



United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics and Research

“Food as Medicine: Current Efforts and Potential Opportunities”

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Written Testimony Submitted by:

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the Subcommittee Hearing, *Food as Medicine: Current Efforts and Potential Opportunities*.

As the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, I have the unique honor of representing and supporting Kentucky’s more than 75,000 farm families. I also have an opportunity to promote my home state’s fresh, local, and healthy agricultural products. Through the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, I have created and supported many pathways to alleviate hunger in Kentucky.

One in eight Kentuckians, which includes one in six Kentucky children, face hunger each day. Breaking the cycle of food insecurity is something I believed my administration had to take on. So, seven years ago, at the beginning of my administration, I created the Kentucky Hunger Initiative (KHI). This first-of-its-kind program built and expanded collaborative partnerships between the public and private sectors to minimize hunger and food insecurity in the state. To date, the KHI has raised more than \$36 million for hunger relief programs. The KHI and its members also have increased public awareness of hunger in the state. I’m proud that through the KHI, organizations such as Feeding America, Feeding Kentucky, Humana, the Kentucky Farm Bureau, Farm Credit Mid-America and so many more have joined together in ways they might not have before.

For many Kentuckians, access to food is critical. For many more, access to the right food is key. KDA supports many initiatives that promote nutritious diets and healthy lifestyles. We believe that diets concentrated on nutrient-rich food lead to enhanced health outcomes. And, we also recognize that state agencies are increasingly serving a critical role in access to nutritious foods.





We are blessed that Kentucky's agricultural producers provide our state and world with an abundant, affordable, nutritious, and wholesome food supply. They feed us so it makes sense to bring them to the table — as together we develop nutrition and Food as Medicine programs.

Today you will hear testimony from Martin Richards of the Community Farm Alliance. Martin's organization and the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund, a program administered by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture have partnered since 2017 on the Kentucky Double Dollars program. Double Dollars provides individuals who participate in SNAP, WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, or the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program additional funds to buy local products at farmers' markets. When combined, the four programs bring healthy, local food to a family's dinner table and provide economic opportunities to Kentucky's producers. As an example, when added to the SFMNP, an eligible senior received almost \$100 in purchasing power during the 2022 market season—\$48 from SFMNP and \$48 from Double Dollars. This makes an impact in a person's health.

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture is thankful for its relationship with the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry and the United States Department of Agriculture. Through the work we have accomplished together we have advanced several initiatives, including Kentucky's Farm to School program, which has generated more than \$8 million in funding to local producers and allows Kentucky students to receive fresh locally grown products for their summer feeding programs and the National School Lunch Program.

Additionally, we used \$1.3 million in Summer Feeding Funds for USDA Foods to school districts across the state.

I also supported Kentucky Senate Bill 151 to remove the "barrier to breakfast" by clarifying the current law regarding breakfast at school. The simple change leaves no ambiguity as to what is allowed: Under the new law, Kentucky school districts are permitted to serve breakfast during the first 15 minutes of instructional time. A child who starts the school day hungry has a more difficult time concentrating on learning.

Supporting healthy food for healthy outcomes in our schools is imperative because it's linked to positive academic performance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, school food service personnel in Kentucky and across the nation worked long, hard hours to feed students even though schools were closed. I went to schools to help hand out food at school drive-throughs, made possible by nationwide waivers. Our schools, summer feeding programs and more benefited from the nationwide waivers established in 2020.





My office was one of the first to request these waivers. I understand that not all of them can or need to be continued. However, when I have conversations with school food service personnel, the one thing I hear more than anything else is that allowing the non-congregate feeding waiver to continue permanently will be a great help toward supporting child nutrition in the long run. Allowing children to eat off-site and take food home — especially during the summer — is critical. Making this waiver permanent takes a legislative change at the federal level and I ask for the Subcommittee's help to make this happen.

Looking ahead, we have more and exciting work to do. During 2022, the KDA received important grant funding through the TEFAP Reach and Resiliency, Local Food Purchase Assistance and Local Food for Schools programs. This represents about \$10.4 million in funding to expand and cultivate programs that will bring healthy food to more Kentuckians, leading to better health outcomes for all.

Thank you again for your consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ryan F. Quarles

Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture

