April 10, 2019

The Honorable Pat Roberts  The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Nutrition and Forestry Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building 328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510 Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

The fresh produce industry takes pride in our responsibility to provide the nation and the world with year-round access to healthy, fresh, affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. Federal nutrition programs play a pivotal role in ensuring all Americans have access to a wide variety of produce, and we urge the Committee to continue the progress of growing consumption through policies in Child Nutrition Reauthorization this Congress.

Research shows that fruit selection and vegetable consumption in schools have increased since updated school nutrition standards went into effect in 2012. Meeting vegetable categories, like leafy greens and orange and red subgroups, ensures that children are exposed to naturally-occurring nutrients, and is consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans’ recommendations. Utilizing salad bars is an effective and popular way to meet the serving requirements for fruits and vegetables, allowing students to exercise choice, while still ensuring that serving minimums are met. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) indicates that 45 percent of middle and high schools now have a salad bar in their cafeterias. This growth is promising, but access to resources for equipment, including salad bars and cold storage, remains a need for our schools – with nearly 90% of schools needing at least one piece of school kitchen equipment.

First authorized in 2002, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) has proven itself a powerful and effective program that ensures students are provided exposure to a wide range of fruit and vegetables. USDA’s own study found that consumption increases for students participating in the program, without

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an overall increase in caloric intake. Additionally, canned, dried, frozen and juiced fruits and vegetables comprise 95 percent of the purchases in the USDA Commodity system between 2010-2017, as shown in the data attached. Additional information below, titled “Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program”, summarizes the pilot included in the 2014 Farm Bill that allowed schools to serve non-fresh produce in the program. Overall consumption of fruits and vegetables decreased while variety did not increase. The evidence is overwhelmingly clear that fresh is what is best for students participating in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

The United Fresh Produce Association urges you to support bipartisan legislation that protects nutrition gains in the nation’s feeding programs, and works to improve access and consumption of fruits and vegetables for all Americans. A Child Nutrition Reauthorization should prioritize the following:

- Continue the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) as “fresh only”
- Ensure school nutrition standards align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), including maintaining the fruit and vegetable serving requirements
- Permanently authorize School Kitchen Equipment Grants
- Protect and strengthen nutrition in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Identify opportunities to ensure that all our nation’s nutrition programs align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA)

We thank you for your longstanding work on these important issues, and stand ready to work with your Committee as this process moves forward.

Sincerely,

Tom Stenzel
President and CEO

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Founded in 1904, the United Fresh Produce Association serves companies at the forefront of the global fresh and fresh-cut produce industry, including growers, shippers, fresh-cut processors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, foodservice operators, industry suppliers and allied associations. From its headquarters in Washington, D.C., United Fresh and its members work year-round to make a difference for the produce industry by driving policies that increase consumption of fresh produce, shaping critical legislative and regulatory action, providing scientific and technical leadership in food safety, quality assurance, nutrition and health, and developing educational programs and business opportunities to assist member companies in growing successful businesses.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

The Evidence is Clear: Fresh Works

Program Background: The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) was first authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill and provides a fruit and vegetable snack to elementary school students outside the traditional school lunch and breakfast program. Due to its success and popularity, Congress has continued to support the program, expanding it nationwide in 2008. The bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized FFVP as a fresh only program.

FFVP is available in all 50 states and implemented by the state child nutrition agency. The FFVP is voluntary for schools. Districts interested in participating apply to receive funding with the state agency and priority is given to schools with the highest percentage of free/reduced price lunch rates.

Congressional Intent: Congress has stated the goal of FFVP is to help schools create healthier school environments by providing healthier food choices; expanding the variety of fruits and vegetables children experience; and increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. Approximately 95% of commodities purchased by USDA are canned, dried, frozen, or juiced. FFVP aims to expose students to a wider variety of fruits and vegetables through access to fresh products.

Evaluation: FFVP has been evaluated through several studies over the years, showing that serving fresh fruits and vegetables within FFVP can reduce childhood obesity and increase fruit and vegetable consumption both within the program and at lunch.

Some groups representing canned, dried, and/or frozen commodities, often referred to as “all forms”, continue to push to eliminate the fresh only status of the program. As a result, the 2014 Farm Bill authorized a multi-state “all forms” pilot. A 2017 report commissioned by USDA and conducted by Mathematica Policy Research compared outcomes in schools that transitioned from serving only fresh fruits and vegetables in FFVP to participating in a pilot that allowed canned, dried or frozen (referred to as “CDF” here). The study found:
Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Decreased - Students in the CDF pilot consumed one quarter fewer fruits and vegetables per day from fall 2014 to spring 2015. A substantial decrease in the consumption of fresh fruit during the pilot was the largest single cause of the overall decrease.

Dried and Canned Fruit Most Frequently Served – During the CDF pilot, the most frequently served fruits and vegetables were dried (cranberries, raisins, and trail mix) and canned fruit (canned mandarin oranges and applesauce). Less than 1% of the CFD items served were frozen fruits or canned vegetables. No schools offered frozen or dried vegetables.

Variety Did Not Increase – The CDF pilot did not increase the variety of fruits and vegetables served.

Students and Parents Prefer Fresh– Students in the pilot reported preferring fresh fruits and vegetable compared to those that were CDF. Students preferred fresh oranges over canned mandarins, fresh pears over canned pears, and fresh apples over applesauce or dried apples. Two-thirds of parents in the pilot want the FFVP to only serve Fresh fruit and vegetable snacks.

Pilot Impacted School Lunch – When schools participated in the CDF pilot, more canned fruit and less fresh fruit was served during lunch.

Calories Increased – during the CDF pilot, the caloric content of the snack increased by 20 calories/day on average; this increase was attributed to the higher sugar content of dried and canned fruit compared to fresh.

United Fresh continues to support FFVP as a way to not just feed children, but expose them to a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables that they might not otherwise have an opportunity to try at home or school. Students continue to have adequate access to “all forms” of produce through school breakfast and lunch programs. Maintaining the program as fresh only is the only proven way to ensure the best outcome for students and schools, and align with congressional intent of the program.

For more information please visit unitedfresh.org/nutrition.
### USDA FOODS: FRUIT AND VEGETABLE COMMODITY PURCHASES FY 2010-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Value ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frozen</td>
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<td>Juice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dried</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fresh</td>
<td>4.20%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Purchase 2010-2017: $5,191,456,531.81**