



ProducePERKS

Interested Party Testimony- House HHS Subcommittee HB 33- State Operating Budget March 21, 2023

Chair Carruthers and Ranking Member Liston - Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33, the State Operating Budget, in support of Produce Perks Midwest's funding request which would appropriate \$1,000,000 in each fiscal year within the Department of Job and Family Services TANF Block Grant for Produce Perks to expand services to reach more SNAP recipients across the state.

My name is Tanisha Velez, and I am an Urban Farmer, Produce Perks User and Produce Perks Distributor, Founder of Cleveland Fresh, President & CEO of Jardin 4 Life, and Program Associate for The FARE Project.

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.

I am here today because I have benefited from Produce Perks, and it was important to me to share the benefits of Produce Perks. I started working with Produce Perks in 2019 when I was selling my produce microgreens at the Tremont Farmers Market in Cleveland. I noticed an increase in sales due to the fact that Produce Perks allows more customers to purchase our microgreens without having to sacrifice money that could be used for utility bills or other necessities. I have now been able to expand to the Kamm's Corners Farmers Market. About 80% of my customers purchase microgreens with Produce Perks coins. As a low-income family and farmer, I am able to use my SNAP/EBT card to maximize my buying power with Produce Perks. With this program, we have increased fresh produce intake at home. Produce Perks give us the opportunity to give our children a set amount of tokens to have a chance to purchase what we need at the markets for the families meal for the week. They are also able to understand spending power.

Through The FARE Project, we were able to launch Produce Perks books at the beloved West Side Market. We had an opportunity to create marketing in Spanish, it being the first time in WSM history. We had two days to distribute the books, launching \$250 books. This helps increase sales within the produce vendors as well as invite others to the market that usually shop there. We had a 93% redemption rate at the market. Through music, food demos and other community partners we distributed Produce Perks benefits and it helped the vendors gain lifetime customers.

With my non-profit organization Jardin 4 Life, we are launching a farmers market in the community for its first time. The market will be a global market as it is a high newcomer, Latinx, and culturally diverse community. We are looking forward to the market season and offering Produce Perks to the community.

I implore you to support our amendment of \$1,000,000 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.
Tanisha Velez