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Combining Food Assistance, Farmers Markets is a Win-Win for Families and Farmers

Position Statement Supporting House Bill 586

Given before the House Appropriations Committee

The Maryland Market Money program matches purchases made with federal food assistance benefits at participating farmers markets throughout the state. The program gives low-income Marylanders better access to fresh produce, helps sustain farmers markets in communities that otherwise don't have access to fresh food, and increases revenue for Maryland farms and agricultural producers. The Maryland Farms and Families Act would create a grant program that will allow the Market Money program to continue to thrive around the state, leveraging federal and private funds to maximize the program's benefit to Maryland. For these reasons, Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports HB 586.

Even with federal nutrition assistance, it is difficult for low-income households to afford nutritious food. The Market Money program provides up to \$5 in matching funds per market day to SNAP, WIC, and Farmers Market Nutrition Program recipients who shop at participating farmers markets. This can make a huge difference for SNAP recipients, who on average only receive \$1.35 to spend on each meal. Since it was implemented, the program has been a clear success, with 95 percent of Market Money recipients reporting an increase in healthy food consumption as a result of the program.ⁱ The grant program created by HB 586 will ensure the program has a stable future, providing critical access to healthy food to Maryland families who struggle to afford enough to eat.

Maryland Market Money provides an incentive to shop at farmers markets, which channels federal dollars directly into the Maryland economy and increases revenue for Maryland's farmers and agricultural sector. It can be difficult for markets in rural or low-income communities to be sustainable due to small customer bases. State investment in the Maryland Market Money program will increase revenue to these markets, which are also likely to serve customers in communities with limited access to fresh food. Every dollar of Market Money used generates \$2.30 in revenue for local farmers.ⁱⁱ State investment in the program would allow Maryland to apply for additional federal grants, which would allow more Marylanders to benefit from the program

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the House Appropriations Committee give a favorable report to House Bill 586.

ⁱ "Maryland Market Money 2015 Annual Report." Maryland Farmers Market Association. https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB2Rz6Dlj_7bemYoQ2c3SjJMUDA/view

ⁱⁱ Maryland Farms and Families Act." Maryland Farmers Market Association. <http://www.marylandfma.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Maryland-Farms-and-Families-Act-Summary.pdf>