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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 Councilman Graham. I'm especially pleased to join Ms. Anderson, Ms. Stockton and Rob Schubert from Columbia Heights Community Market Place.**

**Some 30 years ago, several of us led by then DC Extension Director Thornell Page and our beloved DC Nutrition leader Mildred Brooks worked to start one of the District's first open-air farmers market at RFK Stadium—hundreds of citizens still purchase from farmers there. We sorely miss Mildred who did so much for the health of District citizens.**

**Subsequently, farmers markets have taken root in many neighborhoods of the District, from Ward 8 to Columbia Heights to DC Greens in Burleith. In peak season, perhaps as many as 25,000 or more citizens will buy, each week, healthy, regionally grown produce at these lively community places.**

**A decade ago, to ensure all citizens have access to this healthy, fresh produce, Sabrina Lewis and her colleagues at DHS applied and were successful in accessing the then new USDA WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program "vouchers".**

**In 2010, some 6,600 seniors received these vouchers to exchange at local farmers markets. We stopped by to visit Sabrina and her colleagues last week at their DC offices with Rob Schubert and Lauren Biel . to thank them for their outreach on these programs. Marilyn Tingling, Sabrina's Director, said seniors have already enquired when the next round of vouchers will be distributed. It's a popular program. For younger citizens on WIC, all receive WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Vouchers. Together these programs invest more than \$500,000 annually provided by USDA to enable seniors and WIC clients to purchase fresh produce at local farmers markets.**

**A few years ago, a great friend, John Hyde, who sold at Maryland farmers markets approached me to see if these programs could be expanded to SNAP clients, focusing on an underserved vulnerable neighborhood at Crossroads in Takoma Park. We approached USDA Food and Nutrition Service to ask for permission to install a wireless EBT machine at the Crossroads Farmers Market and to "double" SNAP food stamps if used at this market. The Kellogg Foundation/Project for Public Spaces provided initial seed funding in 2007 and subsequently, with annual support from our new Wholesome Wave nonprofit organization.**

The Crossroads program was very successful and some 2,000 WIC, Seniors and SNAP clients used their benefits which were doubled at Crossroads in 2011. Farmers were especially enthused at the new revenue source. In 2009, our Wholesome Wave “double value” program expanded to the District, initially at Fresh Farm Markets’ site on H Street NE, and in subsequent years to White House, and Foggy Bottom. They are known as Double Dollars—Michelle Obama kicked off the program in 2010 at the White House Farmers Market.

Further expansion in 2011 took place in Ward 8 Farmers Market (Michael Segal) and Columbia Heights Community Market Place with modest Wholesome Wave “double value” funding support. Rob Schubert reported that some 2,100 WIC, Senior and SNAP participants purchased more than \$45,000 in fresh produce in 2011.

In 2011, our Wholesome Wave “double value” program reached some 225 farmers markets in 26 states, working to improve nutrition for hundreds of thousands SNAP, WIC and Seniors clients, while increasing revenue for farmers—farmers who are becoming Pharmacies in helping to reduce obesity, mitigate diabetes with fresh fruits and vegetables as medicine—and without side effects!

A number of cities have been especially active in promoting these important nutrition incentive programs—Boston’s Mayor Tom Menino is investing \$100,000 annually in Boston Bounty Bucks, New York City Mayor Bloomberg has an outstanding \$200,000 Health Bucks program, Philadelphia Mayor Nutter, Philly Bucks and Baltimore’s Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake’s distributes “Baltimore Bucks”.

USDA and Congress continue to be energized as the health, farmer revenue, jobs and community impact benefits come to fruition. Moody’s Analytics say \$1 in SNAP generates some \$1.73 in economic activity—add “nutrition incentives” at farmers markets to this economic activity and I suspect Marc Zandi at Moody’s would recalculate to say \$1 in SNAP at farmers markets offering incentives would perhaps generate \$3 in economic activity at the market and especially in rural towns where farmers would spend their revenue on new hires, tractors and hoop houses.

I’ve noticed many farmers coming to the District hire district citizens to staff their booths as demand and customers are so high. So, jobs are created by these programs both in the District and in the rural towns supplying such fresh produce.

At Wholesome Wave, we are also expanding our Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program or FVRx. In 2011, FVRx operated in four states at seven health clinics. I understand that the Unity Health Clinic near the Columbia Heights Community Market Place may be applying for FVRx program to Wholesome Wave for 2012. Doctors at such clinics provide monthly “Veggie Prescriptions” to diet impacted patients to exchange at local farmers markets. So far, these have worked exceptionally well in our pilot clinics

**We'll see later this spring what the health impact might be and whether an extra serving or two per day per family member can reduce health care costs, especially with Medicare and Medicaid patients. Can "Farmers truly become Pharmacies" to help us control spiraling health care costs? The early anecdotal evidence is positive and we hope DC Unity Health Clinic is successful in its application. Local hospitals can also contribute to "Veggie Prescriptions" through their Community Benefit Reporting obligations.**

**Mr. Chairman and Council Members, it has been a great honor to testify today. I'm an avid farmers market shopper, and can assure you the produce is fresh, tasty, healthy and grown nearby and now, hopefully with your support, can be made more accessible and affordable to all our District citizens.**