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Gonzales Proposes Plan to Bring Fresher Foods into Local Schools

Plan will allow schools to purchase more food from local farmers

LANSING – State Representative Lee Gonzales (D-Flint Township) today introduced House Bill 5967, a bill that would make it easier for school districts to purchase food from local farmers for school lunch programs, bringing more fresh fruits and vegetables into our cafeterias and boosting the local economy.

"It's important to give our schools the ability to bring the freshest and healthiest food possible into our school cafeterias," Gonzales said. "When our children fuel up on healthy foods they are able to focus on their school work and prepare themselves for the good-paying jobs of the 21st century. This plan will help our schools provide the best possible food for our students at lunchtime."

Gonzales' plan would streamline the bidding process for school food administrators by increasing schools' small purchase threshold (SPT) for food procurement to \$100,000, up from \$19,650. The SPT is the dollar value above which competitive, formal bids must be obtained for purchases. Purchases below the SPT may be obtained through a simple informal bidding process in which schools may accept bids or quotes in writing or by phone, typically from at least three vendors.

Michigan's current SPT has proven to be a barrier for school food authorities who want to increase fresh and local food because it makes the bidding process more onerous, which often prevents schools from purchasing food from local farmers.

Purchasing locally grown food from local farmers for school meal programs – known as "farm to school" – has other benefits. It can provide schoolchildren with greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables, hands-on educational opportunities about local agriculture and food systems, expanded market opportunities for Michigan farmers and economic development opportunities.

"By implementing the higher threshold in Michigan, children will have greater access to fresh and locally grown food," Gonzales said. "This not only helps them develop healthier lifestyles and a taste for nutritious foods, but will help to expand market

opportunities for Michigan farmers and keep more dollars in our state."