



## **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 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, Ohio's lead agency administering nutrition incentive programming.

**Produce Perks** is Ohio's *Nutrition Incentive Program*, and provides a \$1:\$1 match for SNAP beneficiaries to purchase fruits and vegetables from Ohio farmers, farmers markets and small-business retailers. In 2022 our nutrition incentive programming generated over \$4 million in healthy food purchases for low-income households in communities across Ohio (*this is an economic impact of over \$12M*). These dollars are going directly back into local economies, increasing household food and nutrition security, improving health outcomes for our most vulnerable – and empowering individuals to make healthy lifestyle choices while providing dignity as a consumer.

Millions of Ohioans struggle with food insecurity and rely on SNAP benefits to feed their families. Produce Perks stretches those SNAP dollars further and doubles the purchasing power of SNAP shoppers to buy healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables. With pandemic-era benefits coming to an end, households across Ohio are going to be significantly impacted – further emphasizing the need for Produce Perks.

It's important to recognize that our work is not only increasing affordable access to healthy foods, but it is directly strengthening and stimulating local economies – supporting our small-scale farmers and small-business retailers in communities throughout Ohio. We place great value on our local agricultural systems and our Ohio-owned businesses and have demonstrated that we can combat hunger (with dignity) while strategically building the infrastructure and capacity of our local food systems.

Furthermore, through our collaborations with healthcare partners, both providers and payors, we continue to see positive health outcomes in the patients we are serving. Patients participating in our Produce Prescription (PRx) programs are experiencing decreases in their A1C and BMI numbers, and general well-being. In partnership with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), through our Produce Prescription – Infant Vitality program, mothers are giving birth to healthier

babies. In 2022 over 90% of the babies born within our Produce Prescription – Infant Vitality (PRx-IV) program reached their appropriate gestational goals (as set by the Ohio Department of Health). Our PRx-IV program works in partnership with ODH and WIC (Women Infant and Children) to improve maternal and infant health in Ohio Equity Institute (OEI) counties. OEI counties are Ohio counties with the highest infant mortality rates.

Extensive research has shown a significant correlation between food insecurity and chronic health conditions among all age groups.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, there is strong data evidencing the positive impacts of nutrition incentive programming (i.e. Produce Perks) including improved health outcomes, increased household food and nutrition security, and overall well-being.<sup>2</sup>

Produce Perks is a nationally recognized program, advancing years of investment and the collective work of partners statewide. **Since 2017, Produce Perks has generated more than \$10.7M in healthy food purchases in Ohio – generating over \$32M in local economic impacts.**

Since 2017, we have experienced nearly 900% growth in our nutrition incentive programs. We are building healthy and resilient local food economies – making strategic investments in the infrastructure and capacity of our localized food systems; improving health outcomes by integrating our work within the healthcare sector; and providing the dignity of choice to low-income Ohioans in communities across our great state.

Produce Perks is currently funded through public-private partnership. In 2021, the USDA awarded Produce Perks Midwest a 3-year, \$6.7M grant through the Farm Bill's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GUSNIP) to expand Produce Perks. Combined with matching funds contributed by Produce Perks Midwest and partners, these funds represent a \$15M million commitment to Ohio's food insecure families, farmers, and communities.

With \$2M from the state, Produce Perks will expand programming to reach 40,000+ low-income consumers, benefit 1000+ Ohio farmers, and support 200+ farmers markets and Ohio-owned small-business retailers in communities throughout Ohio's highest-need counties.

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.



Tevis Foreman  
Executive Director  
Produce Perks Midwest, Inc.

---

<sup>1</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs?mc\\_cid=52712c837e&mc\\_cid=5a1bf9dda6](https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs?mc_cid=52712c837e&mc_cid=5a1bf9dda6)

<sup>2</sup> Thilmany D, Baumann A, Love E, Jablonski Becca BR. January 2021. *The Economic Contributions of Healthy Food Incentives*. Fairfoodnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Economic\_Contributions\_Incentives\_2.2.21.pdf