

March 14, 2006

U.S. House of Representatives
2112 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

As you begin your work on the Fiscal Year 2007 Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we urge you to include \$5 million in funding for the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), a program authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill to be administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service. Bipartisan support for this program resulted in Congress providing \$1 million in first-year funding for FY 06.

The FMPP provides grants on a competitive basis to agricultural cooperatives, local governments, non-profits, economic development corporations and other entities to establish, expand and promote local farmers markets and other forms of direct farmer-to-consumer markets. USDA now estimates consumer spending at farmers markets and other direct marketing venues to now exceed \$1 billion. Demand is growing in part due to a desire to support local farmers and ranchers, an interest in markets that bring consumers and producers, urban and rural residents together and heightened concern about how food is grown or raised.

Prior to FY 06, AMS resources for direct marketing enterprises were primarily technical assistance, with no financial assistance available to expand direct farmer-to-consumer marketing opportunities. It is our strong belief that federal assistance to grow and promote direct marketing initiatives is a critical addition to USDA's portfolio of programs that serve small and mid-sized farms and ranches, beginning farmers, rural communities and consumers. We therefore strongly recommend an allocation of \$5 million in FY 07 to begin to fill a major gap in marketing assistance and help complete the AMS direct marketing toolbox.

Thank you for your time and good work.

Sincerely,

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association
Project for Public Spaces
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
Community Food Security Coalition
American Farmland Trust
Boston Public Market Association
California Coalition for Food and Farming
Catholic Charities Diocese of Sioux City, IA

CitySeed, Inc.
Community, Food and Agriculture
Community Food Bank
Cornucopia Institute
Corporation for Findlay Market
Food Animal Concerns Trust
The Food Trust
Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers of America Inc.
Kansas Rural Center
Lettuce Link, Fremont Public Association
Lion's Tooth Media
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute- Wisconsin
Michigan Land Use Institute
Northeast Midwest Institute
Northeast States Association for Agricultural Stewardship
The Minnesota Project
Mt. Vernon Health Communities Project
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Organic Trade Association
Project for Public Spaces
Small Potatoes Gleaning Project- Virginia
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Wisconsin Farmer's Union
Women, Food and Agriculture Network