



Columbia Heights Community Marketplace
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Robert Schubert

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City Council-District of Columbia

Good morning and thank you, Chairman Brown, and Council Members, for inviting us to testify this morning in support of the \$100,000 investment in the health of our citizens by Councilmember Graham. I'm glad that Ms. Anderson and Ms. Stockton, two Columbia Heights residents who use Senior Get Fresh Checks and our Festibucks bonus bucks to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, and Gus Schumacher of Wholesome Wave are joining me to talk about the importance of matching incentives to help low-income DC residents extend the purchasing power of their nutrition assistance benefits.

I thank Sabrina Lewis and her colleagues at the Department of Health for all the great work they do with the Farmers Market Nutrition and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition programs.

Festibucks, the name of our program that matches, up to a limit, the federal nutrition assistance benefits that many Columbia Heights Community Marketplace customers receive, helps them to purchase more fresh, locally grown produce than they normally would. This improves their health, multiplies economic benefits in the DC region by putting small farmers and food producers to work, creates jobs in the community and, over the long term, likely will drive down Medicare and Medicaid costs.

In our May through December 2011 season, more than 2,000 nutrition assistance customers, most of them families, spent \$28,809 of their benefits on healthy food at the Columbia Heights Community Marketplace and then spent \$17,259 more with the Festibucks we had matched to their benefits, up to \$10 per recipient, per weekend. That totaled more than \$46,000 of WIC, Senior Get Fresh Checks, WIC Cash Value Vouchers and SNAP being spent on fresh, healthy food grown within 150 miles of Washington, DC.

A number of our customers chimed in about the importance of the Festibucks:

- "I think Festibucks are wonderful because they help me purchase even more healthful food than I normally could. It improves health because the food is nutritious. I usually use the tokens to buy more fruit." -- Ms. Elizabeth Stockton, a longtime resident of Columbia Heights and recipient of Senior Get Fresh Checks.
- "It's beautiful. It really helps senior citizens on a fixed income who have limited resources." - Veronica, Senior "Get Fresh" Checks



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- "I come from Anacostia to get your product." - Senior "Get Fresh" Checks user
- "It is important because we can buy more healthy food." - Dalia Esquivel
- "It's a good program. Doubles your bucks for healthy food." - Patricia Britton
- "The coupons were very helpful and the folks who gave me the coupons were very kind and courteous." - Senior "Get Fresh" Checks user
- "It gives me more money to spend on good, healthy food for the kids." Ana P., WIC user
- "The prices are right, but the WIC checks -- it helps you buy a little more fruits and vegetables." - Lena R., WIC user
- "This program was incentive for my children to be more involved in their nutrition choices. The Festibucks reminded them of monopoly money. They found it fun to shop and make choices at the market. This was a great way to create prospective farm consumers. Bring this program back!" -- Lisa Cobham

But in addition to the health benefits cited in those testimonials, the Festibucks and federal nutrition assistance generated at least 12 Full Time Equivalent jobs in the Columbia Heights community and on nearby farms. Our vendors hired local residents to help staff their stands, and hired people to work on their farms to meet the demand coming from Columbia Heights.

With those health and economic benefits in mind, we urge the Council to invest at least \$100,000 this year in matching incentives at DC farmers market that accept WIC, Senior Get Fresh Checks, WIC Cash Value Checks and SNAP (Food Stamps).

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Robert Schubert