

Q: Why is the definition of local specific to PA products instead of based on a geographic distance?

A: PA tax dollars should be invested in PA farmers and PA schools. The intent of the Keystone Fresh Act is to develop the resilience of Pennsylvania's food system and increase food security among communities across the Commonwealth. School districts are encouraged to use alternative funds for local foods based on any additional definitions they use.

Q: Why is fluid dairy milk not included in the eligible expenses for the Keystone Fresh Act grant?

A: Fluid dairy milk is an essential part of child nutrition that is already included in every USDA meal program as a requirement for full reimbursement. Milk, by nature of its perishability, tends to be regional if not local and 73% of PA schools report serving local milk on a daily basis in their nutrition programs.[6] Other dairy-based products like yogurt and cheese are allowable costs in the Keystone Fresh Act because, unlike fluid milk, farmers experience market accessibility and cost barriers to selling these products to schools. The intent of the Keystone Fresh Act is to open up new market opportunities for PA producers and increase the volume and variety of PA food products in school meals. PA dairy farmers stand to benefit from The Keystone Fresh Act by selling these non-fluid dairy products to schools.

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4 Statewide Farm to School Procurement Incentives: Design Thinking & Analysis of the National Landscape, Cassandra Bull
5 Pennsylvania Local Food Purchasing Incentive Investigation, Elaine McDonnell with Penn State University 4 Department of Nutritional Sciences and Audrey Hess with Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition
6 USDA 2019 Farm to School Census

Q: How much funding does the Keystone Fresh Act require to make a meaningful impact?

A: The Keystone Fresh Act should be funded as a $15 million total biennial program with roughly $8 million of the total funds spent on PA food products. This amount would **double** the total amount of reported school meal dollars spent on PA local food and would be multiple times the amount that has ever been invested in making school markets available for PA farmers despite the decades-long interest in expanding local food served in school meals. It's time for legislators to make a significant investment by funding the Keystone Fresh Act - a program model that benefits all of Pennsylvania. As outlined in the bill, schools would receive grant awards based on student enrollment in the following amounts:

Enrollment:	Award Range:
100 - 1,000 students	$16,500 to $45,000
1,001 - 5,000 students	$35,000 to $120,000
5,001 - 10,000 students	$85,000 to $200,000
10,001 - 32,000 students	$100,000 to $275,000
above 32,000 students	$200,000 to $650,000

Q: Doesn't PA already provide grants for local food procurement through the Farm to School Program in the PA Farm Bill?

A: While there is a PA Farm to School Grant program in the PA Farm Bill, the funds are not spent solely on purchasing local food for school meals or snacks and the maximum grant award is $15,000. This program is significant and important for Early Care and Education (ECE) programs, which typically serve fewer students than a school district, as well as schools just beginning their farm to school journey. The PA Farm to School Grant also offers essential financial support for other components of farm to school including food and agriculture education and school gardens. Higher grant award amounts are necessary to make a significant impact on schools' food purchasing behavior and our regional economies.

Q: Why are the Keystone Fresh Act grants only available for K-12 schools and not for Early Care and Education (ECE) programs?

A: The PA Farm to School Grant program offers ECEs financial support to offset the cost of purchasing local food and for the majority of ECEs the $15,000 max grant award is more than enough to make a meaningful impact. ECE meal programs are not funded in the same uniform way as most K-12 schools are, so including ECE programs in the Keystone Fresh Act would demand additional administrative responsibilities and costs from multiple state agencies.

Learn more:
pafarmtoschool.org/keystone-fresh-act

PENNSYLVANIA FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

The FOOD TRUST

The Pennsylvania Farm to School Network, coordinated by The Food Trust, is a resource and advocacy collaborative bringing together representatives from state agencies, non-profit organizations and industry associations that actively support farm to school interests and activities throughout the Commonwealth.