

Recommendation 7: Improve Access to Fresh Produce by More Funding for Local Marketing.

Congress should include new funding for innovative USDA grant programs that improve the health of children and seniors with farm fresh fruits and vegetables by increasing the Farmers Market Promotion Program funding to \$5 million annually and funding a new Farm-to-Cafeteria grant program with \$5 million annually. The cost of these recommendations over 10 years would be \$100 million.

Rationale for Farm-to-Cafeteria Funding: Childhood obesity rates have doubled in the last twenty years, with more than 16 percent of American children now overweight or obese and vulnerable to heart disease and other diet-related illness. Another 15 percent are considered at risk of becoming overweight. The number of young people who do not eat the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables is almost 80 percent. At the same time that children need more healthy food in their diets, small- and medium- sized farms are struggling to find profitable markets. However, with the removal of certain barriers, farmers can market their fresh foods directly to local schools. Successful Farm-to-Cafeteria projects are beginning to emerge across the country; they have demonstrated that children's eating habits dramatically improve when provided with hands-on nutrition education, farm-fresh food choices, and positive experiences in a school garden or at a local farm.

Description of Farm-to-Cafeteria: Building on these innovative successes, Section 122 of the 2004 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, "Access to Local Foods and School Gardens" removes barriers and creates a win-win situation for at-risk kids, small- and medium-sized family farmers, and their communities. Children who receive free and reduced price lunches particularly benefit from Farm-to-Cafeteria, as they often do not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables elsewhere. Section 122 authorizes a grant program for schools to receive funds of up to \$100,000 to assist with the start-up costs of a Farm-to-Cafeteria project. These competitive, one-time grants will allow schools to purchase adequate equipment to store and prepare fresh foods, develop vendor relationships with nearby farmers, plan seasonal menus and promotional materials, start a school garden, and develop hands-on nutrition education showing the importance of agriculture. An initial investment of \$5 million will allow schools to create long-term Farm-to-Cafeteria projects.

Rationale for Farmers' Market Promotion Program Funding: PA alone has 150 farmers' markets and clearly, direct marketing is a potent force in this state. They are also a vital source of fresh produce for low-income seniors and WIC families who utilize the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. Many PA markets would like to expand, and other communities would like to start new markets. \$5 million for this grant program will create new opportunities in Pennsylvania and across the country to improve public health with locally-grown fresh produce.

Description of Farmers' Market Promotion Program: The Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) offers competitive grants to start up and expand direct markets of all kinds, including U-pick operations, farmstands, farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) markets and more. It finally received startup funding for FY06 – of \$1 million. Given the explosion of interest in direct marketing, more funding is needed to meet the need for new and expanded direct marketing opportunities for farmers and ranchers