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Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy and Speaker Craig Coughlin Condemn U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cancellation of \$26 Million in Funding for Local Food for Schools and Food Banks Across New Jersey

Posted on - 03/11/2025

*Cancellation Impacts 46 Local Food Producers*

**TRENTON** – Governor Murphy and Speaker Craig Coughlin today condemned the U.S. Department of Agriculture's decision to eliminate the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program. The USDA canceled over \$26 million in previously committed funding that would have supported producers across New Jersey in providing fresh, locally sourced food to schools and food banks.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture will not be receiving \$9.9 million in Local Food Purchase Assistance funding and over \$16.2 million in Local Food For Schools Cooperative Agreement funding for Fiscal Year 2025. In all, there are 46 producers across New Jersey participating in these programs, 32 of which are underserved producers.

"Families across the nation are struggling to put food on the table and our leaders must be focused on strengthening food security, supporting local farmers, and ensuring that children have access to nutritious meals in schools," **said Governor Murphy**. "Instead, the Trump Administration's decision to cut these critical food programs will make it harder to access fresh and healthy food, exacerbating food insecurity in vulnerable communities."

"At a time when families across the country are already grappling with rising costs, this move only deepens the divide. Abandoning these commitments not only jeopardizes the livelihoods of our hardworking farmers but also puts at risk the children who rely on fresh, locally sourced meals in their schools," **said Speaker Craig Coughlin**. "Fighting food insecurity has been the cornerstone of my legislative career, and I share in the frustration of so many New Jerseyans who are facing the devastating consequences of this decision. I urge the USDA to reconsider its decision and prioritize the well-being of our communities, our farmers, and our children."

"The elimination of future Local Food for Schools and Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreements by the USDA is disappointing," **NJDA Secretary Ed Wengryn said**. "This funding has proven successful in linking NJ farms with schools and community feeding organizations to provide fresh, nutritious food for children and residents, resulting in a stronger agriculture industry and healthier citizens."

"Two key strengths of our state are innovative food security partnerships and our agriculture industry. We know

there is no shortage of nourishing food in New Jersey, with more than 10,000 farms across our state in rural as well as urban communities. OFSA has worked tirelessly in partnership with Governor Murphy, Speaker Coughlin, and all our partners to create innovative solutions that connect our partnerships with our fresh, local food in the Garden State," **said Mark Dinglasan, Executive Director of the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate.** "These critical programs provided valuable support that empowered these partnerships and supported our farmers. They were means for schools and community-based pantries and organizations with operating budgets to build relationships with nearby farmers. New Jersey's farmers work hard to produce quality food and they want to see it reach their neighbors at its peak of freshness, whether in local school meals, client choice pantries, or through other markets. I applaud and share Governor Murphy's and Speaker Coughlin's commitments to finding solutions to ease the challenges these changes will present to New Jerseyans' everyday lives."

Through the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS), the U.S. Department of Agriculture awards funds to states to purchase local unprocessed or minimally processed foods to be served in the National School Lunch and/or School Breakfast programs in schools and childcare institutions. Local and regional food is raised, produced, aggregated, stored, processed, and distributed in New Jersey. The programs aim to strengthen the food system, with an emphasis on purchasing from historically underserved producers and processors.

Through the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA), known as Jersey Fresh for All in New Jersey, the U.S. Department of Agriculture awards federal funds to states, tribal, and territorial governments, to buy food from local, regional, and underserved producers. The purpose of this program is to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency.

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