

Testimony of
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Before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Hearing on
Increasing Domestic Consumption of U.S.-Grown Agricultural Products
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Prosperity for Producers and a Healthier America for All

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Fresh Produce Association, the largest and most diverse association representing the full supply chain of fresh fruits and vegetables—growers, shippers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, foodservice partners, and allied companies. Our members include thousands of U.S. fruit and vegetable producers whose work not only feeds American families but strengthens rural communities, supports hundreds of thousands of jobs, and contributes billions to the national economy.

IFPA is committed to advancing a simple but powerful objective: to grow a healthier world by increasing access to—and consumption of—fresh fruits and vegetables.

We know the science is clear: eating more fresh fruits and vegetables is one of the most effective actions Americans can take to improve their health. Recent federal initiatives—such as *Make America Healthy Again* and the updated *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*—underscore that increasing fruit and vegetable intake is essential for preventing chronic disease, reducing health care costs, and improving overall well-being...Yet most Americans still fall far short of recommended consumption levels.

Increasing access to U.S.-grown fruits and vegetables is not just a nutrition issue; it is an economic opportunity. When we strengthen produce consumption, we strengthen domestic markets for American farmers.

To meet this opportunity, growers and consumers need systemic solutions that integrate produce into health care, strengthen federal nutrition programs, modernize procurement practices, and make it easier for families in every community to choose fresh fruits and vegetables. When we support evidence-based policies, we create the opportunity to increase consumption. At the same time, we cannot lose sight of the need to make U.S. production economically viable for producers so they are able to meet the increased demand and prosper.

Strengthen Federal Nutrition Programs

Federal nutrition programs feed tens of millions of Americans every day. Ensuring these programs provide consistent access to fresh fruits and vegetables is one of the most direct strategies to increase consumption of U.S.-grown produce. Investing in nutrition programs can make individuals healthy eaters for life – providing longer-term benefits to both health and grower outcomes.

- 1. Fully fund the Women’s Infants & Children (WIC) fruit and vegetable benefit and expedite online redemption.** This monthly benefit is one of the most proven, effective tools for improving young children’s and mothers’ nutrition and reducing healthcare costs. Stable funding and online purchasing options will create a more consistent and reliable experience for producers, retailers, and participants.
- 2. Expand produce incentives in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).** Healthy incentive models help low-income families purchase more fruits and vegetables while directly supporting U.S. producers.
- 3. Strengthen school meal standards to ensure a wide variety of fresh produce.** Children consume up to half their daily calories in school. Today, students receive both a vegetable and a fruit for school lunch. Continuing to ensure a wide variety of fresh options in both the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program improves lifelong eating habits and is one of the most reliable markets for U.S. producers, especially locally. For some rural communities, the school lunch program is literally the largest restaurant in town.
- 4. Expand the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) to more elementary schools nationwide.** This phenomenally successful program introduces students to a broader array of fruits and vegetables—many for the very first time.

5. Increase USDA procurement of fresh produce and transition from low-cost to values-based purchasing. Today, only five fresh produce options are available in the USDA Foods direct purchasing program. We are leaving most varieties of U.S. grown produce off the table. Lev-eraging the existing U.S. produce supply chain for federal procurement supports farmers while ensuring high-quality, nutritious foods reach families.

6. Allow states to use up to 20% of their Temporary Emergency Feeding Assistance Program (TEFAP) funds for fresh produce through the USDA DoD Fresh Program. Food banks are eager to offer more fresh products; this change will deliver healthy fresh fruits and vegetables to families who need them most and support the U.S. fresh produce supply chain.

7. Support FDA labeling reforms that require clear disclosure of “meaningful amounts” of fruits and vegetables. Accurate labeling empowers consumers to make informed, healthier choices.

8. Make Produce Prescriptions a standard benefit in Medicare, Medicaid, Indian Health Services, and the Veterans Administration. Produce prescription programs improve health outcomes and reduce costs—an approach that pays dividends for patients and taxpayers alike.

9. Ensure Health Savings Accounts (HSA) and Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) allow purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables. If we believe food is medicine, the nation’s tax-advantaged health accounts should reflect that reality.

A More Responsive Supply Chain

Fresh produce moves fast—and it depends on a reliable, efficient supply chain. To expand domestic consumption, fruits and vegetables must be affordable, accessible, high-quality, and convenient options for consumers.

- **Make fresh fruits and vegetables more accessible and convenient choices.** Counter unworkable produce and floral packaging bans, while leading a national dialogue on reform and supporting research and development of packaging alternatives.
- **Keep fresh products convenient and affordable with better shelf life.** Guide members while supporting regional and state allies navigating Enhanced

Producer Responsibility (EPR) requirements. Encourage local and state governments to provide the key exemptions recognizing the key role packaging serves in reducing food loss and waste, preventing cross-contamination, and extending the shelf life of most fresh and fresh cut products.

Without thoughtful policy, a patchwork of state regulations could reduce access to fresh produce—an outcome no one can afford. Confusing designations and definitions within state EPR laws will also stifle innovation, actually reduce recycling and composting of packaging waste, and will increase both the cost to the- consumers and to the local communities dealing with trash.

Federal Investment in Domestic Production

To allow for increased consumption of fruits and vegetables in the United States, we must also ensure that domestic production keeps pace with consumer demand. Fresh produce growers are facing rising input costs, labor challenges, regulatory pressures, and increasing natural disasters, all of which make it harder to sustain and expand production.

Over the past two decades, the United States has lost over 230,000 farms, underscoring the economic pressures facing producers across the country. Policies that support farm viability and encourage new investment in specialty crop production are essential to maintaining a strong domestic supply.

- **Strategic investments in research, technical assistance, risk management tools, and conservation programs** can help growers remain competitive while adopting a wide range of production approaches—including conventional, organic, and regenerative systems—that respond to evolving consumer preferences and marketplace demand.

Supporting domestic growers across these production models will help strengthen supply chain resilience, expand consumer access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and ensure more of that production happens here in the United States.

Modernize Food Safety Regulation

Consumer confidence is essential to increasing produce consumption. Food safety must be consistent, transparent, risk-appropriate, and science-based.

- **Push for improvements at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** that create a prevention- focused culture within the Human Foods Program.
- **Sustain implementation of the 2022 FDA traceability rule**, including continued investment in technological tools—such as a Warehouse Management System—to support compliance along the entire supply chain.
- **Encourage uniformity between state and federal regulators** as Produce Regulatory Program Standards are implemented.
- **Ensure reliable federal funding** for state food safety training and compliance programs.

A strong, modernized food safety framework benefits consumers, retailers, and America’s growers.

Lasting Impacts on American Producers and Human Health

Despite tremendous economic headwinds, fresh fruit and vegetable producers are ready to meet growing demand, but they cannot do it alone. Congress has a vital role to play in ensuring every American has access to the fresh, nutritious foods that support good health and strong communities.

By strengthening federal nutrition programs, supporting a resilient supply chain and all forms of production, and modernizing food safety oversight, we can incentivize and increase domestic consumption of fresh produce while creating economic opportunity for farmers across our nation.

On behalf of the International Fresh Produce Association and the many U.S. growers we represent, thank you for your leadership and partnership. IFPA is happy to answer your questions.