

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May , 2007

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

We write in support of including provisions that support healthy, affordable foods and strengthen local and regional food systems to the benefit of both farmers and consumers in the upcoming Farm Bill.

As you may know, the rise of hunger and obesity in both rural and urban America is in part a result of a lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other foods which are vital to a healthy diet. This lack of access is a contributing factor in food insecurity and in the alarming increases in diabetes and other diet-related diseases that – as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have documented – drive up health costs. We hope the 2007 Farm Bill will advance a multi-pronged strategy aimed at providing opportunities for children to learn healthy eating habits and making fresh fruits and vegetables more available in our communities.

Most children in American eat less than half of the fruits and vegetables recommended for good health in the 2005 Dietary Guidelines. To help our children meet these guidelines, we should consider new polices to increase the availability of and access to fresh fruits and vegetables in schools. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 recognized this and authorized farm to cafeteria programs that link schools with local farmers and have been successfully piloted through the country. Similarly, the Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Program helps enable school lunches to have more fresh fruits and vegetables. We encourage you to consider including provisions in the Farm Bill that will work in concert with these other programs to create healthier school food environments such as expanding the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program.

We also support improved access to fresh fruit and vegetables in underserved neighborhoods and communities. Expansion of the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs and making Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) available at farmers markets would enable more Food Stamp and WIC program recipients to purchase fresh, healthy foods in their communities. In turn, this support for farmers markets can strengthen neighborhoods and provide significant micro-enterprise development opportunities for market vendors and local farmers. Programs that let residents take an active part in agriculture through community gardens or urban agriculture enterprises also strengthen relationships within neighborhoods while at the same time increasing access to healthy foods.

More specifically, we encourage you to include the following package of healthy

food policies and programs in the 2007 Farm Bill:

- Procurement policy clarifications to encourage institutions participating in child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, to allow geographic preferences so that schools can request local food where practicable;
- Increased support for farmers markets through expansion of the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, the Farmers Market Promotion Program, and Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) use at farmers markets;
- Expansion of the Community Food Project grant program to support community-based food access improvements in underserved urban and rural communities;
- Support for food production in urban, suburban and near-urban areas through farmland protection, beginning and immigrant farmer programs, and community garden initiatives;
- Investment in processing, distribution, and information technology infrastructure that will enable family farmers—especially socially disadvantaged or limited resource farmers—to access underserved markets;
- Expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to more states, and eventually to every state in the nation;

We look forward to working with you to advance food and farm policies that will improve the health and well-being of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Russell D. Feingold
U.S. Senator

Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator