

October 16, 2015

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We are writing to urge you to act on the authority provided to you by the Agricultural Act of 2014 to ensure that farmers markets and other direct farmer-to-consumer markets authorized to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (SNAP) by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) may do so without incurring costs for equipment, services and transaction fees. Farmers markets and other direct marketing venues can play an important role in increasing access to healthy, affordable food for low-income Americans. To achieve this goal, it should be as easy as possible for markets to serve these SNAP shoppers.

Congress's intent with the language in Section 4002(b)(2)(B)(i) of the 2014 Farm Bill was to ensure that direct, healthy food retailers would not face cost barriers to serving SNAP program participants. Farm-direct retailers usually require wireless equipment, requiring farmers markets to enter into independent contracts with processing companies that include equipment and service costs as well as transaction fees on every SNAP sale they make. We very much appreciate that USDA has provided programs offering temporary support for these costs. We strongly believe, however, that a long-term solution is necessary.

The problem could be eliminated and the process streamlined if USDA were to notify states that their state SNAP processors were required to provide wireless equipment and service to FNS-authorized farmers markets that require it. This system is already successfully in place in California (the state with the most SNAP authorized farmers markets in the country), South Carolina, and Mississippi. We believe this is the easiest and least burdensome way to achieve success. **Therefore, we urge you to instruct state SNAP agencies to include the provision of no-cost, wireless EBT equipment and service to authorized farmers markets and direct marketing farmers within their SNAP processing contracts.**

Almost all retailers are now required to pay the costs associated with accepting SNAP benefits, a saving for federal and state governments. The cost of providing appropriate equipment and service to farmers markets and other direct farmer-to-consumer markets would not present a significant burden to processors or states, and will increase access to healthy, affordable food in for low-income families nationwide.

We appreciate all that the USDA is doing to promote healthy food access for all Americans and to support the development of vibrant regional food systems. We look forward to continuing to collaborate on this important work.

Sincerely,

Farmers Market Coalition
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Johns Hopkins University Center for a Livable Future
Fair Food Network, MI
Hoosier Farmers Market Association, IN
Hunger-Free Pennsylvania, PA

Illinois Stewardship Alliance, IL
Michigan Farmers Market Association, MI
Montgomery County Community Action Development Commission, PA
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Philabundance, PA
Sustainable Food Center, TX
The Food Trust, PA
The SHARE Food Program, PA
Pennypack Farm and Education Center, PA
Wholesome Wave, CT