
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 149

AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM.

SUMMARY

This bill makes various changes to the Department of Agriculture's (DoAg) Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). By law, the FMNP generally gives (1) people eligible for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and (2) low-income people age 60 or older funds to buy eligible Connecticut-grown fresh produce and chicken eggs. Under the bill, FMNP participants may also use program benefits to buy honey.

The bill makes many minor, technical, and conforming changes. Among other things, it changes specific FMNP statutory definitions and terminology to align with program modernizations, including a transition to electronic benefits and expansion of eligible benefit redemption locations, and DoAg's current practices. Additionally, the bill allows, rather than requires as under current law, the FMNP to be jointly funded by Connecticut and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Under current federal law, FNS gives grants to state agencies to administer the FMNP. The bill also eliminates a statutorily defined benefit amount of five \$3 vouchers issued to each program participant in a distribution period, and instead requires DoAg to annually set the benefit amount each FMNP participant will get based on the federal and state allocation for the given program year.

Lastly, the bill makes changes to three other DoAg programs. Specifically, it eliminates the requirement that the DoAg commissioner adopt regulations to administer the farm transition grant program. In practice, the department issues annual program guidance to administer the program instead. It also repeals two defunct programs: the (1) Connecticut Quality Seal Program, which ensured quality and

authenticity of Connecticut-produced products, and (2) Apple Marketing Order program, which promoted the sale of apples and apple products and related market research in the state. In practice, both programs' goals were largely incorporated into DoAg's active CT Grown campaign.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

TRANSITION TO ELECTRONIC BENEFITS

The bill makes changes to FMNP statutes to reflect the modern use of electronic benefits rather than paper vouchers, including replacing references to "vouchers" with "benefits."

To align with DoAg's current practice of coupling FMNP benefit distribution with WIC benefit distribution, made possible by the transition to electronic benefits, the bill also changes the definition of a "local WIC agency" to be an entity that contracts with the Department of Public Health to administer the WIC program and distribute WIC benefits to participants (rather than an entity contracting with DoAg to distribute FMNP vouchers, as under current law). Correspondingly, it eliminates obsolete procedures for the WIC agency to verify a program participant's identity when distributing paper vouchers. The bill also reduces, from four years to three years, the period that local WIC agencies must generally keep FMNP-related records.

The bill also eliminates the requirement for authorized vendors to have a DoAg-issued certified vendor number and use a certified vendor identification stamp on deposited benefit vouchers, and it eliminates a process for vendors to deposit any vouchers they accepted. Similarly, it eliminates the requirement for program participants to countersign a voucher before using it.

EXPANDED BENEFIT REDEMPTION LOCATIONS AND VENDOR CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The bill replaces "authorized farmers' market" with "authorized benefit location" in FMNP statutes to reflect an expansion of approved benefit redemption locations to include farm stands and mobile markets, in addition to farmers' markets. It also replaces "vendors" with

“farmers.”

The bill also makes changes to the requirements a vendor must meet to become certified to accept FMNP benefits. Under existing law, to become certified a vendor must attend a training on FMNP rules and procedures. The bill adds the requirement that vendors also complete an annual online learning module and get a passing score on a knowledge test. Existing law also requires vendors to submit a completed application and crop plan before becoming certified to accept benefits. The bill specifies that they must do so using a form and process DoAg creates. Lastly, the bill eliminates the requirement for vendors to submit to DoAg a signed (1) receipt of a vendor certification handbook and (2) certified vendor agreement before accepting FMNP benefits.

The bill also eliminates a process for the DoAg commissioner to determine whether to authorize a farmers’ market to accept FMNP benefits based on how many vendors apply to participate in the market. In practice, this process was made obsolete by the benefit redemption location expansion and transition to a system that allows individual vendors to accept FMNP benefits. Correspondingly, the bill eliminates the obsolete law making it a violation for vendors to cash vouchers for a noncertified market, as this is not possible under the modern benefit redemption system.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 33 Nay 0 (03/04/2026)