**RESOLUTION # 26**

**ESTABLISHING LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING ECONOMIES FOR FARMERS**

**WHEREAS,** the COVID 19 pandemic led to a surge in community-based initiatives that linked food assistance programs with farm fresh products; and

 **WHEREAS**; through the federal Farm Bill, the federal government 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 now and 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; and

**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 LFPA, known as Jersey Fresh for All in New Jersey, awarded funds to buy food from local and socially disadvantaged farmers, with an aim to provide food for underserved communities and improve resilience of the food supply chain; and

**WHEREAS,** the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) and the Community Food Bank of New Jersey (CFBNJ) implemented the program with the goal to coordinate with other food banks and distribution organizations such as food co-ops, to ensure that locally grown New Jersey agricultural products purchased through LFPA are distributed in 21 counties; and

**WHEREAS,** The Common Market Co-op and the NJ Food Democracy Collaborative were the lead collaborators in the research, outreach, and relationship activities to our local farm producers for the two-year program, which is now ongoing with an extension of federal funds (LFPA+); and

**WHEREAS,** these value chains included farmers, food hubs, processors, cooperatives and community-based organizations working together while paying farmers fair market prices for their products; 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**, the LFPA program prioritized serving specific populations, specifically, low income, underserved populations, immigrant/refugee populations, seniors, families and children, rural and limited fresh food access communities serviced by food pantries and other local food distribution sites while addressing diet-related disease incidence and culturally relevant foods; and

**WHEREAS**, the LFPA program centered and prioritized market-readiness and farm business sustainability for “socially-disadvantaged producers,” defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for LFPA as, “a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.”; and

**WHEREAS,** the LFPA program benefited farmers by providing additional income, resulting in important stability and in some cases survival of our local farmers that participated in the program by purchasing an agreed-upon portion or all of their production; and

**WHEREAS**, a thorough evaluation of LFPA in New Jersey was completed in November 2024 that focused on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data about the program’s impact, and made recommendations for LFPA+ for how to sustain a long-term farm-to-food-assistance program in New Jersey, completed by the NJ Food Democracy Collaborative; and

**WHEREAS,** greater food supply chain innovation and equity are still necessary to support economic development through regional food systems by supporting entrepreneurial activities for small- and mid-sized farms to access appropriate storage, processing, and food-system infrastructure, which will enhance a strong network of farmers, connecting more relationships, as local suppliers with associated institutions and nonprofits while negotiating and paying better prices, concurrent with working with them to grow more diverse and specific products; and

**WHEREAS**, in recent years, there also has been significant growth in support for local food purchasing incentives, and increasing the purchasing power of lower-income communities to support the agricultural sector, with more than a dozen states, including New Jersey, having established programs (e.g., Garden State Good Food Bucks) that provide direct reimbursement to child nutrition programs in schools and early-care settings to offset the cost of buying local foods; 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 NJDA needs to expand the eligibility of participants in the LFPA program beyond those that participate in the Feeding America Program (TFAP) to ensure more equitable participation of smaller nonprofits; and

**WHEREAS,** greater technical assistance is needed through a state appropriation to increase and create a more flexible funding stream and long-term funding for farm to anchor institution (e.g., schools, food banks); and

**WHEREAS,** the focus and objective of the LFPA and LFPA+ program must be that the purchasing come from historically-marginalized, emerging/beginning New Jersey producers; and

**WHEREAS,** a Farm to Food Assistance Advisory Council should be created to increase the transparency and fairness of the LFPA program, and help reach even more local farmers, with the potential soon to have 200-plus farmers participating in the LFPA program; and

**WHEREAS**, recent discussion at New Jersey State Board of Agriculture meetings regarding the LFPA grants has inspired some in the industry to ask for the State Board Grants Committee to monitor this funding instead of creating a new “Farm to Food Assistance Advisory Council” for that purpose.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that we, the delegates to the 110th State Agriculture Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 5-6, 2025, do hereby recommend to the State Legislature work with the NJDA to determine more expansion of this vital purchasing through the LFPA program from our local famers concurrent with adequate state 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 and better tax credits to local small- and medium-scale farm operations of all types for food donations; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the marketing opportunities with the many entities, organizations, agencies and collaborations 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.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the State Board members to decide whether they prefer to have the Board’s Grants Committee monitor LFPA spending or to have a new “Farm to Food Assistance Advisory Council” created for that purpose.