Good afternoon, Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and esteemed members of this Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the importance of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), and how they serve as foundational pillars in the health, well-being, and education of millions of American students.

I am Kay Rentzel and serve as Executive Director for multiple agriculture and food processing industry associations; I work with the National Peach Council, US Sweet Potato Council, American Sweet Potato Marketing Institute, Southeastern Food Processors Association and the National Clean Plant Network – Sweetpotatoes. Each association has a consistent, meaningful and strong voice on nutrition and health, regulations and policy impacting agriculture. Their members take tremendous pride in feeding America and providing the world with the healthiest, safest food source available.

Additionally, I serve as Chair of the USDA Fruit & Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee, on relevancy review panels for the US Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food & Agriculture, and various National Stakeholder Advisory Committees which direct research and resources to areas that will improve the quality of food produced and available to consumers around the world. Previously, I served on the Agricultural Trade Advisory Committee (ATAC) for fruits and vegetables and in various marketing and sales positions in the nation's apple industry.

The federal school lunch and breakfast programs are crucial to ensuring that our children—many of whom come from food-insecure households—have access to the nutrition they need to focus, learn, and grow. After improving most of the past decade, the nation's share of children in food-insecure households took a sharp turn in the wrong direction in 2022. This statistic increased from 13% of all kids in 2021 to 19% of all kids in 2022, according to the USDA. The difference equates to 4.1 million more children in the United States facing food insecurity in 2022.[1]

But these programs go beyond simply feeding students; they instill lifelong habits around healthy eating, support local economies, and ensure nutrition is equitable across socioeconomic lines.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss two topics today: the importance of our children eating more fruits and vegetables in all forms, as well as the importance of Buying American options for these essential foods whenever possible. Schools are on the front lines of delivering these meals and face complex logistical challenges in doing so. Managing compliance with federal regulations, such as nutrition standards and the "Buy American" provision, is critical. Schools must balance the need to provide healthy, nutritious meals with budget constraints, meal timing, and student preferences.

[1] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. "Household Food Security in the United States in 2021." *Economic Research Report No. 325*, 2022. https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/107703/err-325.pdf?v=2841.6

Americans continue to fall far short of meeting recommended intake levels of produce.[2] All federal feeding programs should promote greater consumption of these important foods. Feeding programs intended to increase produce consumption should promote all forms of produce – fresh, frozen, dried, and canned. This will help all consumers, including our students, meet recommendations from the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans for fruit and vegetable intake.

Students interact with these programs not only by receiving meals but also by learning about food systems, agriculture, and nutrition. It is essential that children understand where their food comes from.

Through American innovation, domestic growers and manufacturers have made nutritious foods—such as canned and frozen fruits and vegetables—available year-round. These products are picked at peak ripeness and processed within hours, locking in their nutritional value. For example, a typical green bean is harvested at peak ripeness, transported to a processing facility within 90 miles of the farm, blanched, and canned—all within five hours. This process ensures freshness and safety without the risk of spoilage or food-borne illnesses that fresh produce might face when improperly handled or transported long distances. Additionally, it's a common misconception that high quantities of sodium is added for preservation—any salt content is strictly for taste, and all products served in schools adhere to strict nutrition standards established by the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act.

Whenever possible, we should prioritize purchasing the safest and most nutritious options for students. American-grown fruits and vegetables—in all their forms—offer an excellent solution. While preferential fresh produce programs may be aspirational policy proposals, the reality is that the American school year does not align with the growing season. It's equally important to educate students about the remarkable domestic food manufacturing sector, which forms the backbone of our agricultural economy, and emphasize the importance of consuming fruits and vegetables, whether fresh, frozen, or canned.

It is undeniable that programs favoring fresh-only fruit and vegetable options harm American farmers and inadvertently incentivize, if not subsidize, foreign food imports. This dynamic is one of the key factors behind the United States becoming a net food importer for the first time in its history in 2023.[3] We will not solve all the problems facing our agricultural trade deficit today,

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[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "COVID-19 Response Team. "COVID-19 Cases and Hospitalizations Among Medicare Beneficiaries With and Without Disabilities – United States, January 1, 2020–November 20, 2021." *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2022;71(1):12-18. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7101a1.htm

[3] U.S. Department of Agriculture. "USDA Agricultural Projections to 2032." *U.S. Department of Agriculture*, 2023. https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-Agricultural-Projections-to-2032.pdf

but there is one piece of legislation I would like to highlight that could address some critical problems.

The American Food for American Schools Act is a bipartisan, bicameral piece of legislation that strengthens the "Buy American" provision within the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which ensures that the fruits, vegetables, and other food products served to our children are domestically sourced. This not only supports American farmers and manufacturers but also guarantees the food our students consume meets the highest standards of safety and quality. Imported Chinese foods have a worrying history of high-profile product recalls and scandals spanning decades. More recently, Chinese canned fruit and vegetable imports saw a 43 percent increase between 2019 and 2022.[4]

The California Cling Peach Association became one of the loudest champions for stronger Buy American provisions after a local paper, The Sacramento Bee, investigated why their school district was receiving Chinese imports for students despite peach canneries being in the same town. Further reviews have found that at least twenty-six states, including Georgia our peach state, import Chinese canned peaches for school cafeterias. Outside of peaches, another USDA report has found that some 80% of apple juice served in public schools was made from apples sourced outside the U.S.[5]

The American Food for American Schools Act offers a robust solution by establishing clear, enforceable guidelines for the NSLP's Buy American mandate. The bill would close Buy American compliance loopholes by instituting a 95% domestic sourcing requirement and ensure any waivers for foreign products are rigorously reviewed by the USDA.

