



# HEALTHY FOOD & COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

*Community Food Security Coalition and Partners ~ March 2007*



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## INTRODUCTION

The Community Food Security Coalition's *Healthy Food & Communities Initiative* (Initiative) presents specific policy proposals for the 2007 Farm Bill that lay out the following four broad policy goals to increase access to healthy foods and to strengthen local food systems:

- Encourage greater consumption of fruits and vegetables by enabling federal nutrition program beneficiaries to purchase food at local farmers' markets and other retail food outlets that can supply fresh, local produce;
- Expand innovative, community-based food programs to increase the scale and scope of institutional and emergency food purchasing programs, including through changes in procurement policy and support for infrastructure development;
- Create new and expanded local food system programs to help communities develop retail food markets, urban agriculture projects, and marketing networks that address the needs of under served neighborhoods;
- Provide funding to child nutrition programs to provide fruits and vegetables in schools, implement wellness policies, and expand nutrition education.

The Initiative is the product of extended discussion and research by more than 100 individuals and organizations comprising the Healthy Food & Communities Work Group. The Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) provided staffing and leadership to this Work Group whose participants included representatives from public health, ending hunger, sustainable agriculture, nutrition, urban and regional planning, environmental quality, youth development, agricultural marketing, urban agriculture, and community development. The ideas presented here embody perspectives drawn from faith-based, community-based, academic, Cooperative Extension, governmental, and farmer sectors.

The Initiative is divided into three sections. *Section A* requests \$60.5 million to substantially increase funding for the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program and supporting activities. *Section B* requests \$50 million to improve marketing and distribution infrastructure for under served communities and further requests the elimination of restrictions on the purchase of locally- and

regionally-grown food by institutions. The total request for Sections A and B combined is \$110.5 million. *Section C* makes no funding request, but expresses the support of CFSC's partners' initiatives to promote greater access to and consumption of healthier food by low-income people.

It should be further noted that all of the goals put forward by the Initiative have been incorporated into the Farm and Food Policy Project's declaration, Seeking Balance in US Farm and Food Policy. This document was endorsed separately by over 350 national and local organizations.

## THE NEED FOR A NEW DIRECTION IN U.S. FOOD AND FARM POLICY

All people want what's best for their children and for future generations. All community members, whether they are rural, suburban, and urban, want strong local economies and the ability to buy healthy and affordable food. All people in the United States, whether farmers or not, benefit when agriculture is productive, profitable, and environmentally sustainable.

But what we want from our food system and what our national food and farm policies deliver are increasingly out of balance. This is especially true for the Farm Bill-scheduled to be renewed by Congress in 2007-that addresses such critical issues as agricultural production, food and nutrition assistance, rural development, renewable energy, and conservation policies. These public policies need to result in better management of the farm and food system that serves us all.

The twin phenomena of hunger and obesity are ample proof of how the nation's farm and nutrition policies are out of balance. The obesity epidemic is so severe that the U.S. Surgeon General predicts that this generation of children may be the first to be less healthy and have shorter lives than their parents' generation. Similarly, obesity among adults has risen significantly in the United States. The latest data from the National Center for Health Statistics show that 30% of US adults who are 20 years of age and older-over 60 million people-are obese. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980.<sup>1</sup> Being overweight or obese increases the risk of many diseases and health conditions, including high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, sleep apnea and respiratory problems, and some cancers. Various non-white racial and ethnic populations are often at higher risk for certain diet-related diseases than

the white population.<sup>ii</sup> The Institute of Medicine estimates that national health care expenditures related to obesity are estimated at between \$98 and \$117 billion annually, with the U.S. taxpayer footing an increasingly large share of these costs through Medicare and Medicaid.<sup>iii</sup>

