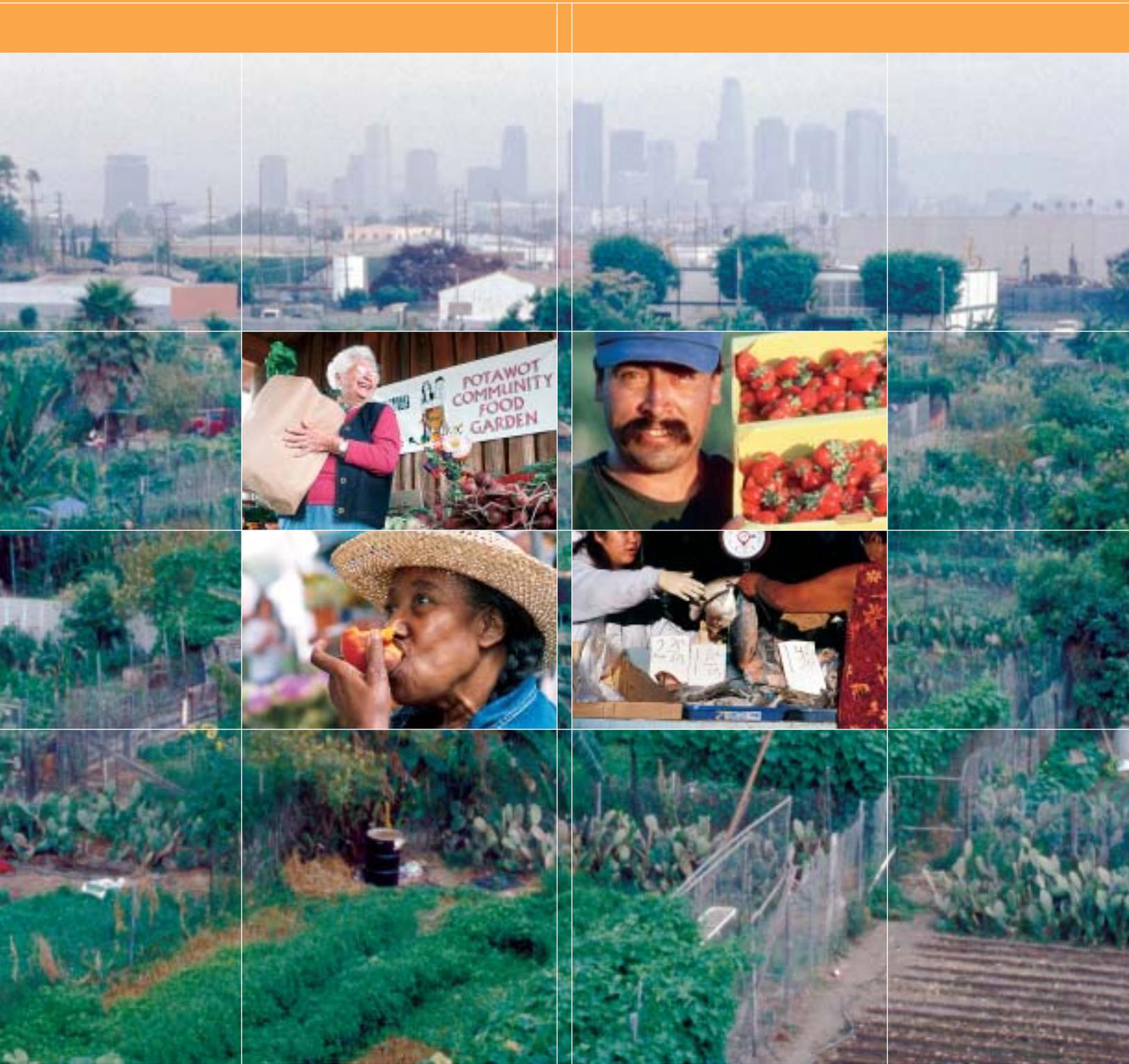


# WEAVING THE FOOD WEB



COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY IN CALIFORNIA



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*Above:*  
Efrén Avalos of AMO Organics harvests strawberries.

*Front Cover:*

*Background:*  
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank's fifteen-acre urban garden.

*Top left:*  
United Indian Health Services' produce stand.

*Top right:*  
AMO Organics' strawberry harvest for Farm Fresh Choice.

*Bottom left:*  
Enjoying the tastes of summer at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market, which serves local schools.

*Bottom right:*  
Affordable fish changes hands at the Stockton Farmers' Market.



