

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 29, 2008

Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Congressman Colin Peterson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Bob Goodlatte
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Conferees:

We write to encourage you to include important provisions in the final Farm Bill that support healthy, affordable foods and strengthen local and regional food systems to the benefit of farmers and consumers. Both the House and Senate versions of the bill included such provisions, and we look forward to a final bill that retains the best of each.

One important provision was included in both the House and Senate bills -- the clarification of procurement policy to allow schools and other institutions participating in child nutrition programs to consider geographic preferences, facilitating the purchase of local foods when available and practical. This seemingly small provision could provide a boost for farmers, as well as provide an opportunity to educate children about nutrition, farming, and their communities. We also support the House's language that would make the provision broader and cover purchases beyond just fruits and vegetables.

There are a number of other programs that support local and community food systems to the benefit of farmers and consumers across this country. These programs facilitate direct purchase of produce, dairy, and other farm products by consumers, often providing the farmer with a greater share of price by cutting out the middleman. One of the best ways to support local food systems is to support farmers markets. To that end, we hope you will provide at least the \$5 million Senate level for grants to help implement the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) at farmers markets. This important program, which helps set up the EBT machines and related costs, allows parents on the Food Stamp and Women Infant Children (WIC) programs to access local, fresh produce and food. Removing this barrier provides these families with the same access to fresh nutritious food as any other family.

The House and Senate each provided increases in two other important programs -- Value Added Producer Grants and Community Food Project Grants. Value-Added Producer Grants

help a wide variety of farmers and producers improve their method of production. We encourage you to maintain the current level of \$40 million in mandatory annual aid provided in the 2002 Farm Bill, and to include the provisions making certain applications easier. This program has proven its value and with improvements to fund mid-tier value chain networks it should become even more important for local farmers and consumers. For Community Food Project Grants, we support the Senate's decision to increase mandatory funding to \$10 million annually.

Some of the other programs we encourage you to fund at the highest possible level are the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program and the Farmers Market Promotion Program, which help consumers and farmers to meet face-to-face at the growing number of farmers markets across the country. In addition, a number of programs indirectly benefit local food projects and the farmers who participate, including the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program and Farmland Protection programs.

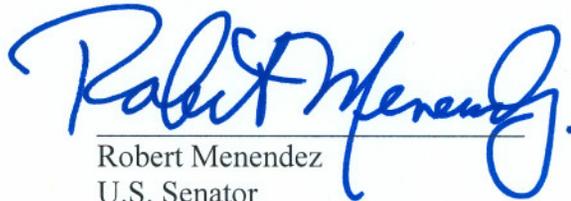
Further, we hope that the final bill will include the Senate-passed language requesting a study on the impact of local food systems on commerce. It is our understanding that supporting local food systems has an impact beyond the farmer and the consumer or individual transactions. Improving our understanding of just how far-reaching the impact of a strong local food system is would benefit all of us.

We recognize that many difficult choices lie ahead as you work to craft the final version of this important legislation, and hope that you will keep these programs in mind.

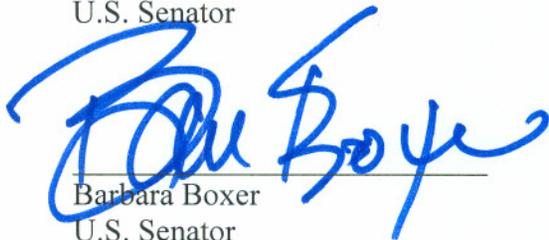
Sincerely,



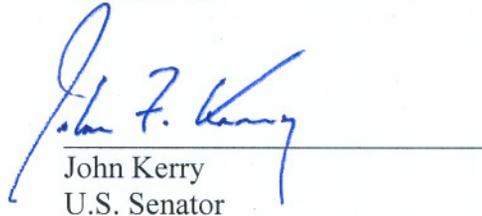
Russ Feingold
U.S. Senator



Robert Menendez
U.S. Senator



Barbara Boxer
U.S. Senator



John Kerry
U.S. Senator



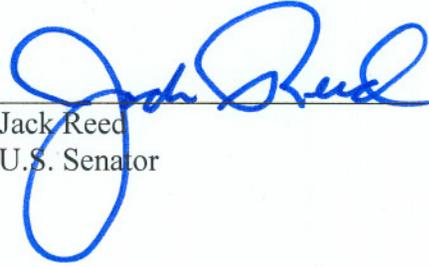
Bernie Sanders
U.S. Senator



Jeff Bingaman
U.S. Senator



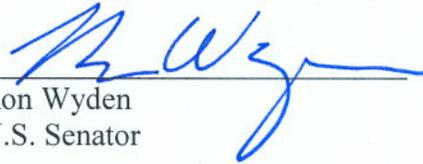
Frank Lautenberg
U.S. Senator



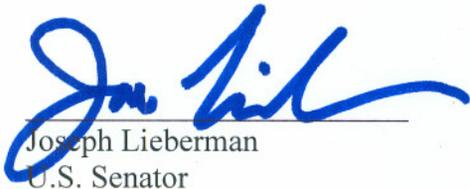
Jack Reed
U.S. Senator



Hillary Rodham Clinton
U.S. Senator



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator



Joseph Lieberman
U.S. Senator