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Thank you Madam Chair, and congratulations on your appointment. We wish to note that your own country, the Netherlands, is also the headquarters of an international organization – the World Union of Wholesale and Retail Markets - whose focus on urban food market infrastructure for food distribution offers a key approach by which Local Authorities can contribute significantly to addressing the challenge of sustainable rural development. – an approach we outline as follows as a key priority recommendation for joint action by national and municipal governments in support of the Millennium Goals.

Local Authorities recognize the vital role they can play in supporting local farmers and producers in their own geographic regions- as the tremendous food buying power of consumers in cities and other urban centers, if properly directed, has enormous potential to sustain, diversify, and expand local agricultural production while at the same time providing all consumers – including those at nutritional risk - with improved access to fresh, nutritious, culturally appropriate, and affordable locally grown local food.

In the same way that Local Authorities have sought and found infrastructure solutions – highlighted at previous CSD sessions -- to ensuring sustainable and secure fresh water supplies from local and regional watersheds, they are increasingly recognizing their civic role in ensuring their residents’ future food security by adopting a new perspective that views their surrounding rural regions as “foodsheds” – containing productive farmland and local farmers – including women and indigenous populations – whose very survival as producers is essential to cities’ long-term economic and environmental health interests.

Such a “local food system” perspective requires that national governments also recognize the key historic role of Local Authorities in urban communities of all scales – a role dating from antiquity -- in developing, modernizing, and operating appropriately scaled wholesale and retail food market infrastructure that provides the critical urban-rural physical link for local food production and distribution that can help produce environmentally and economically sustainable societies. Such an infrastructure link offers the cornerstone of a strategic balance to globalization though a new policy emphasis on “localization” to stimulate a new degree of local food production and self-reliance that ensures that farms are economically viable, preserves high quality farmland, and reduces environmental and energy costs and the carbon footprint attributable to long-distance transportation of foods that can be efficiently grown and marketed locally.

To achieve these realistic goals, new, systemic partnerships with national governments – including ministries of agriculture, health, transportation, and economic development – are needed to enable Local Authorities to plan and finance new and modernized wholesale and retail farmers market infrastructure in urban areas that can specifically provide for direct farmer-to-consumer - and direct farmer-to-wholesale buyer- marketing activities. Such “farmer-focused” market facilities can be highly-cost effective and self-sustaining - as they will attract many small farmers willing to assume direct marketing functions (and pay reasonable market fees) in return for the greater share of the consumer dollar they provide – while also attracting urban food buyers at all levels seeking the expanded variety of affordable, nutritious, fresh local products they will make available.

The new urban-rural partnerships between Local Authorities and national governments we are suggesting include a vital role for community based organizations such as NGOs and farmer cooperatives in the management of farmers market infrastructure – as well as the participation of local businesses, workers, youth organizations, and schools – where the critical importance of local agriculture, food marketing, and nutrition as a key aspect of society can be integrated into educational curricula through a new focus on the social importance and role of farmers in providing better nutrition - and a greater degree of local food sovereignty for nations as they continue to participate in beneficial global trade.

Action in support of new urban-rural farmers market infrastructure facilities is the highest priority need for Local Authorities to help accomplish sustainable rural development. In close connection with this policy recommendation, we also strongly encourage the creative targeting of national food procurement programs to existing and new farmers markets – to provide a limited nutrition benefit to vulnerable consumers, including low-income women and children, the elderly, and school feeding programs-- to purchase vitamin-rich fruits and vegetables from farmers at the markets. This low-cost, win-win strategy will benefit both farmers and consumers by further integrating rural and urban areas – and will encourage the production of nutritious food products by local farmers.

Thank you Madam Chairman, for the opportunity to participate in these proceedings.