## Introduction

*Weaving the Food Web* is a story of California's food system. It traces the efforts of communities across the state to help people put fresh, healthy food on their tables every day. It describes the kinds of relationships among individuals, families, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies that can make life's most basic necessity accessible at the neighborhood level. And it highlights ways that we, as a state, must align resources, policies, and collective effort to ensure that everybody has the opportunities afforded by food security.

Community food security is commonly defined as "all persons having access to culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate food through local non-emergency sources at all times." The benefits of achieving long term food security are many. At a personal level, eating well makes us feel good and nourishes our health. We take pleasure in tasting the diversity of flavors in ethnic cuisines. The planting of seeds and tending of plants through harvest and consumption connects us to the miracle of life. The ties of family and friendship grow when we share meals around a table. And the beauty, productivity, and openness of working landscapes provide a welcome contrast to urban asphalt and high-rise buildings.

In the Golden State it is all too easy to take food for granted. California leads the nation and world in food production. We are blessed with a nearly ideal climate and a wealth of land and water resources from which to grow crops. For many of us, our next meal is only as far away as our neighborhood supermarket. Yet all is not well in the land of

plenty. Record numbers of individuals and families are experiencing hunger. Farms throughout rural California struggle to remain viable against rising costs and global competition. Diet-related diseases are cropping up and growing into epidemics. The surgeon general recently flagged obesity—linked to super-sized meals high in fat, salt, and sugar—as the nation's number one health problem.

While the solutions to these problems are not simple, answers do exist. The projects in this guide illustrate comprehensive community approaches that are improving nutrition, stretching the food dollar, and helping to keep farmers on the land. In many instances, these approaches localize the web of food production and consumption by making basic resources available—be it vacant lots for community gardening or neighborhood stores that sell affordable, high-quality, fresh food. Together, the projects build toward a promise of long term food security at the community level.

Before reading this guide, take a moment to consider the degree of food security in your community. How do you and your neighbors access food? Is the available food culturally acceptable, affordable, and nutritious? How are the farms surrounding you faring? Based on the answers to these questions, many communities have organized resources to improve their long term food security. There are more stories than we can tell here. Our hope is that the stories we have spotlighted will help other communities plant seeds and cross-pollinate ideas to improve the health of Californians.



## Farm Fresh Choice Awakening Inner City Taste Buds to Healthy Local Food

Maria meet Martha. These two matriarchs—one of a budding farm enterprise, the other of a twenty-seven-year-old after school program for low-income, inner city children—have something new to offer each other. Maria Inés Catalán grows fresh fruits and vegetables at her farming cooperative in Hollister. Martha Cueva encourages the families in her after school program to eat such locally grown produce. Their dreams flow together each Tuesday afternoon through a program called Farm Fresh Choice.

When parents come to pick up their kids at Martha's BAHIA, Inc. youth program on Tuesdays, they find a stand piled high with seasonal produce. If they want to take home some of the peas, carrots, eggs, or even *nopales* (cactus), they join Farm Fresh Choice. The project, started in 1999 with \$37,000 from the Food Security Grant program of the California Nutrition Network, a statewide public health program, has grown to include one hundred members at three distribution sites in west and south Berkeley. While most of the families at BAHIA, Inc. are Latino, most of the families at the other two sites, Berkeley Youth Alternatives and the Youth Advancement Project, are African-American. The program links these urban families of color with farmers of color and one farming cooperative, Catalán's *Asociación Mercado Orgánica* (see below).

"Farm Fresh Choice membership gives you access to discounted organic produce, to relationships with farmers and to a feeling for the land on

which the food is grown," says Joy Moore, one of the co-founders of the project. Members get acquainted with their farmers through a seasonal newsletter and an annual festival. Farm Fresh Choice staff, who deliver the food to the sites, are on hand each week punching cards, answering questions, and talking up the benefits of fresh, unprocessed food grown in fields not far from home.

Here's how membership works: The Farm Fresh Choice membership card, issued free of charge, is renewed each year. The card—with its bright logo of a person holding a bowl of fruit and straddling a scene of farms and urban buildings—entitles holders to purchase seven-dollar punch-cards. The twenty-eight punches on each card are worth twenty-five cents apiece. For example, a bunch of carrots, worth a dollar, takes four punches; a pint of strawberries, six punches—all priced at wholesale cost. You don't have to be low-income to join, but the sites are selected to target needy families.

