

# **NAFMNP**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAMS

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## **Statement**

By

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National Association of Farmers'  
Market Nutrition Programs

Presented to

U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition &  
Forestry Committee  
Thad Cochran, Chairman

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*Cultivating opportunities for consumers to buy fresh produce from local growers*

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing on the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act.

I am Don Wambles, Administrator of the State of Alabama Farmers Market Authority and President of the National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (NAFMNP).

The NAFMNP represents 37 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, and 5 Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) that operate WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs and 36 state agencies that operate the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs.

The Farmers Market Nutrition Programs meet two very important objectives.

(1) They provide fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables to low-income women, children and seniors by giving them coupons to buy fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers and, (2) increase income to small family farmers by increasing use and awareness of farmers' markets.

Nationally, more than 2.7 million WIC clients and seniors buy safe and healthy domestically grown fruits and vegetables from approximately 14,400 farmers at more than 2,000 farmers' markets.

The FMNP creates a direct link between production agriculture and thousands of low-income women and children. The FMNP (1) educates WIC clients about the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables; (2) changes eating habits; and, (3) increases sales for small farmers. Last year, farmers received more than \$21.7 million from coupons redeemed in the WIC FMNP alone.

The FMNPs are the only programs that provide direct benefits to small farmers and low income families with so little effort. These benefits are: nutritious fruits and vegetables to needy women, children and seniors and additional income to farmers, with the added benefit of exposing young mothers to the stable family environment provided by small family farmers.

This program is more than just giving a recipient \$20 in coupons. It provides nutrition education, assistance when shopping at a farmers market, and help with how to prepare products when they return home. This is a big change from buying something ready to eat i.e., greasy fries and a burger, or something to pop into a microwave. Learning how to shop for fresh vegetables and how to prepare them takes time and effort, therefore those of us who have the necessary knowledge must spend the time and energy to teach those who do not, especially young mothers. These programs are a win-win for society.

The WIC FMNP, funded \$25 million, requires 30% state match. As state budgets have tightened, it has been increasingly more difficult to find the necessary dollars to provide the required matching funds for this program. While I believe that states should provide some commitment for these programs, the current economic conditions have made it very tough on many states to accomplish this. We have even had states that have had very successful, established programs simply drop out of the program because they could not provide the match.

How do you explain that to a farmer or a hungry child? I know of nothing more frustrating than to establish a program, build interest and enthusiasm in it, only to see the program end because of state budget crises.

Therefore, our Association asks that you give serious consideration to changing the state match requirements so that states can continue to operate this very important program. **The state match of 30% of the total federal grant has been and continues to be an obstacle to program growth within states and limits expansion to new states.** Like other nutrition programs, the FMNP should only be required to match the administrative portion of the Federal funds.

The Federal benefit per recipient has been capped at \$20 since the programs inception. This is the only program that I know of that hasn't increased with inflation. It makes no sense to give recipients the same benefit today as we did ten years ago and think they can purchase the same amount of F & V as they did ten years ago. **Therefore, we recommend the maximum federal benefit be increased to \$30.**

**While it is important that the program continue to strengthen local markets, we also need the flexibility to address local situations where farmers markets are neither abundant nor available.**

While this hearing is focused on reauthorization of the WIC FMNP, I wish to speak briefly about the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program. This program is a sister program to the WIC FMNP. FNS has been exemplary in getting this program up and running. It personifies the “out of the box” thinking that OMB asks for and the public expects from our government. It has been so successful that the demand for the program has far exceeded the \$15 million dollars allocated by the Farm Bill. States’ requests exceeded \$28 million this year. This program will continue to grow, provided that Congress makes available sufficient funds.

In closing, I would like to put a face on the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs. I recently witnessed a young WIC mother with her son purchasing produce with WIC FMNP coupons. When the mother handed the bag of vegetables to her child, he asked with excitement, “Mama, are we going to have something to eat tonight?” The expression on that child’s face and his words are embedded in my mind forever.

An elderly gentleman at one of our markets stated that the Senior FMNP was a blessing to him because he did not have sufficient income to shop at the farmers market otherwise. I could not help but notice the phrase on his cap. It stated; “I’m a World War II Veteran”. He wore that cap and talked about his service to the country with pride. He is just one example of the many veterans that are being served through the Seniors’ FMNP. I cannot forget his face, his words or what his service, and many others like him, has provided you and I.

**At-risk children, young mothers, seniors and small family farmers benefit from both the WIC and Seniors’ Farmers’ Market Nutrition Programs. Lifestyles are changed; bonds between recipients and small farmers are being established every day; and small fruit and vegetable growers receive direct income in these difficult economic times.**

Our association stands ready to work with you and your staff and with USDA staff to strengthen and expand both the WIC FMNP and the Seniors' FMNP.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. I'll be happy to respond to your questions.