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NASDA Member Russell Redding advocates for local agriculture and nutrition security before Senate Ag Subcommittee

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Sept. 18, Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding testified before the U.S. Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research on behalf of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture. His testimony emphasized the critical role of school meal programs in supporting U.S. agriculture, enhancing nutrition security and strengthening local and regional food systems for improved supply chain resilience.

"Across all states, a key focus – in full collaboration with our federal partners – has been on reinforcing the supply chain and creating resiliency at every level," Redding said. "Strengthening our local and regional food systems and expanding processing capacity for Pennsylvania farmers and agribusinesses has been crucial to our agriculture and nutrition security."

He praised recent USDA initiatives promoting local sourcing in school food procurement, highlighting their potential to drive economic growth while improving nutritional outcomes for students.

"I also want to commend the USDA's rule for its strong emphasis on 'local' foods and a reduction in non-domestic purchases," Redding said. "While this may result in some limitations on the varieties of foods that schools can serve, it will provide greater opportunities for U.S. companies to tailor their product lines for school settings and encourage greater connections between the school cafeteria and local farmers. Adding provisions to allow local sourcing in school food contracting procurement will send a strong signal to the marketplace, giving farmers and agribusinesses greater opportunities to make direct and consistent connections with schools."

Redding also spotlighted Pennsylvania's leadership in USDA commodity food purchases, particularly the National School Lunch Program. He stressed the importance of expanding opportunities for U.S.-grown foods and specialty crops in school meals, noting the benefits to both students and producers.

"Enhancing local sourcing and supporting regional food systems can maximize federal investments and reduce food waste," Redding said.

Redding called for greater USDA regulatory flexibility to address the challenges faced by school districts and supply chains, particularly related to infrastructure, logistics and administrative burdens. He advocated for bolstered support for initiatives such as the Farm to School Grant Program and Local Food Purchase Assistance, which can help strengthen local food procurement and support successful introductions of new foods into school meal settings.

"As we approach the upcoming Farm Bill, it's imperative that federal policies prioritize supply chain resilience, nutrition security and waste reduction," Redding said. "NASDA is eager to collaborate with the committee and our partners to ensure the continued success of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs."

NASDA remains committed to advancing policies that support local agriculture and strengthen the nation's food system.



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NASDA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit association which represents the elected and appointed commissioners, secretaries and directors of the departments of agriculture in all 50 states and four U.S. territories. NASDA enhances American food and agricultural communities through policy, partnerships and public engagement. To learn more about NASDA, please visit www.nasda.org.



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