The theory behind Farm Fresh Choice is that if people come to know the source of their food, they will appreciate the effort that went into coaxing it from the earth. As they develop that appreciation—through cultural links with farmers—their food takes on meaning and they eat better, feel better, and live better. Even the punch-card was devised with this in mind. It represents something different than the cold cash that changes hands at vast, anonymous grocery stores. Moore explains it as a seven-dollar commitment to supporting a farmer's hard work.

## I LOVE ORGANICS

Maria Inés Catalán worked eight years harvesting broccoli, lettuce, chiles, spinach, and other produce for \$5.25 an hour. Efrén Avalos worked fourteen years for an industrial-scale conventional farm, picking strawberries for \$1.50 a flat.

Today, these former wage laborers are working with nine other farmers in a producer cooperative, jointly leasing sixty acres of land in Hollister, sharing a tractor, irrigation equipment, water, liability insurance, and other business expenses. Their cooperative, the *Asociación Mercado Orgánica*—or Organic Marketing Association—often goes by its acronym, AMO Organics, which translates as "I love organics."

Cooperative members were trained in small-scale, diversified, organic production methods at the Rural Development Center in Salinas for an average of three years before embarking on their collective venture. Each member takes personal responsibility for production on a

three- to five-acre parcel and may elect to join in collective marketing and distribution.

To survive in a globalized food economy, where artificially depressed prices reign, AMO members are learning they must concentrate on selling their food as close to home as possible—directly to customers who care about them. While they market some of their produce to wholesalers, they are gradually increasing sales at farmers' markets, signing up families for shares in their community supported agriculture group, and participating in such projects as Farm Fresh Choice. It's hard work being a small farmer, but Avalos wouldn't trade it for his old life on a factory farm.

"Right now, I may be earning about the same per hour," he says, "but the difference is, you're doing it yourself and with your friends. When you are tired and want to rest, you don't have somebody telling you to end your break." To Avalos, that freedom makes all the difference.





## BUY LOCAL, EAT BETTER, GROW A STRONGER CALIFORNIA

California residents are blessed with an abundant variety of California grown fresh fruits and vegetables, grains, meat, and milk from which to choose a nutritious diet. Indeed, California supplies the nation with more than half of its fruits, nuts, and vegetables, and twenty percent of its milk. More than 350 different crops are produced in California, and the state is nearly the only U.S. supplier for many of these crops. Almonds, artichokes, dates, figs, raisins, kiwifruit, olives, clingstone peaches, persimmons, pistachios, dried plums (prunes), and walnuts are just a few examples.

Yet California farmers are facing increasing pressure from producers in the global marketplace. Imports from low-wage countries are squeezing many farmers out of their local markets. Crops that have seen significant decreases in the past few years, according to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, include apples, carrots, sweet corn, dates, olives, raisins, Valencia oranges, and processing tomatoes. Some consumers don't care where their food comes from as long as they get their recommended "5-a-Day" fruits and vegetables. But the health of the whole food system—including economic viability for growers, adequate wages for farm laborers, vitality for rural communities, and nutritional health for consumers—depends on maintaining a stable, local food supply.

To help maintain the food system, California residents need to notice where their food comes from and, if possible, which farmers grew it. Consumers who shorten the supply line between farm and table benefit from fresher, more nutritious food, help preserve farms on the landscape, and boost rural communities that depend on farming.

**"The health of the whole food system—including economic viability for growers, adequate wages for farm laborers, vitality for rural communities—and nutritional health for consumers, depends on maintaining a stable, local food supply."**

As ethnic populations in California expand, they benefit from specialty produce grown by the state's racially diverse farmers. For example, the Southeast Asian (Laotian, Hmong and Vietnamese) immigrant farmers who predominate at the Saturday farmers' market in Stockton, cater to the local Southeast Asian low-income community, pulling in 10,000 customers on a busy day for traditional varieties of eggplant, beans and cucumbers. The market brings in more than \$600,000 annually in food stamps and farmers' market nutrition program vouchers, substantially contributing to the annual income of local farmers and improving food security for many low-income residents.

Farmers' markets are only one of many venues for purchasing locally grown food. Californians can also visit farm stands and U-pick farms or join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscription farm, in which eaters purchase "shares" as much as a year in advance and receive weekly boxes of in-season, often organic, produce, flowers, and sometimes grains. At the grocery store, Californians can almost always find produce, meat, and milk from nearby farms. If it is not labeled, they can ask managers to find out where the food is grown so they can make informed choices. The exceptional variety and quality of state grown products and the increasing diversity of market places make it easy to eat locally grown food in California.

