

Organizational Sign-On Letter in Support of the Local Farms, Food and Jobs Act (S.1773)

February 2012

United States Senator Amy Klobuchar
302 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

United States Senator Al Franken
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Klobuchar and Senator Franken:

Despite the current recession, agriculture has remained a strong and vibrant part of both the state and national economy. One area of rapid growth is local and regional food systems. For a host of reasons, more Minnesota farmers are growing for these markets and more consumers are looking for products grown or raised in the surrounding community. The innovative spirit of farmers and increasing appetite of consumers for a diverse basket of local foods, show this is a movement that is here to stay and one ready to expand.

Over the past few years, Minnesota has become a national leader in increasing the availability of healthy, nutritious foods to under-served and communities of color through the expansion of farmers' markets and development of EBT services at participating markets. We've seen growing numbers of small and mid-size farms listed in the State's *Minnesota Grown Directory*, had over a hundred Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms offering shares of fresh and local food, a greater number of restaurants and retail grocers sourcing local products, and more community gardens organized in neighborhoods. Additionally, we're seeing institutional buying increase. At least 123 public school districts in Minnesota are now engaged, at some level, in Farm to School efforts.

Local and regional food systems are also an important jobs creator and keep more dollars in the local economies across our country. Here again, Minnesota has been a leader with a large number of farms that produce local products which maintain that farm identity all the way through the retail chain and to consumers. This value-added approach is one way farmers are finding greater stability and profitability.

While this progress is encouraging, more must be done to make healthy, locally grown food accessible to all Minnesotans. Strategic public investments can spur greater resilience in our local economy and new opportunities for farmers and consumers alike.

This fall, the **Local Farms, Food and Jobs Act** was introduced by your colleague Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) in the Senate and Representative Chellie Pingree (D-ME) in the House.

The Act offers opportunities to expand local food access to school children, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients, and seniors; helps farmers and ranchers engage in local and regional agriculture by addressing production, aggregation, processing, marketing, and distribution needs; and will also assist consumers by improving access to healthy food through

direct-to-consumer and retail markets. This legislation is both an enhancement of existing policy and a set of new approaches that bolster local and regional food systems.

In building support for this Act we are reaching out to Senate members who have exhibited leadership on food and agriculture issues. Currently Minnesota has three members of the delegation – Representative Tim Walz, Representative Keith Ellison, and Representative Betty McCollum – co-sponsoring this legislation.

As the Senate reconvenes in 2012 we urge you to co-sponsor the Local Farms, Food and Jobs Act – a smart and much needed measure to support equitable economic development and good health in our communities.

We look forward to hearing back from you and continuing to work with you and your staff.

Respectfully,

Organization