

Testimony of Todd Regis – UFCW 951 on Double Up Food Bucks 3/12/2019

Chairman VanWoerkom, Vice Chair^{women}mans' Bollin and Kennedy, Representatives Albert, Green, Sabo and Brixie, thank you for the opportunity to voice my support today for the \$4 million dollar recommendation for the Double Up Food Bucks Program.

My name is Todd Regis and I have been a member of UFCW Local 951 since May 1983 and I have spent those 36 years working at my local Meijer store in high school and college and then as a member of the local's staff. I also served as a member of the Michigan Commission of Agriculture from April 2007 to January 2011 and was chairperson in 2010. In addition, I served as a member of the Michigan Food Policy Council for its entire existence for both Governors from June 2005 until its dissolution in December 2014.

The United Food and Commercial Workers Local 951 is based in Grand Rapids. We represent over 28,000 Michigan members who are Meijer employees statewide in the retail stores, distribution centers and truck fleet, as well as Mid-Michigan based Kroger, Polly's, some Harding's stores, Rite Aid and JBS Meat Packing plant in Plainwell.

Double Up Food Bucks was launched in 2009 after a couple years of tests at farm markets in Michigan which were a result of early recommendations from the previously mentioned Michigan Food Policy Council. In the years since, the program has been a rousing success. In our state, the number of sites accepting Double Up payments have grown from five initially in 2006 to over 250 grocery stores—which have seen a total of \$14.6 million in sales (SNAP and Double Up) of healthy food. Unfortunately it is only available in 65 of our counties.

Double Up works. SNAP recipients shop more often and eat more produce when Double Up is in place—those using both programs who bought fresh fruits and vegetables six or more times per month increased by 70 percent. These shoppers reported that Double Up improved their physical, mental, and economic health. Further, Double Up spending quadrupled between 2016 and 2017, while the number of participating stores only doubled. This money

supports Michigan farmers, area grocery stores, and workers right here in our communities.

What's more, Double Up Bucks has expanded across the country. What began in five Detroit farmers market soon grew into the first statewide healthy food incentive program and is now a national model for SNAP incentives. Double Up programs are now active in more than 20 states around the country.

Despite this, food insecurity remains a serious issue in Michigan. Even though Michigan is the second largest agricultural state in our great country, Feeding America estimates that 1.4 million Michiganders—14.2 percent of the state's population—experience food insecurity. Further, 73 percent of those 1.4 million within our state who experience food insecurity are at or below 200% of the federal poverty line. Double Up food Bucks doesn't solve this issue but it certainly helps those who experience food insecurity.

It is clear that more work needs to be done, and we are thankful for Governor Whitmer for including Double Up within her budget recommendation.

The Governor's budget recommendation of \$4 million would allow Double Up to expand to all of Michigan's 83 counties by 2022, an important milestone and a tremendous benefit to farmers, grocers, workers, and consumers within our state.

It would continue the states support of the Fair Food Network that increases SNAP recipient purchasing power, it would allow for a dollar for dollar match up to \$20 per day to buy fresh fruit and vegetables and it would benefit over ~~85,000~~ ^{300,000} of our low-income Michiganders. In addition this recommendation would assure sustainability for the largest food retailers in our state to fully participate in this program as this would become a permanent part of the Farm Bill and an ongoing recommendation from the Governor. This will be a Win – Win for every person in our states agricultural circle of life from Farm to Fork or as my father use to say from Seed to Stomach.

On behalf of the 28,000 members of UFCW Local 951 we strongly support this budget recommendation and we hope that each of you will enthusiastically do the same.

We thank Governor Whitmer for her continued leadership on this issue and I Thank you for allowing me the time to express our position.