
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 7013

AN ACT CONCERNING ENHANCEMENTS TO THE LOCAL FOOD FOR SCHOOLS INCENTIVE PROGRAM.

SUMMARY

This bill makes several changes to the Local Food for Schools Incentive Program (LFSIP), which provides reimbursements for purchasing locally or regionally sourced food to be used for eligible meal programs (see BACKGROUND).

First, it expands the program to child care providers (i.e. licensed child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes) that provide meal programs. Currently, only local or regional boards of education participating in the National School Lunch Program are eligible.

The bill makes the State Department of Education (SDE), rather than the Department of Agriculture (DoAg), the lead agency responsible for administering the program and DoAg, rather than SDE, the consulting agency. In practice, the program is currently implemented collaboratively between the two agencies, pursuant to a memorandum of understanding outlining each agency's responsibilities. For FY 26, the bill requires SDE to hire a full-time employee to administer the program and take on specified responsibilities, including identifying other funding sources. The bill additionally requires SDE to seek and maximize existing federal funding available for administering the program.

Under the bill, SDE must use at least 20% of LFSIP's annual appropriation to engage with external partners to provide supplemental services, including school nutrition or farm-to-school consultants, technical assistance, outreach, training, or evaluation related to the core elements of farm-to school programs (e.g., procurement, processing,

preparation, serving, and education of locally and regionally sourced food). The bill eliminates a provision in current law authorizing supplemental LFSIP grants that schools could use to pay for similar supplemental services; current law gives priority for these grants to alliance districts.

The bill also (1) allows SDE to give preference to historically underserved farmers, rather than social disadvantaged farmers as under current law; (2) specifies that food must be used in an eligible meal program in order to be eligible for reimbursement; and (3) makes numerous technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

EMPLOYEE DUTIES

Under the bill, the employee SDE hires must be responsible for:

1. identifying and promoting the critical components of individual farm-to-school programs and advising the SDE commissioner on program implementation strategies;
2. supporting partnerships with public and nonprofit organizations to create a structure to facilitate communication between farmers and school district officials;
3. providing workshops, training sessions, and technical assistance to school food service directors, school personnel, farmers, produce distributors, and processors on Connecticut farm product availability and demand;
4. identifying grants, donations, and other sources to help fund the program; and
5. seeking available federal funding, including applying to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for grants and other federal financial assistance.

PREFERENCE FOR CERTAIN FARMERS

By law, LFSIP implementation guidelines must promote geographic,

social, economic, and racial equity. To that end, current law allows the administering agency to include a preference for socially disadvantaged farmers. The bill instead allows this preference to be given to historically underserved farmers.

Under federal and state law, a “socially disadvantaged farmer” is one who is part of a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice due to their identity as members of the group without regard to their individual qualities. Generally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture considers the following to be “historically underserved farmers”: beginning farmers, limited resource farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, and veteran farmers. However, the bill does not specifically define this term, and there are several definitions under federal law.

Existing law, unchanged by the bill, also allows the agency to give preference to small farm businesses.

BACKGROUND

Local Food for Schools Incentive Program

LFSIP provides reimbursements to eligible entities (currently, school boards) that purchase locally or regionally sourced food to be used in an eligible meal program. Locally sourced foods are eligible for 50% reimbursement, and regionally sourced foods are eligible for 30% reimbursement.

Food purchases eligible for reimbursement are produce and farm products that are grown or produced at or sold by farms located in, and have a traceable point of origin within, (1) Connecticut (local farms) or (2) New England or New York (regional farms). They include value-added dairy, fish, pork, beef, poultry, eggs, fruits, vegetables, and minimally processed foods.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference - APP

Yea 44 Nay 0 (03/21/2025)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 54 Nay 0 (04/24/2025)