Schools would also be required to notify parents when foreign-sourced food is served, increasing transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, by requiring that the USDA publish waiver information and foreign product purchases online, this bill creates an open market for domestic producers, allowing them to meet the needs of schools. This level of transparency not only holds suppliers accountable but also opens new opportunities for American farmers to compete.

Finally, the bill would subject other USDA school feeding programs (after-school snacks, summer food service, child and adult care food, special milk, and school breakfast) to the Buy American requirement, which currently only applies to the NSLP.

I stand with the farmers, food manufacturers, and labor unions like the Teamsters who support this bill, and I thank Senators Braun and Brown for their leadership on this critical issue.

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[4] Trading Economics. "United States Imports from China." *Trading Economics*, 2024. https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/imports/china

[5] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service. "Fruit and Tree Nuts: World Markets and Trade." *USDA*, 2023. http://www.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/fruit.pdf

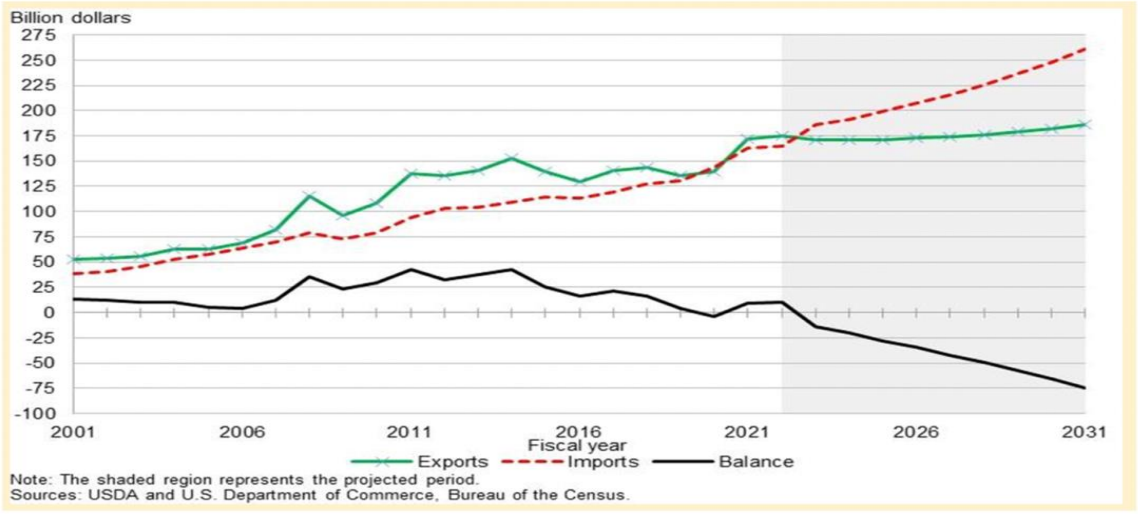
Strengthening the "Buy American" provisions ensures the food our children eat is not only safe and nutritious but also supports the backbone of the American agricultural economy. This bill represents a win for our schools, our students, and our farmers.

In conclusion, there is no safer source of quality nutrition than the food produced right here in America. By buying American food for American schools, we are not only supporting our nation's children but also safeguarding the livelihoods of the families who grow, harvest, and process our food. Strengthening programs like the NSLP and SBP and reinforcing the Buy American requirements mean everyone wins—the students, our communities, and the agricultural families who work tirelessly to feed us all.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Additional Materials

The United States became a net food importer in 2023



Note: The shaded region represents the projected period.
Sources: USDA and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Import Data – Sweet Corn

VOLUME - Sweet Corn US Imports by Destination and Volume (1,000 pounds)

2023 Information considers Jan 1 2023 through Oct 31 2023

Ranking based on prior 4 annual market year* totals				2018	2019	2020	2021	2022		Jan 1 2023 - Oct 31 2023
Prepared or preserved	Aprox Avg Share (2019-2022)	Avg Vol (2019-2022)	Vol 2019-2022: Jan-Dec	2018	2019	2020	**2021**	**2022**	**Jan 1 2022 - Oct 31 2022**	**Jan 1 2023 - Oct 31 2023**
Thailand	**60.7%**	35,771		19,983	23,707	26,938	**47,540**	**44,898**	**34,182**	**49,223**
China	**24.9%**	14,707		2,013	1,559	12,652	**8,968**	**35,650**	**27,384**	**10,854**
Brazil	4.3%	2,552		10	30	50	6,367	3,762	2,924	2,650
Canada	4.1%	2,418		2,572	1,545	2,471	2,945	2,712	1,940	3,077
Vietnam	3.3%	1,947		2,856	1,766	1,673	2,840	1,507	1,389	1,958
Other Countries	3%	1,577		561	315	1,536	3,568	889	663	1,583
Prepared or preserved total		**58,972**	19 20 21 22	27,975	28,922	45,320	**72,228**	**89,418**	**68,482**	**69,345**

Due to rounding, country data less than 500 pounds are displayed as 0. Merchandise entering the United States for consumption.