Farm Fresh Choice promotes eating habits whose potential public health benefits are huge. In 1990, nearly half the adults and more than three-fourths of the children below 200 percent of the poverty level were living in the southern and western areas targeted by the program, according to the 1999 City of Berkeley Health Status Report. In 1998, chronic disease accounted for sixty-eight percent of deaths in Berkeley and the mortality rate from strokes was significantly higher than in the state as a whole. African-Americans had the bleakest prospects, comprising nineteen percent of the population but accounting for forty-eight percent of deaths from stroke and thirty-six percent of deaths from coronary heart disease and hypertension. Diet is a major contributing factor in all of these diseases.

For co-founder Moore, Farm Fresh Choice was a way to do something for her grandson. "His odds of coming up healthy are stacked against him," says Moore, who is African-American, lives in south Berkeley, and until recently subsisted on a typical urban diet of fast, highly processed foods. "I realized I didn't eat fresh fruits and vegetables. For years I went to the store and bought a piece of fruit, and it just didn't taste good. No flavor. I turned off from it. Then one day I was given this nectarine from a farmer of Good Humus Produce in Yolo County, and I said, 'Oh, my God!'...the flavor bursting in my mouth. I've never been the same since. I was reminded of what good food could taste like. Simple pleasure."

For Maria Inés Catalán, participation in Farm Fresh Choice brought an unexpected opportunity. Most farmers wait for years to secure a spot at the popular Berkeley Farmers' Market, operated by the Berkeley Ecology Center. But Penny Leff, the market manager, rewarded Catalán by shortening her wait for a spot at the Tuesday market. Leff is on the steering committee of Farm Fresh Choice and says the Ecology Center is committed to such food security projects. Between Farm Fresh Choice and the farmers' market, the Tuesday trip to Berkeley now makes good economic sense for Catalán.

"We earn more by coming to Berkeley than if we were to sell to a wholesale company," says Catalán. "The pay is just. We also like getting to know the people who eat the food." When Farm Fresh Choice organizers see their inner city neighbors picking up healthy fruits and vegetables from such local farmers as Catalán, they feel they're making headway in a struggle against crippling health disparities.

"We have a long way to go," says Moore, "but if we incorporate bits and pieces of this more simple way of life into our daily lives, we are on the path to a healthier community, physically and spiritually."

*Top right: Parent and child meet their farmer at BAHIA, Inc.*

*Top left: Boys shelling peas for a meal at the after school program.*

*Bottom left to right: AMO Organics; nopales; Joy Moore, co-founder, Farm Fresh Choice.*

*—Gail Feenstra, UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program*

"The food bank offices are not in the kind of neighborhood where you'd expect to see people tilling the soil."

## A Food Oasis Grows in the Heart of Los Angeles

From the ashes of the riots following the 1992 Rodney King trial, a garden rose like a Phoenix. "I'd always wished something could be done about the ramshackle buildings and discarded tires across the street from our offices," says Doris Bloch, retired executive director of the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, "Right after the civil disorders, I decided it was important for people to see that Los Angeles could be a place where constructive programs that involved and helped people in tough circumstances occurred."

The food bank offices are not in the kind of neighborhood where you'd expect to see people tilling the soil. To the north, the jagged skyline of downtown rakes the sky; to the east sprawls the industrial warehouse district of Vernon; but to the west lies a low-income neighborhood whose residents, mostly recent immigrants from Mexico, Bloch recognized as potential urban farmers.

Bloch's wish for transforming the blighted fifteen acres across the

street came true when the owner, the City of Los Angeles, agreed she could use the acreage—at least for a while—and offered to underwrite the cost of water. A USDA representative offered assistance with free seeds, soil and other resources.

Today, the food bank garden is a verdant oasis where 364 neighbors cultivate food year-round. "On weekends there is no room left to park," says Michael Flood, who took over from Bloch as executive director. The acreage is a patchwork of tidy plots. "This is my little ranch in the city," says Manuel of the twenty- by thirty-foot plot he signed up for seven years ago. Manuel comes early on weekends—the garden is open from sunrise to sunset—and stays until lunch, cultivating corn, squash, Shasta daisies, and other crops. His family joins him in the garden at harvest time.

"Nobody was interested at first," says Bloch. The Food Bank had cleared and prepared the land for

gardening but no one responded to announcements advertising plots free of charge. "No one could believe they could get access to land without strings attached," she says. Then county Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke held a ceremony to dedicate the garden. "A few people started to plant," says Bloch, "and word spread. We put up fences delineating the plots and the garden took off."

