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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Nutrition
Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Subcommittee on Nutrition:

Let me begin by giving real thanks for so many things, but first and foremost for opportunities. Thank you for the opportunity to let voices be heard, the opportunity to be part of a system that aids those in need, the opportunity to stress less when it comes to feeding my family, the opportunity to take part in local community markets that in turn create awareness and knowledge.

Many of these opportunities have not come easily. Just the fact that there is a current Congressional hearing in regards to these programs lets me know that things are always evolving. My hope is that the continued conversation aids in bettering the system for all involved.

I have been a participant in the Snap and Wic programs for over 3 years. As I foresee my time in both programs coming to an end I feel compelled to stay connected and be a conduit for change where needed.

I must say that my favorite part about using Snap and Wic are the farmer's market incentives. These incentives give me the option to show my son an alternative way of shopping; a way that takes us out of the traditional stale settings of our large chain grocery stores and lets us create relationships with vendors and neighbors. I do not always find the pricing at farmer's markets to be less than our local large chain supermarket but I do find the quality to be just as good and the lessons in regards to eating more locally, cutting down on shipping emissions, and putting growers' faces to products are lessons that will help mold a generation of growing children armed with social awareness.

As mentioned above, sometimes the pricing at a large chain grocery store for produce or meat will be less than at a market...this is where the incentives make an huge difference. Knowing that a certain allotment of my monthly benefits can be used at the market and will be matched definitely affects my shopping habits, especially during the summer months when markets are readily accessible and produce is abundant. I am able to use the extra money to buy products that I can freeze and use through the winter months.

I am adamant about making as much as our own food as possible and teaching children how things are made. It is wonderful to buy ingredients for such foods as applesauce, ice cream, and tomato sauce from the market and transform the list into a finished product. This empowers children and adults alike to learn how to adapt food to fit their likes and dislikes and also leaves little worry as to what additives have gone into a finished product. Crossroads Market in Takoma Park, MD does a superb job of creating a food demonstration each week that is made of items (many times) entirely from the market. This has given me the opportunity to learn about and taste new herbs, greens, fruits, and vegetables that I would otherwise have to purchase first to taste. This is wonderful for children and adults alike.

As is the case with any program a constant eye on how it is evolving and bettering the community must always be there. I have so many positive feelings from the market incentive program that is a part of Snap and Wic. In regards to the Snap program, I do wish that the markets were more transparent about the matching benefits that they offered. Many times a market site will advertise that they offer these incentives but it is difficult to decipher from the site, especially if you are not already familiar with the program. Also the site does not typically list the matching dollar amount on their website. I was also pondering if it would help to have all of the markets offering the same amount of matching dollars or if these amounts should be based per Snap recipient and the amount they may receive monthly. I am assuming that each of these ideas would be based on a number of factors and one important factor is the means by which a market receives its funding: private donations or government grants. As it currently stands, the ease of this program for participants may be one of its largest draws and too much bureaucracy may diminish the participation...and we would not like that to happen.

I thank you once again for letting voices be heard, for letting families feed their children in a healthy manner, and for helping create small communities within this grand United States of America. These are the opportunities we dream of providing for our children!

Sincerely,

Kathleen L. Kiley