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**Act No. 34 (H.79). Agriculture; education; farm-to-school; school nutrition purchasing**

**An act relating to eligibility for farm-to-school grant assistance**

This act clarifies that technical service providers are eligible for assistance from the Farm-to-School grant program. It amends the maximum grant from the Farm-to-School Program to change the maximum award from \$15,000.00 to 20 percent of the total amount of available grant money, except that the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets may award grants that exceed the cap for awards to technical service providers or to school districts that merged under one of three previous school merger acts, provided that the grant is used to expand farm-to-school programs to additional schools in a new school district.

The act requires the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to consult with the Agency of Education (AOE) to increase the purchase of foods grown in Vermont. The act specifies that, under the State school food program, it is a State goal that by the year 2022, school boards operating a school meals program shall purchase at least 20 percent of all food from local producers. The act requires school boards annually to submit to AOE an estimate of the amount of locally produced food purchased as part of a school meals program. The act sets the simplified acquisition threshold for food purchased by a school board at the federal level of \$250,000.00 instead of the current State mandated threshold of \$25,000.00.

The act also requires the Department of Taxes to review whether it can use existing tax data to maximize enrollment in State and federal assistance programs, and, if so, how to increase enrollment in reduced and free lunch programs.

Effective Date: July 1, 2019