Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 21, 2007

Chairman Tom Harkin
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition
and Forestry Committee
328A Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Saxby Chambliss
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition
and Forestry Committee
328A Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Colin Peterson
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Bob Goodlatte
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members;

We are writing to request that you include $300 million per year in mandatory funding for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program in the 2007 Farm Bill. Expanding this program would have tremendous benefits for children and farmers across the nation, and it would be especially effective in New Jersey.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program was originally part of a four state pilot program in the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act. Due to its success, Congress converted the initiative into a full program in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization of 2004. In FY 2006, Congress provided $15 million for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program in fourteen states and three Native American Tribal Organizations. Mandatory funding at $300 million would allow 100 schools in every state to implement the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, with additional funds allocated to states based on their total student population. This funding would help initiate this program in 7,500 schools across the nation.

Over the past few years, there has been a rise in obesity and related illnesses in children in the United States. In order to combat this alarming trend, the USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend an increase in the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables that studies have shown are important for a healthy diet, for cancer prevention, and for decreasing the risk of other chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. Access to fresh fruits and vegetables in schools will not only improve the nutrition of children, but will also establish healthy eating habits that children can take home to their families and that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

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Expanding the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program would be beneficial in helping New Jersey continue to be a leader in the farm-to-school programs. New Jersey farmers are among the most prolific in the country in growing fruits and vegetables, yet they are often just a few miles from distressed communities where children struggle for access to nutritious food. This additional funding will help to expand local efforts to bring fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables into school meal programs throughout our state. New Jersey is known for growing blueberries, cranberries, strawberries, peaches, tomatoes, and apples, which would be implemented in more schools across the state if funding were made available through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program.

Additionally, the program would help strengthen New Jersey's agricultural economy. New Jersey is a leading producer of specialty crops, ranking second nationally in blueberry production, fourth in peach production, fourth in bell pepper production, and eighth in tomato production. Our farmers are eager to develop new markets, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program will allow them to do so. This will undoubtedly benefit New Jersey, which produces nearly $ 1 billion in agriculture products annually.

We believe that funding this program at $300 million a year is a small price to pay to help improve the health and well being of our children. This program will help to protect our children from obesity and related illnesses that are often connected to poor nutrition and other factors. We appreciate your consideration of our request and look forward to working with you to reduce childhood obesity trends in New Jersey and across the nation.

Sincerely,

ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator

FRANK R. LAUTENBERG
United States Senator

CHRISTOPHER SMITH
Member of Congress

DONALD PAYNE
Member of Congress

ROBERT ANDREWS
Member of Congress

ALBIO SIRES
Member of Congress

FRANK PALLONE
Member of Congress

JIM SAXTON
Member of Congress

FRANK A. LOBIONDO
Member of Congress

BILL PASCRELL JR.
Member of Congress

STEVE ROTHMAN
Member of Congress

RUSH HOLT
Member of Congress