Promote Healthy Diet and Physical Activity Behaviors

ACHIEVEMENTS: USDA continues to make great progress in partnership with the Nation's schools in implementing updated nutrition standards pursuant to the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA). 97 percent of schools are reporting that they are meeting the new meal patterns. Recent studies from Harvard and the University of Connecticut are showing positive outcomes from these standards in a number of schools, such as students eating more fruits and vegetables and no increase in plate waste.

The Food Nutrition Service (FNS) used FY 2015 funds to provide grants to entities working with the farmers' market community to provide markets with different types of assistance. These grants addressed the most commonly requested types of assistance, which are: (1) personnel costs to operate farmers' markets; (2) materials to inform SNAP participants of their ability to use their benefits at farmers' markets; (3) miscellaneous equipment, such as scrip, and technology infrastructure (wifi hotspots, phone lines, electrical lines, etc.); and (4) replacement equipment for existing markets and farmers that are in situations of hardship.

In FY 2015, there were a total of 6,483 SNAP-authorized farmers' markets and direct-marketing farmers. This represents more than an eight fold increase since 2008 when there were 753 SNAP-authorized farmers' markets. Meanwhile, SNAP redemptions increased from $4.3 million in 2008 to $19.4 million in 2015.

CHALLENGES: FNS continues to face several challenges to increasing the availability of SNAP at farmers' markets. For example, FNS must identify farmers' markets and direct-marketing farmers who are eligible to participate in SNAP; successfully encourage markets and farmers to become SNAP-authorized; and provide technical assistance (to complete the application process, securing EBT equipment, operating that equipment, etc.). FNS may also encounter additional, unforeseen challenges once it determines the disposition of the $4 million FY 2016 funding.