

“The Time Is Ripe”



Northeast Midwest Institute
Community Food Access Initiative
Policy Action Plan

*Prepared for Capitol Hill Visits
With Members of Illinois Congressional Delegation
December 6 and 7, 2006*

“The Time Is Ripe”

Northeast Midwest Institute **Community Food Access Initiative**

“The United States has always made food and agriculture an important emphasis of its economic assistance programs. We have provided massive amounts of food to fight starvation, but we have also undertaken successful agricultural research, welcomed thousands of foreign students for instruction and training at our finest institutes, and helped make discoveries of the high-yielding varieties of the Green Revolution available throughout the world.” *Ronald Reagan, Presidents Remarks to the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia, 1982*

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“While the federal government continues to be deeply involved in the fight against hunger, our nutritional safety net alone can't conquer the problem. The solution lies in new and innovative partnerships with grass roots efforts. For too long, government programs haven't done enough to capitalize on community expertise. And, likewise, community efforts have often not taken full advantage of the government resources available to them.” *Remarks of President William J. Clinton, National Summit on Community Food Security, October, 1999.*

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The USDA's Economic Research Service recently released household food security data for 2004. “Food security” refers to access by all people, at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life, and includes at a minimum: (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. That is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies. *National Conference of State Legislatures, Household Food Security in the United States, 2004*

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Food is the fuel of life. Our bodies are nourished from the proteins, natural minerals and vitamins naturally found within the foods we eat. The right selection and balance of foods for nutrition is vitally important for children, expectant mothers, and the elderly. At all stages of life, in fact, food is the essential ingredient for a healthy, active body. *Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. United States Senate. June 4, 2006*

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Community Food Security and Community Food Systems are closely related. Achieving food security for all individuals is a key goal in the development of local, community food systems. Community food security is defined as "all persons in a community having access to culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate food through local non-emergency sources at all times.... The ways in which food access is achieved for true community food security would emphasize local sources of production and processing in a food system that tends toward economic and environmental sustainability, but the emphasis would be on improving access. Assuring the food needs of this audience is one of the key components of a community food system, but such systems encompass and emphasize this broader set of issues such as a stable base of family farms, sustainable production methods, economic and social justice, democracy, community development and entrepreneurship. *Cornell University, CFAP, www.cfap.org/afs_temp2.cfm?topicID=79.*



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POLICY ACTION PLAN

- **CREATE CONGRESSIONAL FOOD CAUCUS**

ISSUE:

- Identifying Community Food Access is a key legislative priority requiring proactive policy development through strategically identified congressional delegations and their membership.

PROPOSED ACTION:

- Propose a Joint Resolution creating the Congressional Food Caucus. Creating and coordinating a Congressional Food Caucus to review, analyze and enact proactive food systems policy focusing on community food access and urban food systems is needed. The Congressional Food Caucus will be comprised of members representing diverse regions of the country, and committees representing health, agriculture, commerce, environment, and education & workforce.
- As Congress gears up to reauthorize the Farm Bill, and as it looks for innovative strategies to address economic development in urban areas, food-related policies take center stage. The human service elements of the Farm Bill must be strategically reviewed for maximum impact, taking into account innovations and best practices. At the same time, Congress has an opportunity to promote market based changes in high priority communities by focusing on the food system as an economic and community development driver. By taking a proactive, deliberative approach to these complex issues, Congress, through a Congressional Food Caucus, the necessary dialogue around the importance of our food system will occur.

- **SUPPORT COMMUNITY FOOD INNOVATION PILOTS THROUGH FARM BILL REAUTHORIZATION**

ISSUE:

- Strategic and innovative Community Food Access provisions in the Farm Bill Reauthorization will provide necessary support for urban and isolated food systems. A fundamental focus of the Farm Bill Reauthorization includes dynamic approaches to promote market-based change in urban and isolated areas. Focusing on Urban & isolated food systems, innovative best practices and solutions must be identified and funded to support true market-based change and community food access.

