

Dear House Committee on Finance members,

As Registered Dietitians that work in the community education space, we are in support of House Resolution No 5536 regarding the appropriation of \$200,000 to be used for incentives for fruits and vegetables sold at participating Bonus Bucks outlets in Rhode Island. Farm Fresh RI has a long history of connecting local farmers with Rhode Island patrons, providing fresh and healthy options and helping address food and nutrition insecurity. Now more than ever local farmers need support, and likewise, as social service programs are at threat, hard working Rhode Islanders deserve the means to become food and nutrition secure.

Through our work, we have been fortunate to collaborate with Farm Fresh RI for 15 years, with one such collaboration including nutrition education tables at Farm Fresh RI markets. At these markets, our community nutrition office provides recipe samples that include in-season, local produce so patrons can try a recipe and decide if that produce item is a good fit for their household.

Our community nutrition office also encourages patrons to eat the recommended amount and variety of fruits and vegetables. During conversations with patrons, we have learned first hand how Bonus Bucks have allowed for patrons to afford enough produce for their household so they can meet the dietary recommendations and enjoy fruits and vegetables they love. On average, those that use Bonus Bucks spend approximately \$35 at the farmers' market each visit, thus receiving an additional \$35 to spend. A research article in the journal *Appetite* (2025) found that financial incentives, like Bonus Bucks, "not only increase access to sustainable food, but also influence food choice processes and contribute to greater acceptability of plant-based food in low-income families. The results call for financial incentives to be considered as an opportunity to support changes in dietary behaviour in low-income populations."

Changes in dietary behavior can help with chronic diseases. Feeding America reports that 58% and 33% of households served by Feeding America food pantry sites have a member with high blood pressure or with diabetes, respectively. By providing incentives towards produce at the farmers' markets, Farm Fresh RI is cultivating positive dietary behavior change that can lead to long term health benefits.

Thank you for considering this appropriation that will support the health of Rhode Islanders as well as boost the local food economy.

Sincerely,

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