While obesity has reached epidemic proportions throughout America, over 35 million people (including 12.4 million children) lived in food-insecure households in 2005.<sup>iv</sup> These are households who are uncertain of having, or unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all their members. Ironically, hunger and obesity may exist side-by-side, because households that cannot afford, or do not have access to healthy food often resort to cheap, high-calorie foods that are low in nutrients to reduce sensations of hunger.<sup>v</sup>

The lack of full-service grocery stores in many lower income urban and rural areas, especially those with large numbers of people of color, also exacerbates these problems.<sup>vi</sup> Corner stores or bodegas, convenience stores, and inner-city grocery stores often charge substantially higher prices than supermarkets in middle class neighborhoods, leading to decreased purchasing power for socially disadvantaged residents.<sup>vii</sup> Limited access to supermarkets also reduces the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>viii</sup> Without access to affordable and nutritious foods, individuals in these under served communities have fewer chances of making positive changes to their diets.

Like consumers, the American farmer is also challenged at many levels by unbalanced food and farm policies. With increasing concentration of many food and farm sectors in the control of a few large companies, family farmers have fewer options for marketing, processing, and adding value to their products. As the cost of land, water, labor and energy rise, and the prices received for most crops remain stagnant, family farmers increasingly find themselves selling the farm and leaving agriculture altogether. These conditions adversely affect the health and security of our food system, which depends on a stable base of farmland and new generations of farmers. Currently, 1.2 million acres of farmland are lost to development and erosion every year. Developed land increased by 19% between 1982 and 1992, and by 24% between 1992 and 2002,<sup>ix</sup> and farmers over 65 currently outnumber those who are under 35 by more than four to one.<sup>x</sup>

## OPPORTUNITIES

Due in large measure to consumer demand and farmer

innovation, new marketing channels are opening up that benefit farmers, consumers, and communities. As more people express concern about where and how their food is grown, the demand for organic, sustainable, and locally produced food expands. Evidence for this growth can be seen in the over 4,000 farmers' markets -- 1,250 of which have opened since the 2002 Farm Bill -- that are spread across the American continent.<sup>xi</sup> As many as 1,000 public schools in 32 states are now buying products from local producers for their school meals programs, up from a handful in 1998. And over 1200 community supported agriculture (CSA) farms and thousands of community gardens and urban farms have blossomed in the past decade.<sup>xii</sup>

These consumer-driven trends have existed at the margins of federal policy, which has only provided minimal support for these important new directions in food and farming. While the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, for instance, has enabled the expansion of farmers' markets in low-income areas, a significant infusion of public resources would have a dramatic impact on farmers' markets' ability to promote healthy eating and economic development among under served populations and communities.

CFSC's *Healthy Food & Communities Initiative* is a new direction that makes a modest investment in the self-reliance of our nation's communities. It will give them the tools they need to develop their own solutions while employing their native skills and resources. Community-based solutions like these bridge class, racial, ethnic and geographic divides by focusing on the shared interest in healthy and affordable food.

## POLICY PROPOSALS

### SECTION A: Expand the Community Food Projects (CFP) Competitive Grants Program.

Since it was first authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill, the Community Food Project Competitive Grants Program (CFP) has earned a reputation as a dynamic and adaptable force within the changing circumstances of community food needs. Re-authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill at \$5 million per year of mandatory funding, CFP has made grants to over 240 innovative community food projects in 45 states, the District of Columbia, and 1 US territory. These funds have promoted a wide variety of community-based solutions to local food system and food security problems.

CFP's purposes were clearly expressed by Congress, which

established the program to assist non-profit, community-based organizations with the development of projects that would require a one-time infusion of federal assistance to become self-sustaining and were designed to:

- Meet the food needs of low-income people;
- Increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs, and;
- Promote comprehensive responses to food, farm, and nutrition issues by combining the resources of multiple sectors of the food system.

