

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 124

BY SENATOR MCMATH

A RESOLUTION

To express Louisiana's support for farmers, specifically farmers growing specialty crops, in light of ongoing market fluctuations, staffing changes, and funding cuts to state and local departments at the federal level.

WHEREAS, the Louisiana agricultural community is a vital part of the state's economy, providing food, jobs, and resources that are essential to the livelihoods of thousands of farmers and families; and

WHEREAS, according to Louisiana State University, the agricultural sector contributes nearly twenty-six billion dollars to the state's economy; and

WHEREAS, specialty crops, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to include fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops, are essential to the health and well-being of Louisianians and are a vital economic driver in the state, but market stabilization programs are less likely to support specialty crop producers who grow these important crops such as strawberries, sweet potatoes, figs, pecans, tomatoes, mirliton, and okra; and

WHEREAS, in early 2025 the USDA halted over one billion dollars in federal funding for programs that help schools and food banks purchase food from local farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producers, making it difficult for food banks and schools to afford Louisiana-grown produce for local families and schoolchildren; and

WHEREAS, the USDA's Local Food for Schools and Local Food Purchase Assistance programs, operating from 2022 to 2024, allowed schools and food banks to buy food from local growers, ensuring that Louisiana's children and families received locally-sourced, minimally-processed vegetables, fruits, and meats; and

WHEREAS, the cancellation of these programs will result in the loss of approximately six million three hundred eighty thousand dollars in funding for food banks

and eleven million seven hundred thousand dollars in funding for schools and childcare centers in Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, the USDA's Local Food Purchase Assistance agreement, along with its expansion (LFPA Plus), allocated about ten million six hundred thousand dollars for food purchases through a partnership between the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) and food banks, allowing LDAF to purchase fresh produce, meats, seafood, and rice from local growers; and

WHEREAS, this partnership was expected to impact two hundred thousand people across Louisiana and facilitate the purchase of four million five hundred thousand pounds of local food over the three-year grant period; and

WHEREAS, without these federal programs, food banks will be forced to purchase more food from out-of-state vendors, reducing their ability to serve local populations, and the loss of USDA funding will cost Louisiana farmers millions in sales and exacerbate food insecurity in the state, especially among low-income families and schoolchildren who benefit from these programs; and

WHEREAS, these programs have been instrumental in helping local farmers establish contracts with institutional buyers, expand market reach, and increase financial stability, while also providing fresh, nutritious, and locally grown food for Louisiana's institutions and invest in on farm processing for value-added products; and

WHEREAS, the cancellation of federal support for these programs has put additional pressure on Louisiana's agricultural community, particularly small and medium-sized producers, who rely on institutional relationships to stay competitive in an increasingly challenging market; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana recognizes the economic and cultural importance of local food markets, including farmers' markets, roadside stands, and institutional buyers such as food banks, schools, and hospitals, as essential fresh food purchasers; and

WHEREAS, when Louisiana's schools, universities, hospitals, and other institutions purchase from local farmers and food producers, it strengthens the state's food system, builds resilience, and offers educational opportunities about the importance of local agriculture and food sustainability; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana has the opportunity to continue supporting its farmers in the face of federal cuts by creating and expanding state-level initiatives and funding mechanisms that prioritize farm-to-institution purchasing and strengthen local food systems; and by allocating funds for programs that enhance the stability and vitality of local food markets, supporting local farmers, and reducing food insecurity across the state.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express support for farmers in light of ongoing market fluctuations, staffing changes, and funding cuts to state and local departments at the federal level.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE