



December 3, 2012

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture
Agriculture
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
Agriculture
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairmen Stabenow and Lucas and Ranking Members Roberts and Peterson:

As you meet to work out the differences in the Senate and House versions of the Farm Bill, we bring to your attention the two ***Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP)***: 1.) the Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Farmers Market Nutrition Program, currently authorized in the Child Nutrition Act with annual appropriations of up to \$20 million; and 2.) the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program, authorized as part of the 2002 Farm Bill, and limited to \$15 million in mandatory spending. The FMNPs are the only programs that target low-income, nutritionally at risk seniors and WIC participants with fresh fruit and vegetables while ***directly benefiting small fruit and vegetable farmers, farmers markets and communities***. **We ask that Congress combine and consolidate the two programs into one FMNP program in the Farm Bill, as well as fund the program at a combined minimum level of \$50 million.**

The FMNPs have been a cornerstone in local food system delivery for many years, alleviating the dearth of fresh food in food deserts and adding stability to the income of our small family farmers for over 20 years. They have become more important to participants and farmers throughout the recent recession. Our programs currently benefit more than 30,000 small farmers in 51 states and tribal territories. Over 2 million families received fresh fruits and vegetables through FMNPs in 2011. This in turn stimulates additional revenue within the more than 5,000 participating farmers markets, 4,000 farm stands and 150 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) groups in the programs.

Chairmen Stabenow and Lucas and Ranking Members Roberts and Peterson
December 3, 2012
Page Two

The economic downturn has also increased demand for these programs. Recent changes in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) food package to include fruits and vegetables have affected the states' administration of WIC FMNP; and the increasing acceptance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at farmers markets has highlighted the challenges of program coordination across the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

We would like to leverage the success of the **FMNPs** in directly benefiting small farmers and find ways to streamline cooperation and coordination with the other nutrition programs at farmers markets, which are administered through USDA in coordination with each state. The current FMNP structure and rules prohibit combining resources to achieve efficiencies and enable cooperative efforts amongst state agencies, which in some cases may be four or more involved in nutrition programs at farmers markets.

Merging these two successful programs is essential as well to transitioning farmers markets to be able to accept all federal nutrition benefits while helping them adapt to the new electronic benefits transfer (EBT) based programs. This consolidation and increased flexibility would also enable expanded and more effective cooperation with other groups working on farmers market issues as less time will be spent on administering two separate programs (with distinct funding streams) at the state level.

In the current iterations of the Farm Bill, the Senate made no changes to SFMNP. The House has recommended merging the two programs into one, but has not committed adequate funding. At the very minimum, we would like to encourage you to fund the FMNPs as outlined in the House version of the Farm Bill at a combined minimum of \$50 million annually, despite existing demand for additional funding. The transition of the Seniors FMNP program from the appropriations bill will also achieve savings in this time of challenging federal budgets.

The consolidated FMNP is a crucial program that helps low-income, at-risk WIC and Senior participants, farmers markets and small fruit and vegetable farmers in the Farm Bill. These dollars will be utilized to provide much needed fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income seniors and low-income families while also improve the economic outlook of small farmers through increased sales at farmers markets.

Sincerely,



Earl F. Hance
Secretary
Maryland Department
of Agriculture



Bill Northey
Secretary
Iowa Department
of Agriculture



Jeff Witte
Secretary
New Mexico Department
of Agriculture



David J. Frederickson
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Katy Coba
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