# Virginia Department of Education Logo NEWS RELEASE

**Jillian Balow | Superintendent of Public Instruction**

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**VDOE Connects Schools to Virginia Food**

**Through Pilot Procurement Program**

RICHMOND — The Virginia Department of Education is partnering with regional food hubs to deliver nearly $2.2 million worth of locally produced and grown food products to school nutrition programs in the commonwealth. The Centralized Local Procurement Pilot Program — funded by a U.S. Department of Agriculture Supply Chain Assistance grant — is designed to help school nutrition programs avoid supply chain disruptions and strengthen regional food systems.

“Schools with close relationships with Virginia farmers and producers are experiencing fewer supply chain disruptions, and their students are benefiting from nutritious meals made with fresh local foods,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow said.

In partnership with regional food hubs, VDOE has identified more than 70 school divisions as eligible to participate in the pilot based on their proximity to a regional hub, such as 4P Foods in Warrenton and Appalachian Sustainable Development in Duffield. The department will help participating divisions establish procurement relationships with the hubs, allowing school nutrition programs to order unprocessed and minimally processed seasonal products, and serve the food in their lunch, breakfast and summer meals programs.

“School nutrition professionals across the commonwealth have worked tirelessly during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep students connected to the healthy, nutritious meals they need to thrive and learn,” VDOE School Nutrition Director Sandra Curwood said. “The department is excited to help school divisions overcome their current supply chain challenges through this innovative pilot program.”

The Virginia Department of Education received $21.9 million in USDA Supply Chain Assistance funds and withheld 10 percent of the award to support the Centralized Local Procurement Pilot Program. The remaining funds will be dispersed directly to school divisions for the purchase of unprocessed and minimally processed food for use in school meals programs.

The Centralized Local Procurement Pilot Program will get underway later this month as the initial list of participating school divisions is finalized and continue through the 2022-2023 school year.

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