



March 6, 2026

The Honorable Monique Limón  
 Senate President pro Tempore  
 1021 O Street, Suite 8518  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable John Laird  
 Chair, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee  
 1021 O Street, Suite 8720  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Sasha Renée Pérez  
 Chair, Senate Education Committee  
 1021 O Street, Suite 6720  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Budget Request for \$25 Million Investment in K–12 School Garden-Based Nutrition and Science Education through the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Farm to School Program**

Dear Senate Budget Leadership:

We respectfully request a one-time allocation of **\$25 million** to the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Office of Farm to Fork, Farm to School Program, for standards-aligned K–12 garden-based nutrition, science, and Career Technical Education. This investment would reach approximately [500,000 students](#) at a cost of roughly [\\$50 per student](#), representing less than [0.44%](#) (less than half of a percent) of the state's per-pupil allocation. We urge the Legislature to include this funding as a Proposition 98 education expenditure or as a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Discretionary allocation in the 2026–27 budget, with funding effective immediately to prevent further program losses.

**An Urgent Gap in Nutrition and Garden Education.** California faces the devastating loss of approximately [\\$132 million annually](#) in federal SNAP-Ed nutrition education funding (CalFresh Healthy Living), [eliminated by House Resolution 1](#), removing the primary source of nutrition education in schools statewide. The state's 2026-27 projected funding for the Farm to School program totals \$20,000,000, which represents ongoing funding at the same levels as allocated in the 2025 state budget. Among the K-12 Farm to School Grantees last year, 73% have built or expanded a total of 353 school gardens and 68% have provided some hands-on food, gardening, or farming education as part of school curriculum. This budget request would infuse additional funding into the successful Farm to School grant program to ensure that up to 500,000 more students have access to high-quality school garden-based education utilizing existing or new school gardens as outdoor classrooms. Although 50% of California schools have garden infrastructure, only [approximately 9%](#) use these gardens for ongoing learning programs for students. Without action, this gap will widen, and the communities with the least access to high-quality nutrition education will be those most affected. Currently, [72%](#) of school garden programs are concentrated in wealthier districts that rely on private fundraising, leaving low-income communities without equitable access to this proven educational model.

**A Cost-Effective Solution Using Existing Infrastructure.** This request builds on California's previous [\\$15 million investment](#) in school garden infrastructure via the Instructional School Garden Program by activating those gardens for standards-aligned instruction, not building new programs from scratch. Proposition 98 funding is appropriate for this purpose: garden-based instruction qualifies as K–12 education spending, including Career Technical Education, and the Farm to School program has received Prop 98 funding previously, establishing precedent. The Governor's proposed 2026–27 budget estimates a significant increase in the Proposition 98 guarantee to \$125.5 billion, reflecting revised revenue projections. The loss of federal SNAP-Ed nutrition education funding has created an education deficit that Prop 98 is designed to address.

**Legislative Precedent and Broad Coalition Support.** The Senate Agriculture Committee is introducing a committee bill to formally direct the currently unused, unfunded [Instructional School Garden Program](#) to the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Office of Farm to Fork, aligning it with the state's existing, funded Farm to School Programs that include garden-based nutrition education, and eliminating duplicative code. [SB 341](#) (Pérez, 2025), which would have reestablished and moved the Instructional School Garden Program to the Department of Food and Agriculture, received the backing of more than [135 organizations](#) and

five bipartisan co-authors, and passed both the Senate Agriculture and Education Committees unanimously. The 70-member California School Garden Coalition includes school districts, environmental education organizations, public health advocates, and agricultural stakeholders united behind this investment.

**Proven Results for Students and Communities.** Research consistently demonstrates that school garden education delivers measurable outcomes across multiple state priorities. Students participating in garden-based instruction eat [three times more fruits and vegetables](#), directly addressing childhood nutrition and health equity. Garden programs [increase science achievement scores and student engagement](#) while [reducing stress and anxiety](#) and building resilience. Students participating in experiential education programs focused on climate solutions make choices that result in a [30% smaller carbon footprint](#), and [research shows](#) scaled environmental literacy programs can reduce carbon emissions on par with rooftop solar or electric vehicles. These programs also create green career pathways and agricultural workforce readiness, supporting California’s economic future. Research strongly indicates that school garden education programs have significant positive impacts on both [school attendance](#) and parent enrollment decisions, both of which are key drivers of school district income in an era of declining public school enrollment.

This investment advances California’s commitments to climate action, health equity, environmental literacy, and agricultural workforce development through a single, proven, cost-effective program. We respectfully urge the Legislature to include this \$25 million allocation in the 2026–27 budget.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued leadership on behalf of California’s students.

Sincerely,

The [California School Garden Coalition](#) & Friends

**Sponsor Organizations:**

***The CA School Garden Leadership Team***



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**Organizations:**

*The CA School Garden Leadership Team (listed above) has the authorization to sign this letter of support on behalf of the following organizations.*

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**Individuals:**

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Kat Romo, School Garden/Living Schoolyard Program Manager

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