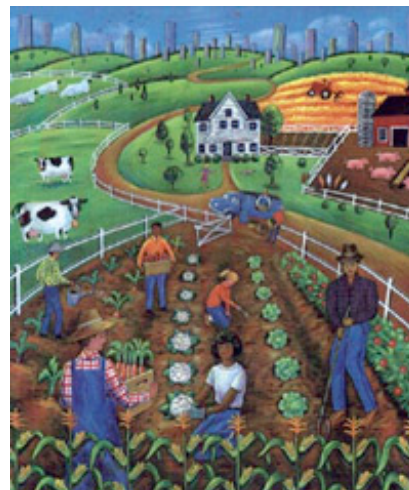




Making Policy Work for You: **Tips for Meeting with Your Legislators**

Federal policy can affect the work you do, whether it's through school lunch regulations, access to locally grown foods, or farm conservation that affects our clean air and water. Since policy can influence you, it's important to stay informed and let your legislators know how you feel. Remember that you have a valuable local perspective to share! Policymakers need to hear from individuals and community groups to better understand the way federal policies affect real people and their communities.



Before the Meeting

- Call ahead to schedule a meeting with your Congressperson or a member of the legislative staff. Don't be disappointed if you get a meeting with a staff person. They actually have a lot of power in the office as the go to experts on specific issues.
 - For information on scheduling a meeting with your senators, consult www.senate.gov
 - For information on scheduling a meeting with your representative, consult www.house.gov
- If scheduling a meeting for a group, make sure to keep the group small, but representative – no more than 3-6 people.
- Read up on your Congressperson and his or her background, voting record, issues of focus, and Congressional committee membership.
- Organize and prepare to talk about your issue. This includes researching and understanding potential opposing views to your request, so you will be prepared to respond with a factual counter argument if necessary.
- Again, if meeting as a group, plan what each of you will cover in order to use your time most effectively. Most meetings with legislators and/or staff are only 15-30 minutes long.
- Gather materials to bring with you. In addition to gathering background materials about your issue, you should also bring information about your organization or program in the district and your contact information.
- Dress professionally for your meeting
- Give yourself plenty of time to get to the meeting. Arrive on time or early, but also be prepared to wait as hearings and committee meetings may run longer than expected, delaying the availability of Senators, Representatives, and staff.

COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY COALITION



During the Meeting

- Introduce yourself and your organization. Remind whomever you meet with that you are a constituent.
- Be succinct, and be clear about what you're asking them to do (i.e. sponsor a bill, co-sponsor a bill, vote yes or no on a bill, etc.).
- Remember that you are an expert on how an issue or program affects your community! Tell the legislator or legislative aid all about the issue in your state. The person you meet with could know a lot or a little, so be prepared to educate. And, be confident!
- Answer the staff person or legislator's questions as thoroughly as you can, but don't be afraid to say "I don't know" and follow-up after the meeting with the answer.
- Take notes of follow-up items and reactions the staff person or legislator has. If you are meeting with a staff person who cannot commit to your "ask," set a deadline as to when you will receive an answer (i.e. "Can I call you next week to find out if Sen. Jones will co-sponsor the bill?")
- Obtain a business card from whomever you meet with so that you may contact that person again, directly.
- And don't forget to leave behind your materials or a fact sheet concerning your issue.

After The Meeting

- Debrief. Talk over your impressions, and decide if any next steps are necessary.
- Decide who will write a thank-you note. E-mail or fax Thank you notes. Include in your email or fax an overview of main points of the meeting, and answer any questions you left unanswered.¹
- Maintain contact with your legislators by adding their names or their aids' names to your mailing lists and newsletter lists, by inviting them to visit a farm to school program in your area, or by e-mailing updates on farm to school developments in your area.

How Can I Find Out Who My Legislators Are?

- Check out the government section of your local phone book.
- Call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
- Search by state or zip code at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.

¹ Though hand-written notes are appropriate for most situations, standard mail that comes to legislators in DC is often delayed and sometimes damaged due to security measures. Send an e-mail or fax instead. If you meet in an office outside of DC, writing a hand-written note to the local office is fine. Address the note to the person with whom you met.