To acquire "title" to a plot, residents fill out a one-page application, showing they meet low-income eligibility requirements similar to those for the USDA commodity foods program. Most applicants are retired men who garden with their extended families. "I worked thirty-three years in a furniture factory," says seventy-year-old Ediogenes "Eddie" Luviano Rumbos. "Now the garden is a place for me to come and be productive. It keeps me healthy, too." Luviano grows medicinal plants as well as food. Standing among corn,

beans, and squash, he points to a crop of *manzanilla*, or chamomile, an herbal tea he says is good for digestion.

Besides tending their own gardens, members are encouraged to attend monthly Urban Garden Council meetings. Usually about fifty gardeners show up to discuss such improvement projects as a community barbeque area, a clean-up day, or collective compost retrieval. A steering committee of seven members collects dues, maintains the water system, and unlocks and locks the garden gate each day.

The Food Bank recently hired an urban garden groundskeeper, Ray Calzadas, who coordinates beautification of the "commons"—the aisles between plots. Calzadas also delivers green waste to the Department of Sanitation and picks up finished compost to distribute.

Some gardeners have become entrepreneurs, selling their surplus at a nearby flea market or informally to passersby. A few plant



**THIS IS A COMMUNITY GARDEN  
THE PEOPLE WHO WORK IN  
THIS GARDEN, RECEIVE  
THE FOOD FROM IT.**



## STRESSED BY HIGH HOUSING COSTS, CALIFORNIANS CAN'T AFFORD TO FEED THEIR CHILDREN



with the intention of selling most of their crops. "We want to see people growing fresh food for themselves," says Jeff Dronkers, program development manager for the Food Bank, "but we don't want to discourage production for neighbors. We'd like to bring it to the next level—an organized farmers' market." The Food Bank is considering hosting a market once a week, along the street that runs through the middle of the garden.

The Food Bank project is one of a hundred such community gardens, serving 4,900 families in Los Angeles County. Each garden is a small but significant step for a county whose 2001 Hunger Report noted 1.4 million people experiencing food insecurity and 584,000 of those feeling the pain of hunger.

Besides operating the garden, the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank offers emergency services to a network of more than 1,000 charities that feed 400,000 people every

week. The Food Bank also works with other groups to improve access to federal assistance programs, enact a livable-wage ordinance for Los Angeles, and expand access to land for gardening.

If the Food Bank's Urban Garden is any indication, Los Angelenos are hungry for soil to cultivate. "There are fifty people waiting in line to get a plot in the food bank garden," says Flood. "It's a five- or six-month wait."

**"I'd always wished something could be done about the ramshackle buildings and discarded tires across the street from our offices."**

In a state renowned for agricultural abundance, far too many families struggle to put food on the table. More than sixteen percent of Californians—a staggering 6.4 million people—live in households that experience hunger or food insecurity, according to a Brandeis University report released this summer. That's significantly worse than in the nation as a whole.

Sadly, the figures include roughly 2.5 million children for whom hunger and food insecurity—defined as limited or uncertain access to adequate nutrition—translate into poor health, poor academic performance, and curtailed opportunities for a better life. In low-income communities, more than forty percent of all children suffer hunger and food insecurity, and the problem is concentrated in communities of color: roughly thirty percent of African-American and Hispanic children live in households that cannot provide adequate food for an active, healthy life.

For some families, a sudden emergency or crisis brings hunger and food insecurity. But for most, these are long-term conditions of poverty. Low-wage jobs and modest public assistance are not sufficient to cover the high costs of housing, medical care, and food in California. In particular high housing costs in California put tremendous pressure on families' budgets and limit their ability to purchase adequate food. Almost seventy percent of low-income Californians spend more than half their income on housing, according to a 2001 report from the nonprofit California Budget Project. Families in this situation face an impossible choice. Food is often the first thing to go.

For children and adults who live with the daily threat of hunger, the cost is obvious and immediate. Among children, food insecurity and hunger lead to poorer overall health and increased susceptibility to illness. Without adequate food for hungry bodies, children suffer a diminished potential for learning. Malnourished children are likely to perform poorly on tests, repeat grades, and experience behavioral problems—hyperactivity, aggression, tardiness, absences, and suspension from school. Hunger and food insecurity sap hope from families and present a tremendous cost to society, making it impossible to achieve a good return on investments in education, work, and health care.

