

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ASAP Asks USDA to Improve Child Nutrition Act

ASHEVILLE, NC (August 15, 2008) -- *Who doesn't want to feed children well?* This is the question the Southeast Farm to School Network will pose to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) as it prepares to bring the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act to Congress. Lead by Growing Minds, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project's (ASAP) Farm to School Program, members of the network from across the southeast will attend a USDA listening session to request more support for providing fresh, local foods in schools.

Child Nutrition Programs affected by the reauthorization of the bill include the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, and the Summer Food Service Program.

Farm to School programs connect kids with their food by working to get local products served in school cafeterias--benefiting both farmers and children--as well as by facilitating farm field trips, school gardens, and more.

The network requests that program guidelines incorporate language promoting local food and that funding be increased for:

- fresh local foods in school meal programs
- school gardens
- reimbursement rates for school meals, with schools participating in farm to school receiving additional reimbursement
- educating school foodservice staff and directors about buying and preparing fresh, local foods
- school foodservice equipment
- dollars for schools to use to buy local products rather than commodities

School foodservice staff are faced with many challenges, from tight budgets, to complicated bidding processes for purchasing food that make it difficult to buy from small farmers, to the lack of equipment for preparing fresh foods. Additional money and increased support in the 2009 Child Nutrition Act would enable our schools to better serve children.

It's not hard to see that local food is an improvement over the pre-made and processed fare that's long been the fodder for kids' jokes about--and genuine aversion to--the school cafeteria. Emily Jackson, Growing Minds' Program Director, also offers a reminder of the larger scale impact of Farm to School. It is a comprehensive community health and economic development strategy that supports local business and economic development, improves community health, and teaches sustainable behavior, beginning with youth. "Our region is still dominated by its small, rural towns and traditions. Our farmers are struggling to stay viable and we have to support them. Their businesses are the bedrock of our communities--and families'--physical and economic health," Jackson says.

The listening session will take place in Atlanta on August 20, 2008. Written comments must be submitted by October 15, 2008. State agencies, advocacy groups, the families of program participants--all interested parties--are invited to participate in the USDA's information gathering. For more information on attending the listening session or to submit written comments, use the following information:

Phone:404-562-7106

Fax: 404-527-4518

Email: serolisteningsession@fns.usda.gov

Mail: USDA/Food Nutrition Service
61 Forsyth Street, S.W., Room 8T36
Atlanta, GA 30303

For more information on Growing Minds, visit www.growing-minds.org.

ABOUT THE APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT

The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project is a nonprofit organization that supports farmers and rural communities in the mountains of Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachians by providing education, mentoring, promotion, web resources, and community and policy development. ASAP's mission is to create and expand regional community-based and integrated food systems that are locally owned and controlled, environmentally sound, economically viable and health-promoting.

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