



ProducePERKS

Interested Party Testimony- House HHS Subcommittee HB 166- State Operating Budget May 6, 2019

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, and Ranking Member Cera - Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 166, the State Operating Budget, in support of Produce Perks Midwest's funding request which would appropriate \$500,000 in each fiscal year within the Department of Job and Family Service's TANF Block Grant for Produce Perks to expand services to reach more SNAP recipients across the state.

My name is Tevis Foreman and I serve as the Executive Director of Produce Perks Midwest, the lead agency administering the Produce Perks program.

Produce Perks is Ohio's nutrition incentive program, empowering SNAP consumers to purchase fresh, healthy fruits & vegetables from Ohio farmers, farmers' markets and grocery-retailers across the state. Produce Perks doubles the purchasing power of SNAP consumers by providing a \$1-for-\$1 match to buy fresh, local produce – our work increases affordable access to healthy foods for the 1.5 million Ohioans receiving SNAP benefits.

In 2018, Produce Perks generated over \$800,000 in healthy food purchases by SNAP consumers, benefited 500+ Ohio farmers, and is operational at 100+ locations statewide.

Ohio ranks 45th in the U.S. for food insecurity and has the 7th highest number of households receiving SNAP benefits. Consequently, we experience some of the nation's worst health outcomes tied to chronic disease and disparity, resulting in unsustainable health expenditures - \$50 billion annually to address chronic disease. As a proud agricultural state, we should be the bellwether.

Produce Perks is a nationally recognized program, with proven programmatic and systems-level solutions. Our work advances years of investment and the collective work of partners from across our state. Since 2010, nutrition incentive programming has generated over \$1.4 million dollars in healthy food purchases within Ohio – these dollars are going directly into local economies, supporting Ohio farmers and strengthening Ohio's food system – all while helping vulnerable Ohio families put healthy food on the table.

Since 2016 we have convened the Ohio Nutrition Incentive Network (OHNIN), a multi-sector coalition of state-level agencies and collaborators, program operators, local stakeholders, and

national experts working toward a shared vision of affordable access to healthy local foods and a resilient Ohio food system. OHNIN members represent diverse and distinct regions of Ohio.

OHNIN members include:

- ACENet
- Case Western Reserve University
- Countryside Conservancy
- Farmers Market Association of Toledo
- OH Dept. of Aging
- OH Dept. of Health
- OH Farmers Market Network
- OH Grocers Association
- OSU Extension, Cuyahoga Co.
- OSU SNAP-Ed
- Summit Food Coalition
- Wholesome Wave
- Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation

Produce Perks is an evidenced-based model recognized for its dual impact of increasing purchases of fruits & vegetables by SNAP consumers and increasing revenues for small- to mid-sized farmers, farmers' markets, and grocery-retailers. The USDA estimates that every \$1 in SNAP spending creates \$1.80 in economic activity, and this impact is magnified when purchasing locally-grown food.

Our work redirects SNAP dollars to create positive, direct impacts on health and economy - **it is the highest and best use of federal SNAP dollars.**

Both the *Ohio Department of Health* and *Health Policy Institute of Ohio* recommend nutrition incentive programming (Produce Perks) as the top-rated, evidence-based strategy relevant to state policy to address food insecurity and improve health outcomes. Produce Perks is recognized as a key strategy within the State's Health Improvement Plan.

Produce Perks is currently funded through public-private partnership. In 2018, the USDA awarded Produce Perks Midwest a 3-year, \$2.27 million grant through the Farm Bill's Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) program to expand Produce Perks. Combined with matching funds contributed by Produce Perks Midwest and partners, these funds represent a \$4.6 million commitment to Ohio's food insecure families, farmers, and communities.

With \$1M from the state, Produce Perks could expand programming to reach 1000+ Ohio farmers, and over 300 farmers markets and retailers in communities throughout Ohio's highest-need counties. Furthermore, these dollars will work to leverage a renewal of our FINI award in 2021.

I implore you to support our amendment of \$500,000 in each fiscal year within the Department of Job and Family Service's TANF Block Grant for Produce Perks to expand services to reach more SNAP recipients across the state. I can answer any questions at this time.

Thank you.

Tevis Foreman
Executive Director
Produce Perks Midwest, Inc.