

**Testimony Presented To the Connecticut Environment Committee by the
Connecticut Department of Agriculture**

3/20/15

H.B. No. 5734 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING FARMERS' MARKET COUPONS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS.

Connecticut's Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition program is a federal-state cooperative initiative that benefits nutritionally at-risk senior citizens in the state by providing vouchers for fresh Connecticut Grown produce and honey. It also benefits the Connecticut farmers who grow and produce those products by supplementing demand and sales.

Increasing the total allotment of vouchers provided to each senior, as proposed by H.B. 5734, will provide an additional three-dollar benefit per year to those seniors who receive vouchers, but it also will significantly reduce the total number of seniors who can be served if total program funding remains constant.

The Department of Agriculture makes a concerted effort to serve every possible eligible senior within available resources. Based on historical redemption rates, the agency over-distributes vouchers in an attempt to ensure every dollar of voucher funding is used.

In 2014, for example, the agency received \$76,433 in federal funding and \$365,062 in state funding for Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition vouchers, enough to provide the current \$18 per-person benefit to 22,075 seniors.

Because history has shown that not every senior receiving benefits redeems every voucher, the Department of Agriculture provided vouchers to a total of 32,845 seniors through a statewide distribution network of 188 sites. Of the vouchers distributed, 72 percent were redeemed, with a total reimbursed value virtually equal to voucher funding.

Increasing the statutory allotment to \$21 per senior would, using 2014 figures, reduce the number of seniors funded to only 18,921. While the agency supports the concept of enhancing benefits to Connecticut's nutritionally at-risk seniors, it opposes a reduction in the number of seniors served.