Over the past ten years, CFP has proven that modestly-sized federal grants, when combined with local resources and knowledge, can galvanize the hearts and minds of citizens and give struggling, food insecure communities new hope. These grants have played a major role in forging a national network of community food system practitioners who are eager to learn from each other, know how to put good ideas into action, and respect the need for evaluation and research. At the local level, CFP has given a diverse group of food system stakeholders the opportunity to develop and implement ideas, projects, and ultimately solutions by using creative and dynamic problem solving skills. As a result of these linkages, local planners now work with food program advocates, public health officials engage community development groups, and farmers see their futures increasingly tied to local markets.


Building on this success, CFSC's Healthy Food & Communities Initiative proposes to expand the size and scope of the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program in the 2007 Farm Bill by including:

- Local food procurement by institutions such as schools;
- Retail access in under served markets;
- Urban and metro-area food production;
- Technical assistance for socially disadvantaged and limited resource groups;
- Food policy council and food system network development;
- Emergency food providers who purchase food from local farm communities, and;
- A national clearinghouse on community food security innovations.


Specific provisions of this proposal are as follows:

The USDA Community Food Project Competitive Grants

Program should be re-authorized at \$60.5 million annually in mandatory spending, making funding permanent and keeping pace with inflation. CFP should expand in scope and size, adding specific uses of funds to meet the urgent need to supply healthy local foods to under served markets in the following ways:

 **Allocate \$15 million annually for Community Food Project Competitive Grants as currently structured.**


*Rationale: Expanding CFP will accelerate the growth in community-based solutions to community food problems, especially given the dollar-for-dollar match required of CFP grantees. Over the past four years, requests for CFP funds have averaged over \$27 million per year, about six times available funds. The staff of CFP report that there are a significant number of highly qualified projects that do not get funded every year due to limited resources.*

 **Add \$10 million annually within CFP for institutional food service projects to invest in infrastructure and planning in order to procure local food by school districts, municipal and state governments, and non-profit organizations.**


*Rationale: Serving locally grown foods in schools and other institutions and introducing kids and adults alike to the foods grown in their region has been shown to improve eating habits while increasing local farmers' income. Seed funding is critical to cover many of the infrastructure costs associated with purchasing local food. A modest outlay of resources in this area can substantially increase the number of children eating farm-fresh food at school while expanding market opportunities for local and regional farmers.*

 **Add \$10 million to CFP to provide seed grants for pre-development and development efforts designed to create new and/or expanded retail food outlets in under served areas. Examples are community-based retail development such as mobile markets, buyers' co-ops, independent grocery co-ops, revitalized public markets, and public-private partnerships with chain supermarkets.**


*Rationale: Modest grants to capable community-based organizations have been shown to help stimulate additional food retail outlets. Community ownership or participation in these outlets can ensure that they remain responsive to the food needs of community residents.*

 Add \$10 million annually within CFP to support metropolitan, urban and peri-urban food production and handling to provide stable seasonal access to healthy food for under served communities. Use of such funds should include physical improvements to existing and future garden sites, such as fencing, water and irrigation systems, importation of compost, and soil. Additionally, funds should be available for planning and technical assistance to link metropolitan-area production with food banks, retail outlets, and farmers' markets.

*Rationale: Community gardens and urban farming provide numerous benefits to the individuals and communities they serve, including recreational and economic development opportunities, beautification, increased safety, social capital, and food security. Despite these multiple benefits, urban agriculture often falls through the federal cracks because USDA programs are oriented toward rural areas, and urban-focused economic development typically ignores agriculture. An allocation in this area can help urban communities more productively utilize undeveloped land at their fringes and in their cores, while making their cities more sustainable.*


 Add \$7 million within CFP for technical assistance and evaluation assistance to organizations applying for and receiving CFP grants.

*Rationale: One reason that CFP has been so successful and unique is that it provides technical assistance to applicants and grantees. This has allowed grantees that have never received federal grants to develop successful proposals. In addition, this assistance has helped build the capacity of grantees to conduct program evaluation, which in turn helps project leaders and administrators to improve their project. As funding for CFP expands, both in number of projects funded and topical areas, additional technical assistance should be provided to bolster the capacity of applicants and grantees and ensure that funds go to the communities that need them the most.*


 Add \$5 million annually within CFP for food policy councils and food system networks.