PROPOSED ACTION:

- Provide sufficient funding through appropriations process to support innovative best practices and solutions. Examples of innovative solutions include:
 - ***Urban Food Systems Policy Options***—Redevelopment program; retail food access study; urban agriculture programs; community food projects; farm to cafeteria program; farmers’ market program; food stamp program; nutrition education; commodities purchases by agencies including DOD and HHS; local procurement incentives; farm and ranchland protection; urban forestry.
 - ***Fresh Link Card Pilot***—provide an additional \$20 during the last 10 days of each month through food stamp EBT for fresh food purchases.
 - ***Engaging Communities of Color***— Support community reinvestment and market-based changes focusing on retail food systems including grocers, farmers markets, restaurants, and other supporting micro-enterprise through agencies including the Department of Commerce (Economic Development Administration & Minority Business Development Agency) and the Small Business Administration, working in coordination with the USDA.
 - ***Farm to Community***— Encourage innovative solutions to food distribution including direct delivery of fresh food from farm to community centers including schools & colleges, hospitals and assisted living centers, farmers markets, and large institutions.

- ***Bridging the Food Divide and the Digital Divide***-- Support the multi-state Market Maker pilot program through University Extensions to encourage community food access in urban and isolated areas.
- ***Federal Trade Commission on Food Labeling Initiative***-- Build upon the policy priority recognized in the April 2006 FTC/HHS report on marketing and childhood obesity by supporting direct marketing of fresh food to children and youth through relevant marketing strategies.

- **ESTABLISH FEDERAL FOOD SYSTEMS POLICY COUNCIL**

ISSUE:

- Food access and security have a direct impact on individual and community health and well-being. Where people get their food, what they eat, where they eat it, and who prepares it, are all key components to individual health and well being. As significantly, the culture of food is key to our communities' and families' productivity. The Food System becomes a key component to self-sustainability, economic viability and health and well-being.

PROPOSED ACTION:

- Add new section 15 USC 4810 creating the Federal Food Systems Policy Council to coordinate food production, access, delivery and security of food, to encourage public/private partnerships around healthy food options. The Council will be administered through the Department of Commerce, and will consist, at a minimum, of federal departments and agencies which regulate food, distribute food, and consume food. The FFSPC will work in consultation with farmers and farm associations, business and business associations, including agri-business and food processing, and community based organizations, including those working on food access, food security, food delivery, and community health including obesity prevention.
- The FFSPC will be administered through the Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. The Mission of the EDA is to "lead the federal economic development agenda by promoting innovation and competitiveness, preparing American regions for growth and success in the worldwide economy." The EDA's Investment Focus includes supporting innovation and competitiveness, and encouraging entrepreneurship.
- Propose legislation to provide linkage between FFSPC and Minority Business Development Agency to support urban food access initiatives.

- **DEVELOP FOOD-FOCUSED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

ISSUE:

- Food-related jobs comprise a significant portion of employment opportunities making the food system a “high growth” industry. From farm to community, each point on the economic spectrum includes food workers. A focused research, evaluation and programmatic approach to understanding the economic and community-based impact of this employment strand will provide a strong foundation for policy strategies to increase job opportunities in this high growth sector, particularly in high priority communities.

PROPOSED ACTION:

- Establish a Food Focused pilot project in the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration to support the President's High Growth Job Training Initiative, “a strategic effort to prepare workers to take advantage of new and increasing job opportunities in high growth/high demand and economically vital industries and sectors of the American economy”. Establish food-related Community Based Job Training Grants.
- In coordination with the Congressional Food Caucus and the Federal Food Systems Policy Council, the ETA will support: funding research and evaluation of food-focused jobs; creating incentives to support the addition of food-focused jobs in high priority communities; and identifying best practices demonstrating linkages between rural-to-urban food-focused employment patterns.