



TO: County Executive Crowley & Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

DATE: October 29, 2021

RE: Invest in SNAP produce incentive programs like the Milwaukee Market Match Program

As leaders in Milwaukee County we know that you face many challenges in evaluating how to invest the County's financial resources – challenges exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. At the same time, we believe that both the current budget process and ongoing conversations around America Rescue Plan Act funding represent an opportunity to lay the foundation for total community health – starting with efforts to address the growing issue of food insecurity. **As you think about spending priorities, please consider investing \$1 million in the Milwaukee Market Match program.**

Across the United States, and throughout our own county, many families and individuals are struggling with food insecurity. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), called FoodShare in Wisconsin, helps alleviate this issue by enabling participants to stretch their food dollars. A related effort, known as SNAP produce incentives, helps families stretch their dollar even further by providing matching dollars to purchase fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets and other grocery retail.

A local example is the Milwaukee Market Match program. In this specific program, spending is matched dollar-for-dollar. If a family spends \$20 at the market, they are given an additional \$20 to spend at the market on fruits and vegetables. Last fall, with an infusion of philanthropic funding, this incentive program ran from September through November. In that short 10-week timeframe, with only 5 farmers markets in the county participating, the pilot program served 793 unique households from 37 different zip codes. Just think what the impact could be with more resources!

When people struggle with making their food dollar stretch further, they may have to sacrifice quality or variety or even skip meals to make ends meet. The results can be devastating, leading to an increased risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and some types

of cancer; trouble in school for children and teens; and increased stress and poor mental health. Good nutrition is at the core of good health.

Moreover, SNAP produce incentives are even more timely as the County increases its strategic focus on achieving racial health equity. As you might expect, the impact of COVID-19 continues to be seen in food insecurity rates, which have increased over the past 18 months. Additionally, what you may not be aware of is the degree that Wisconsin continues to experience high rates of racial disparities around food insecurity. According to the US Census Household Pulse of December 2020, nationally, among households with children, 2.8% of white families reported “often facing insufficient food” in the last seven days, compared to 3.9% of Hispanic families and 4.8 % of Black families. In Wisconsin those same rates were 1.8%, 32.4%, and 10.7% respectively. We can and must do better.

Currently, produce incentive programs in Milwaukee operate on a minimal budget, and demand certainly outweighs resources. With funding from the County, a more robust program could be implemented countywide, helping more families, and creating even more customers for local growers. Indeed, these types of programs can have a marked impact on the local economy—every \$5 spent using SNAP generates as much as \$9 in economic activity.

Thus, SNAP produce incentive programs are a win for families, farmers, and the local economy. Public investment, exemplified in areas like Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles, can greatly enhance the reach and impact of these efforts.

Before closing, we want to applaud past investments you have already made to help food insecure families. Specifically, we commend the \$1.8 million investment just last year to ensure our local food banks and food pantries had what they needed to better serve the community. The work done by our emergency food system partners is nothing short of incredible, and we are fortunate to have such great partners locally addressing hunger in our community. You have the opportunity to build on that success.

Please continue to focus on improving equitable access to sufficient and healthy food by **investing \$1 million in the Milwaukee Market Match program.**

If you have any questions, please reach out to Nicole Hudzinski, Government Relations Director with the American Heart Association at nicole.hudzinski@heart.org or 608-225-4042.