



March 6, 2012

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
 Chairwoman
 Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
 328A Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas
 Chairman
 House Committee on Agriculture
 1301 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
 Ranking Member
 Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
 328A Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
 Ranking Member
 House Committee on Agriculture
 1301 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Lucas, Ranking Member Roberts, and Ranking Member Peterson:

As you begin consideration of the 2012 Farm Bill, we want to express our support for a number of programs that impact cities across the country. We recognize the challenges you face in crafting this reauthorization and are encouraged by the recent announcement of hearings on the bill in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. We believe that the reauthorization of the Farm Bill presents an opportunity to promote food security and the health of our residents, while also fueling economic growth and protecting our environment. As Mayors, we see each of these aims as critical to the long-term well-being of our residents.

Funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and other nutrition programs are vital components of city nutrition programs where the rates of poverty and food insecurity are disproportionately high. As you know, approximately 46 million Americans, half of whom are children, are currently enrolled in SNAP, while millions also rely on TEFAP. We request that you maintain funding levels for these programs so that millions of Americans do not go hungry.

The areas of our cities that have the highest rates of SNAP enrollment also tend to have the least access to healthy foods and the highest rates of obesity and diet-related diseases, which ultimately lead to significant health-related costs at the federal and local levels. Allowing states greater flexibility to test and evaluate policies that can limit unhealthy choices would promote good nutrition for recipients. Congress should direct the USDA to test policies that support healthful food choices and reduce consumption of products, such as sugar-sweetened beverages, that threaten the health of many Americans.

It is also of key importance that a 2012 Farm Bill promotes adequate fruit and vegetable supply and consumption, in alignment with the USDA's dietary recommendations. For example, we support preserving and expanding existing USDA programs such as the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program in Schools that increase healthy food choices for vulnerable populations. In addition, many cities have successfully piloted programs that encourage the consumption of healthful foods by providing financial incentives to SNAP recipients using their benefits at farmers markets. Expanding these programs on a federal level would promote good nutrition and establish additional funding streams for small, regional farmers. Similarly, inclusion of proposals in pending legislation which advocate for the increased use of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) transactions at farmers markets and other non-traditional produce vendors will further support these goals.

Farmers need access to markets to thrive, and many urban neighborhoods lack healthy food retail options. Investment in this area will promote economic development. Communities have already been able to access grants to connect low-income neighborhoods with healthy food products through programs like the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, Farmers Market Promotion Program, and the Healthy Food Enterprise Development Fund. Creating a stronger food network by expanding the reach of these and similar programs would showcase the commitment to changing the food landscape in underserved neighborhoods.

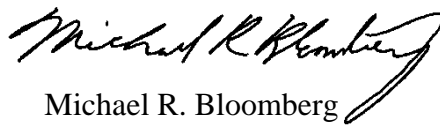
Finally, although we represent urban environments, we recognize the importance of the conservation programs that are fundamental to a healthy food system. These programs are critical to the watersheds that serve our residents, and more fundamentally promote the long-term health and food security of all Americans. We encourage you to maintain a strong commitment to conservation, and particularly those programs that support the environmental stewardship of farmers.

We recognize the great challenges you face. Nonetheless, we believe that your objectives can be met while protecting the most vulnerable citizens in our cities and improving our collective food system. We have been active in our own communities to achieve these goals through diverse and innovative programs and are available as resources for you during this process. We thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



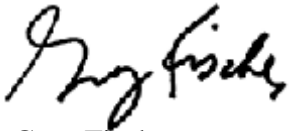
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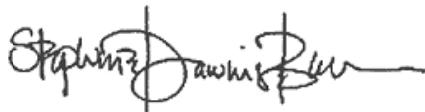
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