

**United States Senate
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and
Forestry**

**Meeting the Challenges of Feeding America's
School Children**

July 23, 2014

Testimony of:

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Prepared Statement

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Good Morning Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Cochran and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. My name is Phillip Muir, I'm the President and CEO of Muir Copper Canyon Farms in Salt Lake City, Utah. Thank you for inviting me here today and for calling attention to the critical issue of school nutrition. I am passionate about making a difference in the nutrition of our school age children.

Muir Copper Canyon Farms is a food service produce distributor. I am the 5th generation of our family that has devoted my life to the fresh fruit and vegetable industry. Muir Copper Canyon Farms provides fresh fruits and vegetables to 52 rural and urban school districts in Utah, Idaho, and western Wyoming with a total enrollment of 450,000 students. Schools are about 15% of our total sales volume. We have worked with schools for the last 15 years and our school business has significantly increased every year since 2006. We are the USDA/DoD Fresh Prime Vendor for schools in Utah, Idaho, and western Wyoming and for three Indian Reservations in Utah and Idaho. In addition, we also provide schools with fresh fruits and vegetables for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, School Lunch, School Breakfast and the Summer Feeding Programs.

Muir Copper Canyon Farms is an owner member of Pro*Act, LLC, which is a cooperative of 70 produce distributors across North America who leverage our purchasing power together to make the most price effective, quality assured, and food safe purchases possible. We are also a member of United Fresh Produce Association and I serve on their Nutrition and Health Council.

We have a saying at Muir Copper Canyon Farms, "Our School Customers Deserve the Best". Our team is passionate about working with schools - the best not only in quality, but in service and value. Success is students eating more fruits and vegetables, going home and telling their parents about the new fruits and vegetables they tried at school and helping to improve the family's eating habits. We consider ourselves more than just a supplier or bid winner – we are a partner with our school customers. Our goal is to be a solution provider through information, training, and consultation assisting schools to successfully implement all of the new fruit and vegetable requirements.

We have dedicated staff for our school business; they meet with our school customers throughout the school year to discuss new fruit and vegetable items, seasonality, getting the best value for their budgets, buying local produce, delivery schedules, etc. We provide schools with our "Fresh Produce Standards and Handling Guide" as a training tool and provide schools with special training workshops, nutrition education materials, Farmer bios, and participate in Kick-Off events. If a specific fruit or vegetable becomes unaffordable during the school year, we work with our schools to substitute another fruit or vegetable that meets the school's needs. This is a collaborative relationship, lots of back and forth. We want our schools to be successful.

To highlight a few examples:

- For the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program we worked with schools to lower labor and packaging costs while providing them with a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables individually portioned and in a system easy to deliver to the classroom.
- We have a booth at the Utah SNA show each year. In June, we demonstrated how schools could grill fresh vegetables in bite sizes. When one attendee said, "We don't have grills in our schools, that is not realistic", we showed them how the same results could be achieved using their school ovens.
- We have introduced new dark green leafy salad mixes to our schools that are more appealing, more nutrient dense, and more cost effective.

From our experience working with schools, there are a few key points I want to make:

- Schools that were proactive in improving the healthfulness of school meals early on, made incremental changes, and offered nutrition education are not having problems or experiencing increased plate waste.
- School that have the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program --- these are the highest poverty elementary schools in our area --- are successful implementing the new nutrition standards because they have already introduced their students to a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Students like fresh fruits and vegetables when they are served great tasting fruits and vegetables. I receive continued feed-back from kids, parents and school officials in my own community, thanking me and the schools for undertaking these changes.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans calls for children and adults to “make ½ their plate fruits and vegetables” at every meal. How can you call school breakfast or school lunch a “meal” if it doesn’t include at least a ½ cup of fruits or vegetables? After all, it is only ½ cup per meal!

The produce industry is committed and stands ready to support school food service directors in successfully implementing the new fruit and vegetable requirements. There are produce suppliers all over the country who are just as passionate and committed to supporting schools as I am. We all want to provide schools with great quality fresh produce and help student’s increase their consumption.

Just last week, myself, and produce distributors from around the country, growers, fresh-cut processors, Pro*Act, and United Fresh Produce Association hosted a Fresh Produce Pavilion at the School Nutrition Association’s (SNA) annual convention in Boston. Hundreds of school food service directors came to our “Ask the Experts- Produce Solution Center” to ask questions about writing a Produce Request for Proposal (RFP), to talk about how they could procure more fresh and fresh-cut fruits and vegetables, or to ask how they could get a fresh produce vending machine to meet Smart Snacks in Schools requirements. We also presented two education workshop sessions on these subjects, all in an effort to assist the school nutrition community.

In closing, my hat is off to those in the trenches who are implementing healthier school meals. The produce industry is committed to helping you; we want to be your partner. We strongly support the continued implementation of the Healthy, Hungry-Free Kids Act of 2010 and maintaining the requirements that school children have access to a wide variety of colorful fruits and vegetables and select a ½ cup of fruit or vegetable at each meal. This is about improving the health of America’s children!

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak here today.

Muir Copper Canyon Farms is a produce, dairy, and specialty food distributor in Salt Lake City, Utah. It services customers primarily in the foodservice industry in Utah, Idaho, and western Wyoming. It sources fresh and specialty products from around the world for its customers. Muir is an owner/member of Pro*Act, a national cooperative, and co-owner of Harvest Sensations and Integrated Fresh Solutions which all provide supply chain solutions enabling Muir to be the leader in produce distribution in the Intermountain West.

PRO*ACT is North America's leading distributor of fresh food to the foodservice and retail industries, including the school programs throughout the country, sourcing from premier national, regional and local farmers. PRO*ACT streamlines the produce supply chain, offering significant cost benefits and an easy, one-call solution to source the freshest produce from more than 70 third-party inspected, independently owned, local distribution centers across the United States and Canada. PRO*ACT provides category cost management through commodity contract pricing, in-house consultation services and integrated produce program distribution management.

Founded in 1904, the **United Fresh Produce Association** brings together companies across every segment of the fresh produce supply chain, including growers, shippers, fresh-cut processors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, foodservice operators, industry suppliers and allied associations. We empower industry leaders to shape sound government policy. We deliver the resources and expertise companies need to succeed in managing complex business and technical issues. We provide the training and development individuals need to advance their careers in produce. And, through these endeavors, we unite our industry with a common purpose – to build long-term value for our members and grow produce consumption. The United Fresh Foundation is a founding partner of Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools which supports First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative.