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**Comments of Berry Friesen, Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee  
March 16, 2007**

Thank you, Chairman Brubaker and Senator Waugh, for providing this opportunity today to address some of the important issues before the Senate Agriculture Committee. I am speaking today on behalf of the PA Hunger Action Center, which has been working statewide since 1978 to end hunger and improve food security in our Commonwealth.

My purpose is to emphasize the importance of four food and nutrition programs that your Committee has a responsibility to oversee and that are administered by the PA Department of Agriculture.

- **State Food Purchase Program**, which provides an annual allocation to each county for the purpose of supporting food distributions by local food pantries and soup kitchens;
- **Farmers' Market Nutrition Program**, which provides four, \$5 checks to WIC participants and low-income seniors to encourage the purchase of healthy, locally grown produce;
- **Healthy Farms-Healthy Schools**, which if funded would provide grants of up to \$15,000 per school to introduce kindergarten children and their families to locally grown food; and
- **Farmers' Market Promotion Program**, which if funded would help remove barriers among low-income households to the utilization of farmers' markets.

Each of these programs addresses the fact that nearly 10 percent of Pennsylvania households experience food insecurity. (That data is from the USDA's report from November 2006.) For each of these households, the question is whether that condition of food security will lead to a more severe condition that is more costly: hunger, overweight and/or increased risk of diabetes, hypertension or cardiovascular disease.

Pennsylvania has been a national leader in fighting hunger. According to USDA data released in November 1999, Pennsylvania had the 6<sup>th</sup> best food security rate in the nation and was *the best* among the large population states. In the USDA data released last fall, Pennsylvania had fallen to 18<sup>th</sup>. This decline has been driven by larger economic forces, particularly the stagnation of wages at lower pay levels and the rising costs of essential items such as energy, housing and health care.

In these challenging circumstances, it is important to keep these programs adequately funded. The Governor's budget proposal would not do that; in fact, it would cut the State Food Purchase Program by 4 percent and the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program by 33 percent. The members of this Committee have traditionally played an important role in protecting these programs and that effort is needed again. It is particularly important to send a strong signal supporting the Farmer's Market Nutrition Program, which will be rolled out before the new budget is complete and which will be hamstrung unless the Department is assured the General Assembly intends to at least continue the current funding level of \$3 million.

I also request that you to actively engage our congressional delegation around the federal Farm Bill. As you know, Pennsylvania has often been shorted by that legislation. Nutrition is one of the areas where this imbalance can be addressed. By supporting the strengthening of our federal nutrition programs in the Farm Bill, you will be helping Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania agriculture and low-income Pennsylvanians. Thank you!

Statewide leadership to end hunger