*Rationale: Coordinating the multiple private, public, and non-profit sector activities and policies in local and regional food systems is challenging and necessary because it can significantly increase the efficient use of existing resources. Food policy councils (public-private commissions linked to state or city governments) and other similar collaborations have taken up this challenge in an ever-increasing number of communities,*

*but are often limited by lack of resources. New multi-sector entities with regional jurisdictions are needed to plan and coordinate on a region-by-region basis the complex production, distribution, processing and consumption sectors that are not currently integrated.*


 Add \$3 million annually within CFP for creating linkages between emergency food providers and other local food system sectors to integrate the handling of emergency and non-emergency locally produced food for food banks, soup kitchens, and pantries.

*Rationale: Food banks-like schools, colleges, and other institutions-are becoming increasingly interested in providing healthy, locally-grown food to their clients. While USDA provides commodity foods and operating funds to food banks through the TEFAP program, additional resources to allow food banks to work directly with small-scale family farmers are urgently needed.*

 Re-authorize funding in the amount of \$500K annually for the Food Security Learning Center.

*Rationale: The Food Security Learning Center (FSLC) is a hub of information exchange for the food security movement. The FSLC provides the tools needed to put policy into practice, offering blueprints and examples of models that work. Each topic of the FSLC provides introductory materials, policy initiatives, profiles of community food projects, links, readings, and more. First launched in 2002, the Food Security Learning Center is run by World Hunger Year, with collaboration from the Community Food Security Coalition and support from the CFP.*

SECTION B: Provide access to healthy, locally produced food in under served urban and rural markets, including institutions, through new incentives and clarification of USDA language.

 Authorize \$45 million in annual mandatory funding for regional planning and technical assistance pilot projects targeting transportation and processing infrastructure that will enable local and regional limited resource and socially-disadvantaged family farmers to aggregate and distribute food supply for under served markets, including local institutions.


*Rationale: Farmers growing for local markets face significant barriers in getting products to market, including a lack of processing plants, warehouses, brokers, and affordable transportation options. Minority and low-income farmers are especially challenged, given the barriers they often face in utilizing USDA services. This fund provides crucial government support for revitalization of local and regional food system infrastructure that the private sector has abandoned over the past decade.*

 **Supply \$5 million annually to support the use of the EBT system at farmers' markets.**

*Rationale: Farmers' markets can play an important role in improving access to fruits and vegetables in low-income communities. This potential, however, has been limited inadvertently by changes in the Food Stamp Program, which converted paper coupons to a debit card. Very few farmers' markets have the ability to process electronic transactions, but many markets across the country are experimenting with technologies to enable Food Stamp users to use their benefits at farmers' markets. These innovations are limited in scope and are often costly; dedicated resources to fix this problem are critical.*

 **Pursue policy changes to allow for geographic preferences and increased flexibility for school and institutional procurement of local and regional foods.**

*Rationale: Conflicting interpretations of statutory and report language in the 2002 Farm Bill have led to much confusion with regards to the ability of school districts and states to provide preference for food grown in specific geographical areas (such as in-state only) for school meals. The current administration has chosen to discourage schools and states from providing geographic preference. In doing so, it has dissuaded many school districts from implementing legally permissible contracting processes that would facilitate farm-to-school food purchasing. This no-cost provision will clarify the intent of Congress by directing USDA to remove this policy barrier.*

 **Restore flexibility and allow geographic preferences in Department of Defense Fresh Program purchase of local products.**

*Rationale: Through the Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Program, school food services have been able to use their non-cash credits for government commodities to acquire local products from family farmers. Both school districts and farmers have benefited from the substantial procurement infrastructure that DoD offers, but the preference for local products within this program has been discontinued, in part because of USDA's*

*interpretation of the law. This no-cost provision will remove this policy barrier and allow the DoD to continue purchasing food from local farmers.*

## SECTION C: Work with partners to expand and improve existing programs to promote healthy food consumption among underserved low-income populations.

