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Senate Agriculture Committee Listening Session

February 21, 2007

Comments of John Weidman, Deputy Executive Director, The Food Trust

Good morning. I would first like to thank Senator Brubaker, Senator Kitchen and Kristin Ebersole for making this listening session possible. The Food Trust works to improve access to affordable nutritious food. A core part of our mission is connecting urban and rural communities through farmers' markets. We currently have 20 farmers' markets that we manage in Southeastern Pennsylvania. We also provide nutrition education services in 100 schools in the region. The Kindergarten Initiative, a program we developed that combines PA-grown fruit and vegetable snacks, nutrition education, and farm trips, is the model for the Healthy Farms & Healthy Schools program. The Food Trust, along with Greensgrow Farms, co-chairs the Farmers' Market Alliance (FMA), an group that meets in Philadelphia with the goal of bring more PA-grown food into schools and communities. The FMA has the following recommendations for the Commonwealth:

- Healthy Farms & Health Schools program – We strongly support this program and believe that it will help young children form healthy eating habits, and open more opportunities for farmers to work with schools. We feel that \$500,000 is enough for a strong first year, but we recommend program funding of \$1,000,000 to meet the demand we are expecting.
- Farmers' Market Development Act – This mini-grant program passed by the legislature in 2006 would provide funds for start-up and expansion of farmers' markets. We are asking the legislature to fund this program this year with at least \$250,000 to get the program started. We recommend \$1,000,000 to meet the demand we are expecting for this program. Pennsylvania ranks third in the nation for direct-farmer to consumer-sales with over \$50 million in sales annually. This program helps strengthen our economy, improve public health, and help PA farmers continue to gain market share in the competitive fresh produce business.
- The Farmers Market Nutrition program – The FMA supports this win-win program for farmers and low-income mothers and seniors. We support increasing the current budget for this critical program by \$1,000,000 to reach the 2006 level. We also ask the Committee to explore the possibility of expanding the voucher amount from \$20 annually to \$30. Currently Vermont as a \$100 voucher program at their farmers' markets.

Please support The Food Trust through the United Way Campaign. The Food Trust's Specific Care Code is 09195.

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- A PA Fruit and Vegetable program – The Federal fruit and vegetable program currently serves 25 schools in Pennsylvania with free produce to encourage healthier eating habits. The program is managed by the PA Dept. of Education. The FMA recommends a PA-grown program modeled on the federal program.
- Tracking PA-grown at the Philadelphia Produce Terminal – The FMA recommends that the legislature ask the Philadelphia Produce Terminal to create a tracking system that measures sales of PA produce. The last time a study was conducted, the Terminal was selling 1% from PA. A tracking system would help to focus efforts on increasing sales of PA-grown foods at the Terminal.

Lastly I would like to announce some good news: The Food Trust, along with many local partners, will be opening a large-scale, open-air farmers market this summer at the historic Shambles structure at Headhouse Square in Center City Philadelphia. The Shambles were originally created as a farmers' market in the late 18th century. The market will have over 40 vendors and will be a wonderful new marketplace for Pennsylvania farmers as well as an asset to the region's food lovers.

Thank you.