



# CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION

## Ensuring Access to Fresh Produce for Children and Young Families

The nation's child nutrition programs were last reauthorized in 2010. These important programs provide meals and snacks to millions of children – including school breakfast and lunch, afterschool snacks and supper, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and the Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC). Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) offers schools and communities with technical and financial resources to ensure that students and low-income families have access to nutritious meals.

With efforts underway in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress to reauthorize this important legislation, United Fresh Produce Association makes the following recommendations.

### We Urge Congress and the Administration to:

#### **Recommendation #1: Protect children's access to fresh produce in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) by keeping it fresh only.**

Congress established the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to help provide low-income children exposure to a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables they might not otherwise have access to at home or school. More than 7,600 elementary schools participate in the program – serving students a fresh fruit or vegetable snack daily in the classroom. With more than 95% of USDA commodities available to schools being canned, dried, frozen, or juiced, FFVP plays an important role in providing access to fresh produce. Evaluation data have shown that consumption increases when the program is exclusively fresh, and when opened up to “all forms” – consumption throughout the school day decreases. FFVP is optional for schools and federal funding is administered to schools from state agencies through a competitive grant process.

#### **Recommendation #2: Ensure school nutrition standards align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), including maintaining current fruit and vegetable serving requirements.**

Today, children are eating more fruits and vegetables in school meal programs than they were a decade ago. With only 1 in 10 Americans eating the recommended daily values of fruits and vegetables, it is critical that our nation's children establish healthy habits early in life to reverse our obesity and overweight epidemic. Healthier meals are also better for schools; recent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) data indicate that schools serving meals with a higher Healthy Eating Index score (how closely they align with the Dietary Guidelines) enjoy higher rates of meal program participation, dispelling the notion that students will not eat healthy meals.

#### **Recommendation #3:**

- **Make permanent School Kitchen Equipment Grants and authorize low-interest loans for infrastructure improvements.**

- **Ensure that lower dollar, durable equipment is allowable under grants, including fresh-cut processing equipment, salad bars, and refrigeration.**

Ninety percent of schools need at least one piece of updated school kitchen equipment, and data show that slicing whole produce and providing options to students through salad bars are effective strategies to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables. Congress has recognized this need for nearly a decade by providing annual appropriations for USDA School Kitchen Equipment Grants. These grants should be made permanent, with additional access to resources through USDA-backed loans for larger scale infrastructure improvements as laid out in the School Food Modernization Act (S.1949/H.R. 3444).

#### **Recommendation #4:**

- **Pilot doubling the dollar amount for WIC cash value vouchers (CVV) for fruits and vegetables in accordance with recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s (National Academies) 2017 WIC food package recommendations.**
- **Pilot allowing WIC participants an option of replacing jarred infant fruits and vegetables with a higher CVV amount to be used for fruits and vegetables.**

WIC provides low-income pregnant and post-partum women, and children under 5, with a monthly benefit to redeem nutritious foods, including fruits and vegetables through a cash value voucher (CVV). The CVV is currently set at \$8 per month for children and \$11 for mothers, despite the 2017 National Academies’ report recommending USDA double the amount of the CVV and allowing participants the option to opt into a higher CVV in lieu of jarred baby food. While the update continues to be reviewed by USDA, Congress should build the evidence base for the updates by authorizing state pilots of the recommendations.

#### **Recommendation #5: Expand WIC benefits to age 6.**

Expanding WIC benefits to age six ensures that children participating in the program have access to a nutritious food package until they reach kindergarten.

#### **Recommendation #6: Require USDA and the Department of Education to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to provide guidance for minimum seat time for consuming school meals and time of day for lunch.**

The time of day, and the amount of time that students have to sit and eat a meal, is an issue facing many schools around the country as they struggle to schedule the school day. The negative implications of rushed and ill-timed lunch periods contribute to plate waste with students not having adequate time to eat the nutritious foods on their tray, including items like whole fruits that may take longer to chew and eat. Establishing an MOU between USDA and ED can help facilitate the conversation between school nutrition personal and administrators and establish voluntary guidance and best practices.

### **By the Numbers**

- 30 million students participate in school lunch daily, receiving full servings of fruits and vegetables
- 95% of USDA fruit and vegetable commodities available to schools are *not* fresh
- 90% of schools need at least one piece of school kitchen equipment
- Children in WIC currently receive \$8/month for fruit and vegetable purchases
- Obesity rates for 2 and 3-year-olds in WIC is declining for the first time in decades