Import Data – Green Beans

VOLUME - SNAP BEANS US Imports by Destination and Volume (1,000 pounds) 2023 Information considers Jan 1 2023 through Oct 31 2023

Ranking based on prior 4 annual market year* totals				2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Jan 1 2023 - Oct 31 2023	
Prepared or preserved	Aprox Avg Share (2019-2022)	Avg Vol (2019-2022)	Vol 2019-2022: Jan-Dec	2018	2019	2020	**2021**	**2022**	**Jan 1 2022 - Oct 31 2022**	**Jan 1 2023 - Oct 31 2023**
Canada	**26.1%**	**13,766**		16,347	14,778	15,515	**12,470**	**12,302**	**10,676**	**6,084**
Mexico	**13.5%**	**7,124**		1,730	5,349	6,293	**6,877**	**9,978**	**8,549**	**11,208**
Egypt	**9.9%**	5,248		604	678	3,573	**13,407**	**3,332**	**2,795**	**3,226**
France	**7.0%**	3,685		72	46	138	**6,289**	**8,265**	**4,555**	**2,342**
Spain	5.4%	2,829		13	224	2,736	3,190	5,165	3,880	5,184
Other Countries	38.1%	20,117		16,734	17,556	19,690	22,690	20,532	18,013	16,374
Prepared or preserved total		**52,769**	19 20 21 22	35,500	38,631	47,945	**64,923**	**59,574**	**48,468**	**44,418**

Due to rounding, country data less than 500 pounds are displayed as 0. Merchandise entering the United States for consumption.

SWEET CORN

Frozen $1.66 per pound

Nutrition Facts
1 Serving Per Container
Serving Size 125g
Amount Per Serving
Calories 80

	% Daily Value *
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrates 20g	7%
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Total Sugars 3g	0%
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 0mg	0%
Iron 0.6mg	4%
Potassium 240mg	6%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Fresh $1.89 per pound

Nutrition Facts
1 Serving Per Container
Serving Size 125g
Amount Per Serving
Calories 130

	% Daily Value *
Total Fat 3.5g	5%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrates 25g	9%
Dietary Fiber 3g	10%
Total Sugars 7g	0%
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 6g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 0mg	0%
Iron 0mg	0%
Potassium 0mg	0%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Canned $1.02 per pound

Nutrition Facts
1 Serving Per Container
Serving Size 125g
Amount Per Serving
Calories 70

	% Daily Value *
Total Fat 1g	1%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 10mg	0%
Total Carbohydrates 12g	4%
Dietary Fiber 2g	7%
Total Sugars 5g	0%
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 2g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 0mg	0%
Iron 0.3mg	2%
Potassium 180mg	4%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

GREEN BEANS

Frozen $1.94 per pound

Nutrition Facts
1 Serving Per Container
Serving Size 125g
Amount Per Serving
Calories 80

	% Daily Value *
Total Fat 7g	8%
Saturated Fat 2g	11%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 35mg	2%
Total Carbohydrates 2g	1%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Total Sugars 0g	0%
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 0g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 0mg	0%
Iron 0mg	0%
Potassium 0mg	0%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Fresh $2.1 per pound

Nutrition Facts
1 Serving Per Container
Serving Size 125g
Amount Per Serving
Calories 40

	% Daily Value *
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 5mg	0%
Total Carbohydrates 9g	3%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Total Sugars 4g	0%
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 2g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 50mg	4%
Iron 1.2mg	6%
Potassium 260mg	6%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Canned $1.01 per pound

Nutrition Facts
1 Serving Per Container
Serving Size 125g
Amount Per Serving
Calories 15

	% Daily Value *
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 15mg	0%
Total Carbohydrates 3g	1%
Dietary Fiber 1g	4%
Total Sugars 0g	0%
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 1g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 30mg	2%
Iron 0.7mg	4%
Potassium 60mg	2%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.


REGAL
Peach
Slices
IN LIGHT SYRUP
NET WT. 6 LBS. 10 OZ. (106 OZ.)


Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1/2 cup (124g)
Servings Per Container about 24
Amount Per Serving
Calories 50
Calories from Fat 0
% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g 0%
Saturated Fat 0g 0%
Trans Fat 0g
Cholesterol 0mg 0%
Sodium 5mg 0%
Total Carbohydrate 12g 4%
Dietary Fiber 0g 0%
Sugars 10g
Protein 0g
Vitamin A 6% • Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 0% • Iron 0%
INGREDIENTS: YELLOW PEACHES, WATER, SUGAR.
REGAL
DISTRIBUTED BY
REGAL FOODS
Lancaster, PA 17602
999775825
PRODUCT OF CHINA