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FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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Ford Legislation Aims to Make Healthy, Farm Fresh Food More Available to Low-Income Families

CHICAGO - State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford (D-Chicago) passed legislation through the Illinois House of Representatives on Thursday that could help farmers' markets across Illinois sell to LINK recipients and increase access to healthy, farm fresh foods.

"One of the biggest barriers to healthier eating is access to healthy foods," Ford said. "This legislation can help more people access nontraditional fresh food markets such as farmers' markets already in their communities, and I'm hopeful that we'll see even more markets open in communities throughout Illinois."

Ford's House Bill 4756 would create a special fund that would help farmers' markets afford the equipment necessary to accept and process Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards such as the Illinois LINK cards. The legislation requires the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the Department of Human Services to solicit state and federal funding for the program. For a vendor to be able to accept federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps) and Illinois LINK benefits, these terminals and federal approval are required. Some farmers' markets in Illinois that have already purchased the necessary equipment have reported significant increases in sales to low-income families.

"We are starting to hear the term 'food desert' more often in Illinois, which is used to describe a community that lacks access to full-service grocery stores and other fresh food options, forcing families to eat more fast foods or highly processed junk," Ford said. "It is not enough to lecture people about eating healthier foods; we must work together to give people more options to buy healthier foods, and this legislation aims to increase the options that Illinoisans have."

For more information, call Ford's constituent service office at (773) 378-5902.