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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 16, 2013

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First-ever *State of Farm to School in San Diego County Report* reveals strong local food movement in schools

Farm to school creates opportunities to enhance local school meals and economy

San Diego, CA—A flourishing farm to school movement is afoot in San Diego County, according to a report released today by Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP). The *State of Farm to School in San Diego County Report*, which surveyed San Diego County school districts on local procurement and programming practices, found that 18 districts purchase local, regional, and/or California grown products and 11 districts purchase directly from a grower. The report includes responses from 24 of San Diego County's 42 districts, representing small rural and large urban communities, 80% of all school meals and snacks served in San Diego County, and more than \$7.3 million in annual produce purchases.

"Farm to school efforts are an important part of addressing today's obesity epidemic," said Fourth District County Supervisor Ron Roberts. "Getting more local produce into our schools helps ensure county growers thrive. It also ensures that we have local production of the fresh foods that promote our children's health and academic success. The *State of Farm to School in San Diego County Report* helps advance this work across San Diego County."

Fruit and vegetable production in San Diego County was valued at \$513 million in 2012. Current studies show that purchasing locally produced items can return twice as many dollars to the local economy as conventional purchasing practices.

"Farm to School is a great boon to San Diego County growers. Directing even a small percentage of schools' produce purchases to local fruits and vegetables could offer major economic returns for local growers and our community," said Eric Larson, executive director of the San Diego Farm Bureau.

The report was conducted by the San Diego County Farm to School Taskforce, a subcommittee of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, facilitated by CHIP, in partnership with Whole Foods Market and the San Diego Hunger Coalition. The Farm to School Taskforce conducted the survey to gather critical data that could help inform and support local farm to school activities.

The report found that in addition to growing interest and activity in farm to school, numerous challenges and opportunities still exist that limit and/or create opportunities to

Core funding provided in part by:

Facilitated by:



expand farm to school. Delivery, ordering methods, volume requirements, food safety, and liability were identified as common challenges. Districts identified competitive pricing, partially processed product, and food safety assurances as important strategies for encouraging procurement of local, regional, and California-grown produce.

Other key findings include:

- 17 districts have a designated staff member who serves as a grower contact
- 7 districts have defined farm to school goals
- 7 districts provide farm to school education
- 7 districts offer garden programming
- 7 districts host grower visits, farm tours, etc.

The report provides recommendations to systematically advance farm to school practice across the county. For example, the report urges the top three produce distributors that service San Diego County school districts to standardize and accelerate farm to school practices. The report also advises school districts to join the Farm to School Taskforce, as the survey revealed statistically significant relationships between Taskforce participation and indicators of local procurement and farm to school programming. Data from the report will further be used to create individual school district profiles to help growers and distributors better understand local produce opportunities within schools.

“As a food service director, I couldn’t be more excited about this report,” said Trieste Chiquete, 2013 Farm to School Taskforce co-chair and director of child nutrition at Coronado Unified School District. “My main goal is to serve students healthy meals so they can be successful learners. Farm to school helps me achieve this goal. Our students get excited when they learn the produce on their plates is from local growers, and they can taste the freshness. The *State of Farm to School in San Diego County Report* identifies the importance of collaboration and strategies key stakeholders can adopt to make farm to school the norm, and, ultimately, improve the health of our community.”

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About Community Health Improvement Partners

Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP) is a San Diego non-profit collaboration of organizations who envision communities where everyone achieves optimal health. CHIP members include hospitals, health plans, community clinics, community-based organizations, physicians, universities, and the County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency, among others. The mission of CHIP is to assess and address priority health needs through collaboration. Together, CHIP and its partners build communities that are physically, mentally, and politically stronger.

About the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative

The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative (Initiative) is a public-private partnership with the mission of reducing and preventing childhood obesity through policy, systems, and environmental change. The Initiative is facilitated by Community Health Improvement Partners. Core funding for the Initiative is provided by the County of San Diego, First 5 Commission of San Diego County, The California Endowment, and Kaiser Permanente.

About the San Diego County Farm to School Taskforce

The San Diego County Farm to School Taskforce is a subcommittee of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative’s school and after-school domain working group in partnership with Whole Foods Market and the San Diego Hunger Coalition. The vision of the Farm to School Taskforce is that all San Diego County school children enjoy healthy foods that maximize seasonal and local products and bolster student achievement and wellness. Its membership includes school, business, and public health leaders, who actively collaborate to increase consumption of local, healthful, seasonal foods and to improve food literacy within schools. The *State of Farm to School in San Diego County Report* was funded in part by the Leichtag Foundation. For more information, visit <http://ourcommunityourkids.org> or contact senior manager JuliAnna Arnett at jarnett@sdchip.org or 858-609-7962.