

Testimony of Dr. Lorelei DiSogra
USDA Listening Session
Implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act
February 24, 2011

Good afternoon, my name is Lorelei DiSogra, VP of Nutrition at United Fresh Produce Association.

United Fresh Produce Association strongly supports the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act because it will significantly improve the healthfulness of school meals and create healthier school food environments. We commend USDA on their timely implementation plan.

First, we applaud the performance –based \$.06 increase in the federal reimbursement rate for school lunch which will make it easier for schools to serve more fruits and vegetables. We encourage USDA to quickly issue guidance so that schools will know when the increase reimbursement rate will be available and what meeting compliance with new meal standards actually means. It appears that the effective date of the increased reimbursement rate does not align with the start of the 2012 school year. We strongly support implementation of the proposed rule by the beginning of the 2012 school year.

United Fresh strongly advocated for the \$.06 increase in the reimbursement rate for school lunch, although we know this is not enough. Additionally, the legislation does not provide increased funding for school breakfast. Therefore, we urge USDA to seriously consider other policy levers that can be utilized to specifically help schools serve a healthier school breakfast.

United Fresh Produce Association strongly supports the development of national nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold outside of school meals. We support USDA's timeline to issue a proposed rule by December 2011 but urge USDA to issue a final regulation earlier than summer of 2013. National nutrition standards for competitive foods should be a higher priority because implementation of these new standards is critical to creating healthier school food environments. Ideally, you want healthier competitive

foods available at the same time as healthier school meals. These improvements in the school food environment should be aligned. The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act also calls for strengthening local wellness policies. United Fresh strongly supports USDA's timeline to issue a proposed rule by fall 2011 and a final rule by fall 2012.

We commend USDA for beginning implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act quickly, and look forward to the issuance of policy memos, guidance and regulations that bring the vision and goals of this legislation to life for millions of school children.

We strongly support USDA's recently released proposed regulation for school meals, which will double the amounts of fruits and vegetables served and emphasize variety. It has been more than 15 years since school meals have been aligned with the Dietary Guidelines, and the changes called for in the proposed rule will result in healthier school meals, foster healthier eating habits and help reduce childhood obesity.

We are however, very concerned about negative comments and criticism about the proposed rule. Successful implementation will require overcoming the problems and concerns raised and building broad support for implementation from various constituents.

Because this legislation and the recently published school meals proposed rule are historic, integrally intertwined and so critical to improving child nutrition, we urge USDA to take a strategic approach to ensuring successful implementation. This strategic approach needs to go beyond policy changes that are included in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. We urge USDA to evaluate all policy levers, such as: funding for cafeteria equipment, commodities for breakfast, a regulation for indirect costs that will shift more resources to food, and others that can be utilized to help schools successfully implement these historic changes.

United Fresh Produce Association applauds the \$.06 increase in federal reimbursement for school lunch, but we and others acknowledge that it is not enough. Additionally, this legislation does not provide increased funding for school breakfast. We acknowledge that much can be accomplished with training, technical assistance,

and nutrition education, but we are concerned with the growing chorus of “unfunded mandates.” Part of the costs associated with improved school meal standards is related to providing children with more fruits and vegetables, we do not suggest USDA weaken the final rule, it has taken 15 long years for USDA to propose standards that meet the Dietary Guidelines. United Fresh wants to see a strong final rule that doubles the amount of fruits and vegetables available to students at breakfast and lunch. Therefore, we urge USDA to seriously consider policy levers that can be utilized in the next few years that will result in additional resources to schools. We want USDA to be successful, we want schools to be successful, and we want all students to have access to healthier foods, including more fruits and vegetables.

Now, it’s time to focus on how to ensure this historic legislation and the proposed rule become reality in 100,000 schools around the country. United Fresh and other organizations are committed to working with USDA to find additional policy solutions that will realize the vision of healthier school meals and healthier school food environments.

Thank you again for the opportunity comment and we look forward to working with you on full implementation of this historic law

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