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United Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association

December 15, 2003

Patricia Daniels
Director, Supplemental Food Programs Division
Food and Nutrition Service
USDA
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 520
Alexandria, VA 22302

PI-20

RE: Revisions to the WIC Food Packages

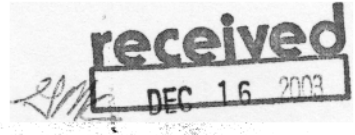
Dear Ms. Daniels:

On behalf of United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association (United) and our member companies, we appreciate the opportunity to provide USDA with comments regarding revisions to the WIC food packages. United is the produce industry's national trade organization representing growers, packers, processors, marketers and distributors of all varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables, working together with our retail and foodservice customers, and our suppliers.

The WIC program represents one of the most important investments this country can make in the health of our nation's children. The WIC program serves over 7.4 million women and children each year, with over 50 percent being children aged one through five. WIC is proven to be one of the premier nutrition assistance programs that saves money and promotes healthy habits for life. We urge you to continue your steadfast commitment to nutrition assistance programs by allowing WIC participants to purchase fresh produce within the program parameters.

Research shows that increasing fruit and vegetable consumption reduces the risk of cancer and numerous other serious illnesses including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) also estimates that better nutrition could reduce the costs associated with diet-related illnesses by \$71 billion each year, enough savings to nearly fully fund the Department's activities each year. Unfortunately, United continues to be concerned by the fact that a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables are not readily available in many of the feeding programs under the USDA's jurisdiction

Congress has responded to this call and in 1998, the *William F. Goodling Child Nutrition and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Reauthorization Act* was approved by the Congress and enacted into Law. As you are aware, this important legislation continues the federal government's commitment to improving the nutrition opportunities for our nation's poorest children. Under the House Report (H. Rep. 105-786), which accompanied that law it stated:



The conferees are aware of the increasing amount of scientific evidence indicating the positive health benefits of fresh fruit and vegetable consumption. These benefits are already enjoyed by participants in the WIC Farmer's Market Nutrition program. Accordingly, the conferees encourage the Secretary to consider carefully including fresh fruits and vegetables in the WIC food package.

In response to this measure, the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service conducted a study entitled *Review of the Nutritional Status of WIC Participants*. This study concluded that WIC mothers were deficient in vital nutrients found in fruits and vegetables. Specifically, for both pregnant and postpartum WIC mothers, shortfalls were documented in total caloric intake, iron, calcium, vitamin C, zinc, and magnesium. Pregnant women were deficient in folic acid. This study underscores the importance of including and making a variety of fruits and vegetables more accessible to nutritionally at risk individuals through USDA assistance programs.


Additionally, as a part of FY 2001 appropriations process, Congress acted in approving Report Language to encourage the Department of Agriculture expeditiously move forward with a revised federal regulation that would incorporate a variety of fresh produce in the WIC Program. No action has yet been taken to release any such proposed or final regulation.

While the current WIC food packages were carefully designed to maximize general nutrition and health benefits, the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables seems inconsistent with both the program's goals and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2000 (Dietary Guidelines)*. As you are aware, for the first time since the *Dietary Guidelines* were issued, a specific guideline was included which encouraged Americans to eat more fruits and vegetables. As USDA, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, and private sector partners seek to promote these *Dietary Guidelines* as broadly as possible, we urge USDA to continue your support of nutrition and broaden the WIC food package to include a variety of fresh produce.

Inasmuch as the WIC program represents one of the most important investments we can make in the health of our nation's children, the inclusion of fresh produce and related nutrition education messages should be a top priority. Since over 50 percent of WIC participants are children aged one through five, the food consumed during these formative years will play a very significant role in healthy development and establishing lifelong eating patterns. It seems only natural that the increased use of fresh produce in meeting the critical nutritional needs of WIC participants will also help establish healthful, nutritious eating habits for life.

Thank you for your time and attention and we look forward to working with you on this and other important health and nutrition issues. Together, we can heighten the awareness of the need of preventative health care efforts through better diets and increased physical activity.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Guenther
Vice President, Public Policy