**RESOLUTION 41**

**ESTABLISHING LOCAL FOOD-PURCHASING ECONOMIES FOR FARMERS**

**WHEREAS,** the current food system in the United States is rigid, consolidated, and fragile, and Congress, through the federal Farm Bill, needs to increase federal farm and food investments, and allow for more state-level decision-making on how to use those funds, in order to enable communities in every state to build healthier, more sustainable food systems by protecting, strengthening and expanding federal programs through the next five-year Farm Bill; and

**WHEREAS,** in December 2021, USDA unveiled the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA), an innovative $900 million effort led by USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service’s (AMS) Commodity Procurement Program, which is part of a historic effort to improve the food system by creating a more resilient food supply chain and a fairer food system through investments in family farmers and rural economies, emphasizing equity, and making nutritious foods more accessible and affordable.

**WHEREAS,** this federal program marked the first time that government help was intended to enhance institutional buyers purchasing from small-scale, beginning, and underserved growers with the commitment of purchase contracts and began to utilize mutually agreeable approaches for building partnerships between a variety of producers and businesses; and

**WHEREAS,** the importance and significance of all farmers, who harvest an array of goods, being a foundation to New Jersey’s economy, culture, history and quality of life, cannot be understated; and

**WHEREAS,** community-supported agriculture can and does promote the value and importance of local farming operations, by which farmers can better ensure their ongoing productivity, success, and financial stability; and

**WHEREAS,** individuals, families, and businesses in the state can obtain fresh, seasonal, and accessible farm-to-table foods throughout the year while developing closer, more supportive and valued relationships with local farmers and become more invested in the long-term success and viability of farming; and

**WHEREAS,** enhancing the value of agricultural products through value-added processing requires helping farmers of all types in adopting the approaches, production methods and marketing strategies for creating those products, which will develop more cooperatives and partnerships through the incorporation of loan programs for planning and facility capital expenses; and

**WHEREAS,** greater food innovation is necessary to support economic development through regional food system development by supporting entrepreneurial activities for small and mid-sized farms to access appropriate storage, processing, and food-system infrastructure, which will enhance and connect food businesses, suppliers and associated institutions; and

**WHEREAS,** municipalities, whether individually or working together, can examine their taxation and zoning policies to designate certain districts for food-oriented businesses (such as food hubs developed in some cities around the nation) that enhance a regional food system by increasing access to local food produced in New Jersey; and

**WHEREAS**, foodsheds are as much “natural geographies” made up of systems and ecosystems as they are political geographies of cities, counties, states, and territories, and situating a local food purchase policy within a broad framework of healthy, sustainable purchasing can be more helpful than relying upon designations based on sheer population numbers when defining a geography that best supports the local policy goals; and

**WHEREAS**, in recent years, there has also been significant growth in support for local food purchasing incentives, with more than a dozen states, including New Jersey, having established programs that provide direct reimbursement to child nutrition programs in schools and early care settings to offset the cost of buying local foods, with additional states in the process of introducing bills and advocating for broader adoption of these programs; and

**WHEREAS,** school districts should be encouraged to, and can, increase participation and subscriptions in community supported agriculture purchases of New Jersey grown food by adopting price preferences for local products; and

**WHEREAS,** the scope of promotion and distinct marketing of all New Jersey farms needs to be supported by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, New Jersey Economic Development Authority, Department of Education and Division of Tourism to better identify all the agricultural products being marketed, as there are still many operations that do not participate in the existing marketing programs; and

**WHEREAS,** diversifying the growing methods and marketing channels for New Jersey agricultural products to maximize their distinct appeal can and should support incorporating those products in the many shops within our state parks, historic sites, recreation areas, and cultural centers whenever and wherever possible, as it will lead to more opportunities for consumers to buy local; and

**WHEREAS,** the use of tax incentives, including tax credits, is a customary government practice through laws relying on tax incentives, rather than direct subsidies, but such reliance has proven to be slow in incentivizing participation in federal and state government programs to increase local purchasing; and

**WHEREAS,** subsidies such as state-dedicated farm loan programs, direct state loans, and state- backed loan guarantee programs can provide access to credit and, further, needed capital to work with agricultural support organizations, both private and public, for beginning farmers, as a much needed essential resource supplying the support they need more readily to reach more and new local markets.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that we, the delegates to the 109th State Agriculture Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 7-8, 2024, do hereby recommend to the State Legislature that it work with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to determine more equitable and adequate appropriations for the NJDA, and to extend that approach to the development of a more appropriate funding allocation formula in the next State budget to establish state-dedicated direct subsidies to farm operations of all types; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the marketing opportunities with the many entities, divisions, and agencies mentioned in this resolution, be established, expanded, and/or accelerated to support small- and mid-sized family farmers, food entrepreneurs of all backgrounds, and local distributors and processers who have historically been unable to access larger local and regional markets.