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HOUSE BILL NO. 859

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 13, 2026

A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-23.4 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Department of Education; Farm to School Program Task Force; membership requirements; report.

Patron—Cousins

Committee Referral Pending

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 22.1-23.4 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 22.1-23.4. Department; Farm to School Program Task Force.**

A. As used in this section, "farm to school program" means any program (i) whereby public schools purchase and feature prominently in school meals locally produced food or (ii) that involves experiential student learning opportunities relating to local food and agriculture, including school and community garden programs and local farm visits.

B. The Department shall establish ~~and appoint such members as it deems necessary or appropriate~~ to the Farm to School Program Task Force (the Task Force) for the purpose of increasing student access to high-quality farm to school programs throughout the Commonwealth. *The Task Force shall consist of (i) one member of the Senate, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules after consideration of the recommendation of the Chair of the Senate Committee on Education and Health; (ii) one member of the House of Delegates, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates after consideration of the recommendation of the Chair of the House Committee on Education; and (iii) at least four members to be appointed by the Department, of whom at least (a) one shall be a member of a school board, (b) one shall be a representative of the Department of General Services who is involved in procurement, (c) one shall be a representative of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and (d) one shall be a farmer or producer in the Commonwealth who sells only the farm or agricultural products produced or grown by him.*

C. The Task Force shall collaborate with local school boards, community-based organizations, farmers, relevant state and local agencies, and other relevant stakeholders to (i) assess existing farm to school programs within the Commonwealth to identify and disseminate to each local school board best practices for implementing and sustaining such programs, (ii) establish and distribute to each local school board a guidance document for the establishment and operation of school garden programs, (iii) provide information and resources to each local school board to assist it in leveraging grant funds to support farm to school programs, and (iv) collect such data and make such policy recommendations to local school boards, the Board, and the General Assembly as it deems appropriate.

2. That the Farm to School Program Task Force (the Task Force) established pursuant to § 22.1-23.4 of the Code of Virginia, as amended by this act, shall study and submit to the Virginia Commission to End Hunger by November 1, 2026, a report on supporting, expanding, and improving farm to school programs in the Commonwealth that shall include (i) a summary of the Task Force's work in assessing existing farm to school programs within the Commonwealth and developing and providing to each school board (a) best practices for implementing and sustaining farm to school programs, (b) a guidance document on the establishment and operation of school garden programs, and (c) informational materials and resources to assist school boards in leveraging grant funds to support farm to school programs; (ii) data collected on and policy recommendations relating to farm to school programs; (iii) identified impacts of federal programming and budgetary changes, including to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Local Food for Schools Program, on the Commonwealth's farm to school programs; (iv) identified barriers to accessing and implementing farm to school programs faced by school boards, community-based organizations, farmers, relevant state and local agencies, and other relevant stakeholders in the Commonwealth; and (v) recommendations to the General Assembly on regulations, programming, or legislative changes that the Task Force deems necessary to increase student access to high-quality farm to school programs through the Commonwealth.

INTRODUCED

HB859