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Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire

c/o the NH Farm to School Network

31,000 Pieces of Pizza and 1.8 Million Dollars

The NH Farm to School Network, Fresh Start Farms, and other community partners plan to provide local food to New Hampshire's students and boost the state's farm economy through various farm to school projects and legislation.

MANCHESTER, NH — On December 9, 2021, New Hampshire state legislators, representatives from the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food, and media joined the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire (NOFA-NH) and its fellow NH Farm to School Network members at Fresh Start Farms in Manchester for a luncheon highlighting forthcoming farm to school projects and legislation in New Hampshire.

Jameson Small, the Program Manager for Fresh Start Farms (a program of the Organization for Refugee & Immigrant Success), kicked off the luncheon with a presentation on Fresh Start Farms' farm to school pilot project. Funded by a USDA Farm to School grant, Fresh Start Farms will work with students from six schools in the Nashua and Manchester school districts to plant tomatoes in local community gardens and Fresh Start Farms locations. Students will assist in growing and harvesting the tomatoes to be sent to Meredith-based food hub, Genuine Local, and processed into a pizza sauce. Fresh Start Farms will then assemble pizzas with the sauce at their food hub facility in Manchester and bring them to participating schools once a month to serve them as part of the school's lunch program and provide a presentation with farmers about how the garden-to-plate pizza was made. Piloting the project for the 2022 school year will allow Small and his team to film the entire process and showcase that film as an educational component to monthly in-classroom pizza tasting activity.

"Getting locally grown food into schools isn't easy. Seasonality, low commodity pricing and minimal staff in school kitchens are all barriers that we have faced over the years. What we have found is that you have to add value by engaging a wide range of community of stakeholders starting with students. They are the true "customers," and they have lots of purchase power. Pizza is the most popular school lunch, and it traditionally has great margins. This gave us an opportunity to make a product that was price competitive to current market offerings but with superior quality and higher nutritional value. Additionally, our project gives us the opportunity to get our foot in the door to some of the largest school districts in the state. Now that they are committed to ordering flatbreads, we can then focus on other foods that could work in their menu planning like fresh spinach, salad greens, apples and dairy. Over 150,000 meals a day are prepared for students in NH with millions of dollars a week leaving the local economy. To shift a portion of this to local farmers and producers will be a massive game changer," said Small.

Following Small's presentation, NH Farm to School Network member and NOFA-NH Board President, Karl Johnson, shared his excitement for Fresh Start Farms's pilot program and made an official announcement about the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Bill, introducing the bill's co-sponsors, Representative Alexis Simpson and Representative Megan

Murray. Simpson and Murray summarized the intent of the bill and the reimbursement program, sharing that it has been submitted to the New Hampshire legislature for the 2022 session with eight other legislative sponsors from both major party affiliations. If passed, the bill will provide funding for the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Program, a program to incentivize New Hampshire schools to purchase fruit, vegetables, dairy, and other locally grown or produced products from New Hampshire farmers for lunch and breakfast service in the cafeteria.

“With this policy, we can improve the health and well-being of our children and the resiliency of our local food system. The Department of Education’s Office of Nutrition Programs and Services would provide a monetary incentive to schools who choose to direct more of their ‘per meal’ USDA cash reimbursement funds toward purchases from New Hampshire and New England farmers. The state would encourage this channeling of federal funds into the local economy by awarding schools \$1 for every \$3 spent on food from New Hampshire and \$1 for every \$6 spent on food from the New England region. The goal is for our local schools to be purchasing at least 10% of their food from local farms,” according to prime sponsor Rep. Alexis Simpson.

New Hampshire’s schools are poised to inject \$1.8 million annually into New Hampshire’s farm and food economy by participating in the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Program. New Hampshire’s farmers will benefit from school districts as a consistent, reliable, and profitable market option, while students will benefit from fresh, local food on their lunch trays.

“Farm to school purchases will make school meals more enticing and help to improve participation leading to healthier children with full bellies. The national school meal programs are a huge opportunity to reach children K-12 and provide them with two nutritious meals a day. NH Hunger Solutions is committed to working with statewide partners to plug more families and individuals into the food system grid to improve access to fresh, affordable, healthy food,” said Jessica Gorhan, Deputy Director, NH Hunger Solutions.

Following Representatives Simpson and Murray, Johnson introduced Katelyn Porter of the NH Food Hub Network to highlight how both farm to school programming, like Fresh Start Farms’s project, and the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement bill would positively impact New Hampshire farmers. Following Porter’s remarks, Johnson applauded the work of the NH Food Hub Network, as well as Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement bill.

“The NH Food Hub Network and the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement bill are co-creating critical markets for New Hampshire’s farmers and producers, helping to keep our state resilient while boosting local economies. Legislation aimed at increasing schools’ local food purchasing will improve this effort and be a major benefit for New Hampshire’s agriculture community,” said Johnson.

Small, along with Stacey Purslow, Program Coordinator for NH Farm to School, closed the luncheon by taking questions from event attendees and offering the opportunity to tour the Fresh Start Farms food hub facility and sample farm fresh pizzas made with the pilot pizza sauce. In attendance was Gail McWilliam Jellie, Director of Marketing for the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food.

“I appreciated the opportunity to see this new facility offering both production space and store front, located in the heart of the Manchester community. Fresh Start Farms provides residents

easy access to nutritious local and regional food via its CSA program, 'stop and shop' store and mobile market. The planned farm to school pilot project to teach local students about food production and marketing by using a favorite food, pizza, is an innovative example of linking the farm to the community and introducing the next generation to the value of local agriculture. The work of Fresh Start Farms is supporting both new American farmers who are seeking to establish themselves in NH agriculture, as well as existing farmers who are looking to expand their markets. Congratulations to Fresh Start Farms and to the NH Farm to School Network on encouraging the legislation to boost school access to local foods. These and other programs around the state benefit all New Hampshire residents," said McWilliam Jellie.

To learn more about farm to school programs and initiatives in New Hampshire, visit nhfarmtoschool.org. For more information and advocacy opportunities related to the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Bill, visit nofanh.org/farm-to-school.

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The Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire (NOFA-NH) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to building a community of organic food activists and educated consumers to help support New Hampshire's local organic farming community. Learn more about NOFA-NH: <https://www.nofanh.org>

NOFA-NH is a member of the NH Farm to School Network, a network of community organizations, school districts, education administrators and professionals, that supports and furthers farm to school programming and values in schools and communities across New Hampshire. Learn more about the NH Farm to School Network: <https://nhfarmtoschool.org/nh-farm-to-school-network/>



