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“American Food for American Schools Act” Introduced in U.S. Senate

**S. 2641 Would Insure U.S. Taxpayer Money Spent on U.S. Ag Products for the
National School Lunch and Breakfast Program**

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (April 16, 2018) – The use of taxpayer money by local school districts to purchase foreign-produced foods imported for use in the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs has long been a sore point for California farmers, taxpayers and elected officials. It is especially painful when tax money is used to purchase food products from foreign countries for school lunches when many specialty crops grown in California are being hit with a 15% tariff on sales to China.

“I applaud the introduction of S. 2641 to strengthen the enforcement of the “Buy American” requirement for school lunches,” said Rich Hudgins, President and CEO of the California Canning Peach Association. He added, “The fact that U.S. tax dollars are being spent overseas to benefit foreign farmers rather than spent to support our county’s farmers, ranchers, ag workers and their families must end. The California Canning Peach Association is proud to join the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the California Farm Bureau Federation, the U.S. Apple Association, and the Agricultural Council of California along with food companies and growers from coast to coast participating in this “Buy American” coalition seeking to bring back common sense and correct a terrible wrong.”

The intent of the National School Lunch and Breakfast program is to provide nutritionally-balanced, low cost or free lunches and breakfasts to children throughout the school year. According to the latest statistics, schools participating in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs receive nearly \$8 billion annually in food products purchased with U.S. tax dollars. This includes more than \$1 billion in food products purchased directly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and more than \$6.8 billion of U.S. tax dollars spent by school districts. Food purchased directly by USDA for school feeding programs is required to be 100 percent American-sourced.

The Buy American requirement for direct school food purchases has been a part of federal law since 1988. Yet, under current USDA regulations, individual school districts can bypass the existing Buy American requirement and purchase imported food products from anywhere in

the world if they believe there is a significant cost differential between domestic and imported food products.

“In recent years, we have discovered that some school districts have chosen to spend tax dollars on imported food and beverage products when American grown food items are not only available but grown literally just down the street. When school districts bypass the requirements it clearly hurts our farmers and taxpayers while not providing our students with the safest food possible,” added Hudgins.

According to an audit conducted last summer by the California State Auditor, California, home to the nation's largest agricultural economy and second largest school district (Los Angeles), had done little to ensure its schools follow federal rules requiring the serving of American grown food. The auditors found that every California school district they examined was not in compliance with the Buy American provision for school food purchases. The school audit was prepared at the request of state lawmakers, who took an interest in school food after it was discovered that local schools were increasingly turning to foreign suppliers.

Now as a possible trade war looms that may severely harm many of California's specialty crops, the idea of U.S. taxpayer money being used to purchase foreign food products for the national school lunch program instead of American grown food is adding insult to injury.

“We commend Senators Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) and Maria Cantwell (D-Washington) for introducing this important legislation and look forward to working with them and their Senate colleagues to resolve this issue as part of the next Farm Bill,” said Hudgins.

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