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Resolve, Directing the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources To Convene a Work Group To Strengthen Farm-to-school Efforts in the State

Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, farm-to-school initiatives are effective and innovative approaches to help youth eat healthier and more nutritious foods, improve academic performance, introduce learning opportunities with regard to food production and preparation and provide hands-on experiential education; and

Whereas, farm-to-school initiatives help preserve working farmland, invigorate local economies, rebuild and revitalize communities, promote environmental stewardship and realize the goals of the State's food policy; and

Whereas, the State's public schools are tax-supported and the purchase by schools of local products strengthens the local tax base; and

Whereas, this legislation establishes a process to review and strengthen farm-to-school initiatives throughout the State; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1 Convene work group. Resolved: That the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources, referred to in this resolve as "the departments," shall convene a work group to study farm-to-school initiatives and programs in the State and develop recommendations for strengthening farm-to-school efforts in the State; and be it further

Sec. 2 Participants. Resolved: That, in conducting the review and developing recommendations, the departments shall invite the participation of the following agencies, groups and organizations:

1. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension;
2. The Maine School Food Service Association;
3. The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association;
4. The Maine Center for Public Health;
5. The Maine Nutrition Network;
6. The Maine Agriculture in the Classroom Program Association;
7. The Healthy Maine Partnerships;

8. Healthy Oxford Hills;
9. Focus on Agriculture in Rural Maine Schools;
10. Maine Harvest Lunch Program;
11. Western Mountains Alliance;
12. Maine agricultural commodity groups; and
13. Other statewide organizations involved in supporting Maine agriculture, public health, the environment and the Maine economy; and be it further

Sec. 3 Duties. Resolved: That the departments, with input from and in consultation with the participants set forth in section 2, shall:

1. Assess the status of regional and statewide farm-to-school efforts throughout the State, including policies, practices and curricula;
2. Review the existing capacities of and barriers to facilitating the purchase and use of local products;
3. Review the status of networking channels that connect farm-to-school efforts throughout the State;
4. Review best practices and evaluate methods from other farm-to-school programs outside the State;
and
5. Prepare recommendations for strengthening farm-to-school initiatives and programs within the State; and be it further

Sec. 4 Report. Resolved: That the departments shall submit a report on the study conducted pursuant to section 1 to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services by February 1, 2010.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.