

May 22, 2025

Dear Rhode Island Legislators,

I am writing to testify on behalf of **House Bill 5536** to sustain the Bonus Bucks Program at farmers markets in Rhode Island. Bonus Bucks are a benefit offered to SNAP recipients, allowing them to receive 1:1 matching funds for locally grown produce for every SNAP dollar they spend with local small businesses at farmers markets.

I wrote the first grant to establish the Bonus Bucks program at Farm Fresh Rhode Island in 2009, and administered the program until 2021. I have seen firsthand the amazing impact this program has had on local farmers and low-income shoppers. It has transformed neighborhood markets into sites of community health and prosperity.

The Bonus Bucks program is a double investment in the community, first by assisting nutritionally at-risk shoppers by allowing their dollars to go farther on healthy produce-only choices. Then, 100% of the Bonus Bucks funds spent by the shoppers then go directly to local farmers, as being a local small business is a requirement of program participation. It also encourages the use of SNAP dollars at these same local small businesses, helping keep federal benefit dollars in the Rhode Island economy.

With this bill, Rhode Island can join numerous states which are providing legislative support to SNAP nutrition incentives, including all of the other New England states. This bill represents a modest request that will shine in its return on investment for local farmers, almost all of who have been negatively impacted by retroactive federal cuts to programs: programs farmers had already planned and planted for.

Farm Fresh has always been the backbone and administrator of this grant, and has raised over \$1.7M in private and federal funds to date to support it. The time has come for modest state support to the program, to ensure it operates without interruption while federal funds reel from arbitrary executive orders and private philanthropy runs thin mending the numerous holes in the social safety net.

I urge you to pass this simple and impactful bill. It will support an existing, well run program that feeds our neighbors and supports our local economy.

Sincerely,

Sheri Griffin
former Co-Executive Director, Farm Fresh Rhode Island
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