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## **FARM TO SCHOOLS**

*Better Food Makes Better Kids*

According to a New England Journal of Medicine study recently published, American life expectancy will either level off or decrease as a result of the increase in childhood obesity. Sadly, this new data is not surprising. The report confirms what many of us know already: diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure are on the rise owing to an obesity epidemic, including an alarming number of children. Statistics are important, but action is essential.

The Farm to Schools Initiative is a new program that educates young children and their families about healthy diets and the importance of eating fruits and vegetables. The program supplies young, school-aged children with locally-grown fruit and vegetable snacks and teachers with educational resources.

The initiative's goals are to help children choose fruits and vegetables over foods which are high in fat, sugar and salt, to help parents find practical ways to encourage their children to choose healthier foods, and to support local farming. The program, successfully piloted by The Food Trust in four Philadelphia schools, could be expanded across Pennsylvania in select areas.

The Farm to Schools Initiative incorporates a comprehensive approach to educating young children about healthy food and the value of supporting local farms, including:

- ❖ **Nutrition Education:** Students participate in interactive nutrition education that is integrated into regular subjects in the curriculum.
- ❖ **Locally Grown Snacks:** Healthy snacks are provided from Pennsylvania farms.
- ❖ **Staff Training:** Teachers and other staff are equipped to incorporate nutrition education into their curriculum.
- ❖ **Family and Community Involvement:** Parents, caregivers and community groups participate in nutrition education activities.
- ❖ **Field Trips:** Students visit nearby farms to learn about the sources of their food.
- ❖ **Economic Development:** Farmers are provided with additional direct marketing opportunities.

Farm to school programs are receiving nationwide recognition as a way to help children eat healthy, while supporting local farms. Pennsylvania has an opportunity to become a national leader by investing in this exciting initiative, with the return going to both our children and our agricultural community.