California Department of Food and Agriculture June 23, 2022

Office of Farm to Fork

Farm to School Grant Review Team,

West Contract Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) enthusiastically submits our Farm to School Incubator grant proposal. We have worked with Conscious Kitchen on a yearlong pilot at a single school (536 students), on our 2021-2022 COVID response organic food box effort, and most recently in attempting to transform our school food to optimize fresh, local, and organic products. We are committed to bringing the freshest food to our students as we have seen that by using our central kitchen and intentionally shifting our supply chain, we can purchase cost effective CA grown or produced food that nourishes our students and supports our community.

Our district was surprised at the benefits we could achieve once we were purchasing organic products at large scale during the pandemic. We were able to dive in and test ourselves at a scale we might not have attempted absent the challenges and the support of the CDFA. Our positive results convinced us that we could bring the fresh, local, organic food experience back to school. Now that we have made a first round of improvements, we see a need to continue this transformation during the upcoming challenges of reduced waiver options, enrollment fluctuations, as well as the opportunities around universal meal programming. With Conscious Kitchen’s unwavering support, we have been able to identify and purchase from a host of new suppliers, advocate for ways to support the organic marketplace through a range of procurement channels, and educate students and their families on our ongoing efforts. We are taking student input through taste tests, bringing large scale events like Project Cereal to fruition which helps promote our work and advocate for change with numerous political players. In one of our most recent workings with an organic producer, Conscious Kitchen was able to help connect us to JSM where we have been purchasing organic strawberries with USDA commodity funds, seek connections to small and disadvantaged farmers that JSM works closely with in the region, and bring those delicious fruits to students. We are grateful to have Conscious Kitchen as a partner working closely together to innovate a healthier school food program.

We know that the work we are doing is engaging local growers and purveyors. We are proud to have been able to adapt our supply chain with changes that are long term and sustainable. We have been amazed at how we can improve the food quality and local sourcing and have a ripple impact on climate, health and local economies.

We appreciate your consideration of our grant application and look forward to applying the funds to step beyond our initial investigation into even more long term and lasting changes. Our overall goal is to have our district procure more organic California grown or produced products and enhance our coordination of the educational opportunities between our cafeteria, classrooms, and community.

Sincerely,

Barbara Jellison, Food Service Director - West Contra Costa Unified School District