

CONTACT:

Jonathan Bash

Brown·Miller Communications
jonathan@brownmillerpr.com

Hannah Love

Center for Ecoliteracy
(510) 295-8092 | hannah@ecoliteracy.org



CENTER FOR
ECOLITERACY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

California Kids Receive Essential Funding for Safe School Meals During Pandemic in State's Final Budget

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., JUNE 29, 2020 ... Recognizing the critical role of school meals to children's well-being, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, California's legislative leaders and Governor Newsom have just passed a final budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year. It includes a \$112 million allocation for California school districts providing free school meals during the pandemic, and another \$10 million in funding for the Farm to School program and the Office of Farm to Fork.

"Governor Newsom, Speaker Anthony Rendon (D-Lakewood), Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins (D-San Diego) and other state leaders have shown insightful leadership throughout this pandemic. This allocation to school food services is evidence of their principled focus on one of the state's highest priorities: protecting kids from hunger," says **Adam Kesselman**, executive director of the Center for Ecoliteracy, a nonprofit dedicated to education for sustainable living in K-12 schools.

According to Kesselman, school sites are effective, trusted and accessible hubs for free meals to school-age children. But the pressures of this pandemic have increased the overall costs associated with school meals, significantly increasing the costs of packaging, food, labor, training and safety, at a time when demand for food aid has increased eight-fold in some communities.

"Our policymakers are demonstrating that allowing kids to go hungry is not an option, and that now more than ever, we must do all we can to preserve a California for all by investing in our most vital community institutions," said **Kat Taylor**, owner of TomKat Ranch and founder of the TomKat Ranch Educational Foundation. "Since the beginning of the pandemic, food service workers and schools across our state have stepped up to distribute meals, risking personal health and fiscal solvency to support struggling children and families. We are grateful to the Governor and Legislature for their leadership through the budget to help us meet this moment of acute need."

This \$112 million allocation will help districts cover these increased costs and ensure schools can continue to safely provide free school meals, which have become essential for many

California families. The additional funding will also help leverage millions of dollars' worth of federal reimbursements that could be lost if school nutrition programs serve fewer students or stop meal service.

Another \$10 million dedicated to the Farm to School program will ensure schools continue to serve and source local produce. These funds will have a significant multiplier effect, helping agricultural producers and struggling local economies recover from the pandemic.

This budget season, a diverse coalition of organizations, including the California School Employees Association, the Center for Ecoliteracy, Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, NextGen California, No Kid Hungry and the Office of Kat Taylor, as well as school districts and leaders from dozens of organizations in agriculture, education and public health rallied to advocate for a stronger COVID-19 budget response to ensure resilient funding for school meal sites.

Kesselman said, "This year's budget is an important first step in acknowledging the increased costs school districts have faced due to campus closures. However, this renewed support for school nutrition should not end once students return to school. We must look to the Governor and state leaders to continue prioritizing school food in future budget negotiations."

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The [Center for Ecoliteracy](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to cultivating education for sustainable living. One of its key initiatives, [California Food for California Kids](#),[®] supports systems change by improving children's health, education and the state's economy while teaching students where food comes from and how it reaches the table.

About the Office of Kat Taylor

Kat Taylor is active in a variety of social enterprises, public benefit and philanthropic ventures. Concurrently, she serves as co-founder and board chair of Beneficial State Bank, a Community Development Financial Institution whose mission is to bring beneficial banking to under-resourced communities in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner. Taylor is also the owner of TomKat Ranch, a cattle ranch that uses environmentally beneficial practices and research to demonstrate, inspire, and teach the adoption of regenerative agriculture. Taylor serves and has served on many nonprofit boards, including CuriOdyssey, Ecotrust, Good Samaritan Family Resource Center, the Harvard Board of Overseers, Insight Prison Project, KQED, ProPublica and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.