



NAFMNP

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FARMERS MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAMS

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Statement

By

Phil Blalock, Executive Director

National Association of Farmers
Market Nutrition Programs

Presented to

U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Nutrition and Horticulture
Jean Schmidt, Chairman

May 8, 2012

Cultivating opportunities for consumers to buy fresh produce from local growers

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Chairman Schmidt and members of the Committee, thank you for giving our Association the opportunity to participate in this hearing on Farmers Markets and Nutrition Programs.

Madame Chairman, my name is Phil Blalock. I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs. Our Association represents most of the 37 states, The District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and 6 Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) that operate WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs and 51 Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs.

These programs meet two very important objectives. They provide fresh produce to women, infants, children, and seniors by providing them benefits to buy fresh fruits and vegetables from small farmers who qualify and participate in the FMNP. They also increase income to small family farmers by increasing use and awareness of farmers markets.

Nationally, 2.15 million WIC clients buy locally grown fresh vegetables and fruits which are safe and healthy from more than 18,245 farmers at more than 3,647 community-based farmers markets, 2,772 farm stands, and CSAs (Community-Supported Agriculture Programs). The Senior FMNP provided 844,999 seniors with benefits that were used with 20,106 farmers in 4,601 farmers markets, 3,861 farm stands and 163 CSA's.

The last five years have seen dramatic changes in small farm participation in nutrition programs. The new food package in the WIC program has offered small farmers with another opportunity to help in the fight against hunger across the nation. There has also been a tremendous amount of interest and help from multiple groups in aiding farmers by increasing SNAP participation by small farmers. Since our programs provide the infrastructure across most of the states for delivery of nutrition programs into farmers markets we have found ourselves tasked to work across program differences by providing guidance and leadership to simplify the processes for farmers.

One of the remarkable things about our programs is their design. It has been our greatest asset and our greatest challenge. Our programs are all cooperative efforts. We take the expertise, eligibility and the distribution system of the WIC agencies as well as the senior programs and marry them with the farmer interaction with the Departments of Agriculture and Cooperative Extension. The asset is we don't create a bureaucracy or added administrative cost. We take the strengths of those agencies and make a new program. The downside is we create a new task for those agencies without a lot of administrative dollars. So you have to want to work a lot of hours for very little reward to operate an FMNP.

Our programs are more than just giving a recipient \$20-\$50 in coupons. They provide nutrition education, assistance when shopping at a farmers market, and help in how to prepare products when they return home. This is a big change from buying greasy fries and a burger, or buying something to pop into a microwave. Learning to shop for fresh vegetables and to prepare them takes time and effort; therefore, those of us

who have the necessary knowledge must spend the time and energy to teach those who do not, whether young or old. The interaction that recipients have with the educators and the farmers provides the most effective tool in increasing fruit and vegetable consumption with low income beneficiaries. That makes us the perfect fit to help WIC and SNAP recipients get needed nutrition benefits.

WIC new fruit and vegetable benefit (CVV) use at farmers markets has been disappointing. We are working with several farmers market associations in numerous states to identify the issues with farmer participation. The problems range from states simply not allowing farmers to participate in the WIC CVV program to less drastic but onerous rules that are prohibitive of small producers operating as a WIC CVV vendor.

The biggest complaint that we have from farmers is the varying rules and multitudes of processes that they have to go through to participate in these programs. In a perfect world, they would go to one place, fill out one form and participate in all programs. We have created many of the problems ourselves with the segmentation of programs across different agencies BUT we also recognize these problems and have started the process to fix them. We have been working across the divisions in the Food Nutrition Services of the Department of Agriculture to break down the silos and simplify the processes. As in all attempts to change government programs it takes time, but we have found the Program Directors and their staff to be attentive and willing to work with us to address the issues. I think that they are looking for ways to simplify the process and flow of information as much as the farmers are. The Food Nutrition Service has been exemplary in their effort to work “outside the box.”

I would like to thank Congress for its continuing support for the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program. These are the only programs that provide direct benefits to small farmers and low income families with so little effort. Unlike a lot of government programs, neither is considered an entitlement program, a welfare program, or even a subsidy to large corporate farmers. The FMNPs provide fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables to low-income women, children and the elderly, and they also provide much needed income to thousands of small family farmers. I don't need to remind this committee that these farmers spend their dollars in their local communities, thus promoting local economic development. These programs are a win-win for the country.

