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*Protect, Prevent, Live Well*

June 12, 2012

U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals and advocates in the world, I write to urge you to prioritize programs that improve public health as you move forward with consideration of S. 3240, the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012, and to oppose any amendments to weaken key nutrition and conservation programs.

We are increasingly aware of the positive and negative impacts of our current agriculture policies on the public's health. The link between access to healthy, nutritious food and positive health is undeniable. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recently released a [report](#) calling on Congress and the administration to review and report on the implications of agriculture policies for obesity in the United States.

With the reauthorization of the farm bill, Congress has the opportunity to support public health while ensuring thriving farm and rural economies. We applaud many of the provisions included in the farm bill approved by the Senate Agriculture Committee. Specifically, we support:

- Maintaining funding for SNAP-Ed and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to improve nutrition and health outcomes for vulnerable populations through access and education.
- Hunger-Free Community Incentive Grants that create a SNAP local fruit and vegetable incentive grant program at farmers markets and other healthy food retailers.
- Community Food Projects Program that helps communities build food self-reliance.
- Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program that helps farmers markets grow their capacity and create food hubs that can connect farmers with more market opportunities.

While these provisions represent a step forward, others are needed to truly improve the nation's health, and ultimately our economy. Therefore, as you move forward with considering the bill on the Senate floor, we urge you to:

- Support Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand's amendment to restore the proposed cuts to SNAP.
- Support Sen. Frank Lautenberg's amendment to require the federal government to study the possible link between sugar-sweetened beverages and obesity and the impact of public health proposals on obesity and health.

- Protect federal nutrition programs including SNAP, SNAP-Ed, the Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program that ensure the most basic health and nutrition needs of vulnerable Americans.
- Oppose further cuts to conservation programs. It is critical to protect mandatory funding for farm conservation programs, especially those aimed at working lands, and to ensure adequate conservation technical assistance.
- Support economic development for local and regional farm and food infrastructure, including assistance for farm-to-school programs that link farmers with consumers and increase access to healthy food, reduce food insecurity, improve nutrition, and promote self-reliance, economic development and job creation.
- Increase farming opportunities and training for beginning, minority, women, immigrant, and socially disadvantaged farmers who play an important role in building robust local and regional food systems.
- Support research, extension and education programs that strengthen local, regional, sustainable and organic agriculture, promote good nutrition and ensure public development of seeds and breeds necessary for a diverse and healthy diet.

While we recognize the current fiscal challenges, we believe a farm bill that prioritizes public health, nutrition and conservation is crucial to ensuring the health of our nation and we urge you to support these programs as you work to reauthorize the farm bill this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Georges" being the most prominent.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (E)  
Executive Director