



**Interested Party Testimony- House Children and Human Services Committee
HB 96 — FY26-27 State Operating Budget
February 27, 2025**

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett and members of the Children and Human Services Committee — Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96 in support of Produce Perks Midwest’s funding request which would appropriate \$2,000,000 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 low-income residents of our great state.

My name is Rachel Tayse, and I serve as the Program Manager of Produce Perks Midwest and facilitator of the Ohio Nutrition Incentive Network.

Produce Perks, Ohio’s *Nutrition Incentive Program*, provides a \$1:\$1 match for SNAP beneficiaries to purchase fruits and vegetables from Ohio farmers, farmers markets and small-business retailers. In 2024 our nutrition incentive programming generated approximately \$3.5M 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.

I help with managing and implementing Produce Perks programs around the state at farmers markets and small grocery retailers. Prior to joining the Produce Perks staff, I operated a produce farm in Ohio and enthusiastically accepted nutrition incentives at farmers markets. I want to share with you what the Produce Perks program means to our communities.

Nutrition incentives began in Northeast Ohio and Produce Perks now operates throughout the state at more than 150 farmers markets, mobile markets, and small-scale grocery-retailers. In 2024, our participating locations saw \$3,419,237 in healthy food purchases, which means 32,643 families were able to add 2,440,208 servings of fruits and vegetables to add to their diet through Produce Perks nutrition incentive and box programs. As one participant summarized, Produce Perks gave them the chance to enjoy local produce “that we may not have tried without it, either because we couldn’t afford it or because we never had it before.”

In Montgomery County, for example, eleven local retailers and market sites allowed low-income customers the chance to add over \$760,000 of healthy food purchases in 2024 with the support of Produce Perks. At places like 2nd Street Market Gem City Market, and Dot’s Market, our program

builds community one family at a time. A recipient shared, “My kids got so excited to see what was in our produce box and then we cooked new things together.”

We also see great benefits for this program in the more rural areas of our state. In Tuscarawas County, for instance, where 13, 720 people are food insecure, Buehler’s Fresh Foods in Dover and New Philadelphia, as well as the Tuscarawas Valley and Uhrichsville Farmers Markets used Produce Perks to distribute \$13,309 of produce incentives, generating an economic impact of \$31,761 in the local community while increasing the nutrition security of families.

In our urban areas, redemption is still high. Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton counties contain 22, 17, and 15 redemption Produce Perks sites respectively, and lead the state in Produce Perks use. Many participating produce vendors in these urban areas are local urban farmers who might not otherwise be able to attract low-income customers. As a Columbus-area market manager said, “We love offering Produce Perks, and so do our vendors! It brings more customers to market and allows them to buy more produce!

As you can see, Produce Perks programming has the potential to benefit every part of our great state. While urban and rural areas face unique challenges, food security remains a concern in both. We are committed to serving Ohioans where they live and within their communities, supporting individual families with the agency to meet their nutritional needs.

Additionally, these dollars directly support our farmers and small business owners, boosting their bottom line. The economic impact that Produce Perks brings is invaluable to farmers like I was, who sometimes struggle to offer a fair price to customers while ensuring business viability.

There are still communities where we can expand the depth and breadth of our successful programming to make an even greater impact, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with the state to achieve that. I implore you to support our amendment of \$2,000,000 in each fiscal year within the Department of Job and Family Service’s TANF Block Grant for Produce Perks to reach more low-income families across the state.

I can answer any questions at this time.

Rachel Tayse
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