

# **INCREASE PURCHASES OF FRUITS & VEGETABLES FOR NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

## ***Recommendation in Brief***

Utilize an additional \$2.75 billion of Section 32 funds over ten years to specifically purchase fruits and vegetables for USDA's domestic nutrition assistance programs, including the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, and other commodity distribution programs.

## ***Problem***

The most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends increasing fruit and vegetable consumption to 4-½ cups per day for a reference 2,000-calorie diet, yet research shows that average consumption of fruits and vegetables among the adult population is 2 to 2-1/2 cup equivalents per day and among school children is approximately 2 cup equivalents per day. Consumers commonly note that they limit consumption of fruits and vegetables because they are perceived to be expensive, time consuming to prepare and perishable. USDA nutrition assistance programs reach one in five Americans. Therefore providing readily accessible servings of fruits and vegetables to low-income populations and schools could significantly increase overall consumption and improve health.

Additionally, five program crops (rice, cotton, wheat, corn and soybeans) continue to receive the vast majority of Federal agriculture assistance even though U.S. specialty crop production is now equal in value to U.S. program crops. In fact, 60 percent of U.S. farmers and ranchers do not receive direct cash support from the farm bill, simply because they do not raise a program crop. These specialty crop producers face the same weather and other production challenges as their program crop counterparts.

This equity issue was raised at farm bill forums across the country. For example, James of New York testified, "Historically, the farm bill has benefited a small but crucial group, farmers. However, by supporting expansion of...(fruit and vegetable purchases), we have the unique opportunity to use the 2007 farm bill to directly and positively impact the health of our children and begin to reverse a dangerous trend toward obesity."

## ***Recommended Solution***

The Administration proposes to increase Section 32 purchases of fruits and vegetables by an additional \$200 million in fiscal year 2008, \$225 million in FY 2009, \$250 million in FY 2010, \$275 million in FY 2011, and \$300 million in FY 2012 and thereafter above the last five-year annual average level of approximately \$291 million.

Under this proposal, USDA would survey the National School Lunch Program and other nutrition assistance programs to determine which traditional fruit and vegetable products

are most in demand. USDA intends that this additional money be used to purchase products that are currently provided to all nutrition assistance programs.

USDA would also consider offering value-added items to schools if there is demand. Some of the products USDA might offer include fruit cups, juice boxes, ready-to-eat fresh-cut vegetables in bags, and ready-to-eat fresh-cut fruits in bags. Fresh-cut vegetables and fruits provided by this proposal would support schools' efforts to increase the utilization of salad bars.

### ***Background***

The Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 provided USDA \$200 million in funding for the support of fruit and vegetable markets. Most of this funding went to food banks and other feeding programs, in addition to schools. This proposed purchase program would operate in much the same manner.

Purchasing traditional fruit and vegetable products also supports domestic markets, and helps reduce surplus inventory by producers. When balancing purchases of lower cost traditional items with purchases of higher cost value-added items, USDA is better able to support producer markets while providing products most attractive to school children to increase their consumption.