Federal nutrition assistance provides the means to reduce food insecurity, and offers education programs that promote healthful eating. The Food Stamp Program, which has historically been used as a way to alleviate surplus of farm commodities, has become one of the nation's premiere anti-poverty programs and a highly successful bulwark against hunger. Yet with the obesity crisis and health disparities among the poor, it is clear that the Food Stamp Program and other forms of nutrition assistance must be used to combat malnutrition in all of its forms. The following provisions are supported by CFSC, but not included in the total funding request of this Initiative, due to the fact that its partner organizations are working directly on those issues. For more information on the rationale behind these proposals, see the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) at [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org).

Because farmers' market offer a low-cost way of increasing access to healthy and affordable food in underserved communities, it is necessary to provide additional incentives to both farmers' market organizations and low-income consumers to extend their benefits as widely as possible. To those ends, federal funds should be used to further develop farmers' market while giving low-income, nutritionally vulnerable groups like WIC and elderly households the opportunities to fully utilize fresh, locally produced food.

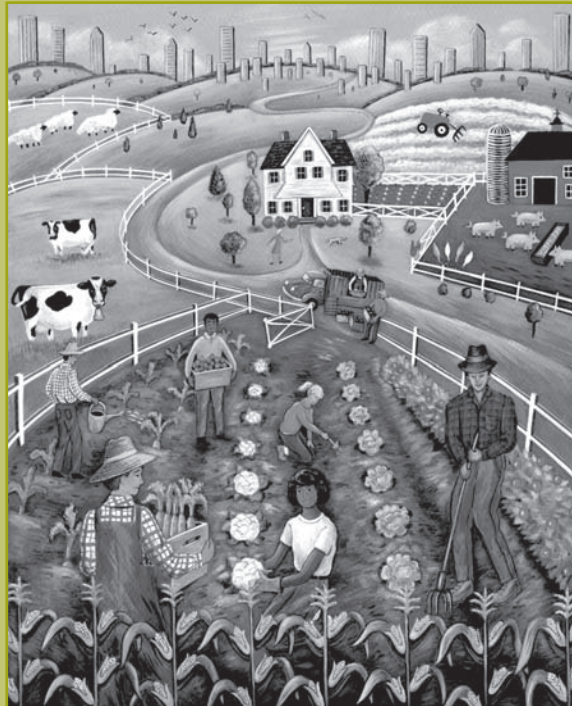
- 1) Expand farmers' markets and improve access to them by low-income people:
  - a. Increase annual funding for the Farmers' Market Promotion Program.
  - b. Increase funding for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs and authorize FMNP Farmers' Markets to be certified for WIC fruit and vegetable vendor status.
- 2) Streamline the Food Stamp Program and increase access to healthy foods for Food Stamp-eligible customers:
  - a. Broaden and streamline eligibility for legal immigrants to Food Stamp Program.

- b. Increase food stamp benefit allotments to provide increased potential to purchase healthy foods by Food Stamp Program recipients.
  - c. Provide clear support for community food security applications of Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) and EFNEP funds.
- 3) Increase the entitlement for TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) for food, storage, and distribution.
  - 4) Expand the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program to all 50 states.
  - 5) Expand research and technical assistance resources for urban agriculture within existing programs or through the renewal of past urban USDA programs.
  - 6) Provide funds for consolidated national research of challenges and solutions for healthy food access through retail markets in under served low-income areas.



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The Community Food Security Coalition is dedicated to building strong, sustainable local and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally affordable food to all people at all times. We seek to develop self-reliance among all communities in obtaining their food and to create a system of growing, manufacturing, processing, distributing, and selling food that is regionally based and grounded in the principles of justice, democracy, and sustainability.

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