



Testimony
2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Listening Sessions
USDA/FNS
Baltimore, MD
August 6, 2008
(as delivered)

Good morning. I am Dr. Cathleen Enright, Vice President of Federal Government Affairs for the Western Growers, a trade association representing growers, shippers and handlers of fresh fruits, nuts and vegetables in California and Arizona. Our 3000 members produce nearly one half of the total U.S. production of fresh fruits, nuts and vegetables. Today, I'll be speaking to the School Meals Programs.

Western Growers' commitment to improving the health of the Nation's school children is long-standing, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. In California, Western Growers was a founding partner of the School Garden Network, Western Growers that sponsored the state bill (AB1535) creating the California Instructional School Garden Program., and since 2003, Western Growers Foundation has supported over 270 school gardens in California and Arizona.

Studies have shown that children involved in structured school garden nutrition education programs increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables, have an increased willingness to try new fruits and vegetables, and have improved attitudes towards fruits and vegetables (2007, McAleese et al., Journal of the American Dietetic Association; Morris et al., California Agriculture).

These same objectives were reinforced by Western Growers as we advocated for the expansion of the School Snack Program under the 2008 Farm Bill, as a member of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, and it is these objectives that bring us to the reauthorization process for the Child Nutrition Act—to promote the health and well being of the Nation’s children through increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Accordingly, Western Growers has identified the following as priorities for the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization:

- There must be an increase in the reimbursement rate for school meals directed specifically to serving more fresh fruits and vegetables, consistent with dietary guidelines. Priority should be given to schools with the highest proportion of low-income students.
- There should be a salad bar in every school cafeteria. Students eat more fruits and vegetables when they have a salad bar offering a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. USDA should provide incentives and training to schools for the operation of salad bars.
- There must be funding for non-food assistance grants to enable schools to purchase equipment to support fresh fruit and vegetables menus, such as refrigeration units and salad bars.
- USDA should be required to significantly expand its commodity purchases of a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, including fresh-cut fruits and vegetables which are a favorite of children, and when available, result in greater fruit and vegetable consumption.

- Finally, funding for the DOD Fresh Program must be increased. DOD Fresh makes it easy for schools to purchase a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables by delivering directly to schools at the lowest cost.

Aligning school meal programs with dietary guidelines by exposing children to a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables through updated menus and by changing the way fresh fruits and vegetables are presented is a key step in improving the healthfulness of the foods offered to America's school children. For Western Growers, three legs are needed to balance the school nutrition stool according to dietary guidelines; school gardens, school snack, and under the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization, school meals.

Thank you.