Our programs have seen reduced funding due to budget constraints and other priorities. As state budgets have tightened, it has been increasingly more difficult to find the necessary dollars to provide the required 30 percent state match for the WIC FMNP program. We have even had states that have had very successful, established programs simply drop FMNP because they could not provide the match or the personnel.

Our states want to expand into areas that are currently not being served. They also want to cooperate with the other programs that are available to farmers. The only limitations have been the funds to take this program to every area and a few adjustments to the law. FNS data shows that states are requesting fifty-four percent more funding annually for WIC and Senior FMNPs than funds are available. And all the while, we are

only serving very minimum number of recipients as evidenced by this very representative example: Washington States program only serves 26% of eligible recipients in the WIC FMNP. Alabama, the fourth largest SFMNP, is only serving 23% of the eligible seniors. The states have requested additional funds; they have shown demand; FNS has documented it; the states have proven they have the methodology for delivery; it is now time for Congress to come to aid of women, children, seniors and small farmers.

We have offered a proposal that will consolidate these programs into one, making it easier for us to operate across program boundaries and to cooperate fully with other groups. It will also make it easier for the farmers to have access to all of the programs and still serve recipients effectively and efficiently. The concept is simple. We have been operating incentive programs for nutrition programs in farmers markets for more than 20 years. We want to leverage that existing infrastructure and knowledge to help deliver all nutrition programs to small farmers. To abandon it would be wasteful and irresponsible. We think that the State Departments of Agriculture and the State Health and Human Services Agencies are the only ones that will provide the stability and the continuity to end hunger in EVERY county in the United States. It is imperative that the democratically elected state agencies remain at the center of these efforts as they have a vested interest in the local economies and hunger needs.

We strongly encourage you to make legislative changes that strengthen and expand the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs. These recommended changes provide flexibility for the Secretary to move funds where there is more demand. The most important action that this change will create is the consolidation of programs for a more efficient and effective mechanism within the states local food regions. Our association stands ready to work with you and your staff and with USDA staff to make this happen.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. I'll be happy to respond to your questions.

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PHILIP ANDREW BLALOCK

EXPERIENCE

- December 2002 – Present National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs
Executive Director
- February 2001 - Present Triangle Associates Inc.
President - Government Relations and Marketing Consultant
- July 2001 - Present Triangle Farm and Home, Inc.
President
- July 2001 - Present Triangle Feed and Supply, Inc.
President
- April 1999 - January 2001 United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Deputy Executive Director for State Operations
- September 1998 - April, 1999 United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Agricultural Marketing Specialist
- April 1991 - August 1998 North Carolina Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Specialist
Administrator Farmers Market Nutrition Program

EDUCATION

North Carolina State University
Raleigh, North Carolina, 27606
Bachelor of Science, Animal Science, May 1989

Person Senior High School
Roxboro, North Carolina
Graduated June 1983

AFFILIATIONS

2009 – Present	North Carolina Horse Council Executive Board
1988 - Present	North Carolina Horse Council.
1991 - 1998	National Association of Produce Market Managers
1991 - 1998	North Carolina Farm Writers and Broadcasters Association.
1992 - 1998	Board of Directors for Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, a non-profit prepared and perishable food transportation organization distributed to over forty recipient agencies in three cities.
1992 - 1998	National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs
1994	Vice President- Board of Directors, Interfaith Food Shuttle.
1994 - Present	Southeastern Grain and Feed Association.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Nongovernmental Witnesses

House rules require nongovernmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Philip Andrew Blalock
2. Organization you represent: National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs
3. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee: Administrator for Farmer Market Nutrition Programs North Carolina
Department of Agriculture, Marketing Specialist NCDA responsible for Farmers
Development
4. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee: _____

5. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold: Executive Director - National Association of Farmers Market
Nutrition Programs

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2008.

Name: Philip Andrew Blalock

Organization you represent (if any): _____

National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2008, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2008, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: X

Signature: Philip A Blalock

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: *Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.