

Testimony of
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Agency Performance Oversight Hearing on Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Budget
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
Committee on Public Services and Consumer Affairs
Council of the District of Columbia
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John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Room 412
Washington, DC 20004

Councilmember Bowser and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today about DCRA's role in increasing access to healthy food across the District. My name is Kristin Roberts and I am a nutrition associate at D.C. Hunger Solutions, an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center. D.C. Hunger Solutions works to create a hunger-free community and improve the nutrition, health, economic security, and well-being of low-income District residents. Part of our work involves increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in low-income parts of the District that are underserved by sources of healthy food.

D.C. Hunger Solutions hosts the D.C. Farmers' Market Collaborative, a group composed of market managers, advocates, and city agency staff, which works to promote District markets and improve low-income residents' access to healthy food. The Collaborative helped equip and train 10 District farmers' markets to accept SNAP/Food Stamp (EBT) benefits and launched an ad campaign to promote the acceptance of SNAP and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) benefits at these markets. The more than 20 farmers' markets across the city are a great source of fresh produce for many District residents, and they add commerce and vitality to many communities.

DCRA, and Sam Williams in particular, has been very supportive of farmers' markets. We appreciate the agency's efforts to institute simpler regulations and permitting, which would ease the start-up process for farmers' markets – potentially bringing more markets to the city and helping encourage markets to locate in underserved communities. We have been able to review the agency's current draft of revised vending regulations. The revised regulations attempt to create a friendlier environment for farmers' market, and they do that, for example, by excluding farmers' markets (and other public markets) from many rules, such as design standards for vending vehicles, that do not apply. This set of regulations, if adopted, will represent a big improvement over the current situation, where it is very unclear which regulations pertain to farmers' markets and which permits and licenses are necessary for market managers.

We do, however, see several ways to improve on and strengthen the revised regulations and look forward to working with DCRA, DDOT and other partners to make the rules even better for promoting farmers' markets. Additionally, D.C. Hunger Solutions and the Farmers' Market Collaborative will submit written suggestions on the new vending regulations when they are available for public comment.

In addition to supporting farmers' markets, the District can create new venues for selling fresh fruits and vegetables in the city – especially in neighborhoods currently underserved by healthy food. We believe that the District has a real opportunity both to satisfy demand for fresh produce (evidenced by the ad hoc, temporary vendors who often pop up – for example, farmers selling watermelons out of the back of a truck when their produce is in season) and to provide a new entrepreneurship opportunity to residents who would sell fruits and vegetables as an ongoing, sustainable business. Further, expanded fruit and vegetable vending could help improve residents' diets and combat the District's high rates of obesity and diet-related chronic illnesses.

Next week, D.C. Hunger Solutions will be releasing a report, "When Healthy Food is Out of Reach," which identifies the District's food deserts, discusses the health

and economic implications of lack of access to healthy, affordable food, and recommends the creation of a Healthy Food Access Initiative, which would be modeled on a highly successful Pennsylvania program that encourages fresh food retail development. Such an Initiative would create policies and incentives and secure financing to develop full-service grocery stores in underserved, low-income areas. It also would improve the capacity of existing food retailers in those areas and support smaller fresh food businesses, such as fruit and vegetable vendors. One specific prong of the Initiative would be promoting the sale of produce on public space by identifying sustainable sites (e.g., public housing courtyards, metro stops, park and recreation facilities) and developing a special fast-track class of permits to recruit produce sellers.

Therefore, we encourage DCRA and other agencies, such as DDOT and DOH, to get involved in the work of the Healthy Food Access Initiative and to think broadly about creative ways to open up new places in the city for fresh produce sales – especially in underserved areas. One great example of creative fresh produce sales is New York City’s Green Carts program, which licenses fresh produce vendors separately from other vendors and provides special training and technical assistance – under the condition that Green Cart operators locate in areas specially targeted to improve access to fresh produce.

In closing, D.C. Hunger Solutions encourages DCRA to continue supporting farmers’ markets and looking for ways to bring more fresh produce to parts of the District that are underserved by healthy food.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

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