

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett and Molinaro Team Up to Introduce Bill Boosting Farm to School Program

Bipartisan Support for Healthy School Meals: The initiative aims to increase access to fresh, locally sourced food in schools across the U.S.

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In a notable bipartisan initiative, Congresswoman Stacey E. Plaskett has teamed up with Congressman Marc Molinaro (R-NY) to introduce the Farm to School Act. This legislation aims to significantly increase the availability of fresh, locally grown foods in schools across the United States. The bill proposes to boost the farm to school program funding for school-aged children from \$5 million to \$10 million.

Congresswoman Plaskett emphasized the importance of the program, stating, "The increased demand for Farm to School programming tells us that more people are beginning to understand the connection between local foods and healthy young minds. Through the Farm to School Grant Program, participating schools, nonprofit organizations, and local, state and tribal governments can help schools offer locally grown, fresh food to students."

She further highlighted the economic and educational benefits of the program, saying, "The Farm to School Act is a blueprint for nourishing our children and invigorating our local economies. Since its inception, the program has channeled more than \$52 million into projects across all states and territories, including the U.S. Virgin Islands, benefiting nearly 21 million students in 47,000 schools. This Act not only broadens access to nutritious, locally-sourced meals for millions of students but also provides a much-needed economic lifeline to our small and socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and fishermen. I am proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation alongside Congressman Molinaro in support of our nation's schools and local farmers who help improve classroom diets and local economies; a bill that closely aligns with our collective mission: to build a healthier, more equitable future for all."

Sommer Sibilly-Brown, the founder and executive director of the Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition, shared her perspective on the program's impact. She said, "Farm to School is not a cure-all for the things that plague our communities as it relates to the inequalities in our food system. However, it's a help-more. Farm to School increases access to healthy food for our youth, supports the small farmer and the local food economy, increases the opportunity for knowledge transfer to students with new mediums for applied learning, and strengthens communities. In the Virgin Islands, I personally see Farm to School as a pillar of building a more resilient food system; the money and support infused in our community through the federal dollars committed to farm to school bolsters our food economy and supports reduction of imports."

Karen Spangler, policy director with the National Farm to School Network (NFSN), emphasized the program's broader community benefits, stating, "Farm to school and farm to early childhood activities can address some of the most important issues facing communities—children's mental and physical health, local jobs and economies, and educational engagement, to name a few. The Farm to School Act of 2023 will expand access and increase sustained funding so this critical grant program reaches even more projects across the country."

Highlighting the role of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) in supporting these initiatives, Hannah Quigley, policy specialist for NSAC, said, "Farm to School programs nationwide are strengthening local food economies, providing nutritious foods, and promoting a culture of health among students. The Farm to School Act of 2023 responds to the growing demand of cafeteria managers and farmers that want to provide high quality, locally produced foods for their students. The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition applauds Representatives Plaskett and Molinaro for their commitment to investing in healthy communities."

Mr. Molinaro also shared his views, stating, "The Farm to School program is a win-win for farmers and students. It provides more economic opportunities for local farmers and ensures a steady stream of fresh, nutritious food in our schools. I am proud to expand the

impact of this program by making additional investments."

The Farm to School Act of 2023 is supported by both the National Farm to School Network and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. Further information and updates on the bill, H.R. 6308, can be followed [here](#).

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