No one in California should experience the devastating effects of hunger and food insecurity—and no one has to. We can end these hardships, gradually, by developing good employment options, ensuring livable wages, and creating a strong social safety net for people unable to work. In the meantime, we can improve our first line of defense: the federal food programs. Many—including Food Stamps, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), School Lunch and Breakfast, Summer Food, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program—are severely underutilized. Inadequate benefits, bureaucratic hassles, and the stigma of receiving assistance discourage those in need. But community leaders, elected officials, families, and social service providers can work together on advocacy and outreach to improve these programs and use them to lead the fight against hunger and food insecurity.

—Autumn Arnold, California Food Policy Advocates

Top right: Edigenes "Eddie" Luviano Rumbos grows native corn.

Background: Los Angeles Regional Food Bank's fifteen-acre urban garden a few miles from downtown.

Bottom left to right: An avid gardener working corn and Shasta daisies in his twenty-by-thirty-foot plot. Building community at the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank's Urban Garden.

# For Immigrants, Farmers' Markets Are a Home Away from Home



"These beans are from my home in Laos, these are from China, and these are from the Philippines," says Pheng Ong, patting piles of skinny beans on his table at the Stockton Certified Farmers' Market. He does not mean he flew his produce here from overseas. Like Ong, who is a Hmong refugee, the long bean varieties are Asian in origin only. Ong grew them on leased land in his adopted home of Lodi, only thirteen miles from here.

More than a million Southeast Asian immigrants have settled in California since the United States withdrew its troops from Vietnam in 1975. Their journey was often harrowing, through war-torn countries and grim refugee camps to a bewildering new culture.

For these refugees and many other immigrants, culinary traditions are a lifeline. Their best bet for finding fresh old-country ingredients is certified farmers' markets such as this one, Stockton's biggest, serving 30,000 customers a year, under a cross-town freeway. While Ong's long beans might send many Californians scurrying for an exotic cookbook, his customers know exactly what to do with them. "I like to cook them with a spicy, lemon grass fish sauce—and chicken," says Orn Snguan, who was born in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Besides the fifty-five vegetable and fruit stands, the market hosts six seafood vendors and—something no supermarket offers—four live-poultry vendors.

**While Ong's long beans might send many Californians scurrying for an exotic cookbook, his customers know exactly what to do with them.**



*Above and left:* Ong with some of the "old-country" produce his customers request.

*Top right:* Live chickens, lemon grass, and fresh, whole fish are familiar favorites amongst the mostly Asian customers.

*Right:* The Stockton Certified Farmers' Market logo.

## FOOD STAMPS GO DIGITAL, DISRUPTING FARMERS' MARKET PURCHASES

During the next two years, low-income Californians who receive food stamps will stop using paper coupons to make their purchases. Instead, they will access food stamp benefits by means of a plastic card similar to an ATM card. The system, called Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), is mandated by federal law to be rolled-out nationwide. It's already operational in forty-six states and four of California's fifty-eight counties—Alameda, Yolo, San Bernardino, and San Diego. While state and federal officials laud the system for reducing paperwork and eliminating the stigma felt by food stamp recipients, public health professionals and community activists worry about its affect on food access.

Consider the impact on farmers' markets, which many inner city families depend on to fill the nutritional gaps left by a decades-long exodus of grocery stores. Across the state, hundreds of farmers' markets are authorized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to participate in the food stamp program. Farmers accept food stamp coupons in

exchange for fresh fruits and vegetables and the USDA redeems the coupons for cash. But in the pilot counties of Yolo and Alameda, farmers' markets are suffering under the digital system. Developed by the Manhattan-based international bank Citicorp, under contract with the state, the system requires participating markets to use a digital machine to swipe food stamp cards. The changeover is proving too costly or complicated for many farmers.

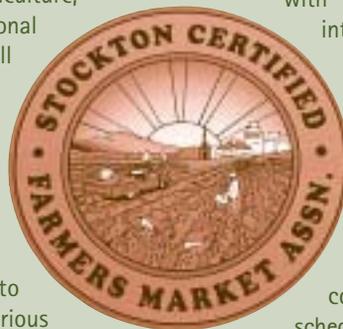
In anticipation of the problems, state officials set up Alameda County pilot programs to test two models. At the relatively small Berkeley Farmers' Market, customers swipe their cards on a wireless machine at the central information booth and receive wooden tokens in the amount they expect to spend. After shopping, they return extra tokens and have their cards credited for the amount returned. Farmers visit the information booth at the end of the market day to exchange the tokens they've earned for cash. This model works well for small markets with staffed information booths.



California farmers' markets provide soulful sustenance to millions of consumers, whether immigrant or native-born. Customers enjoy chatting with the farmers who produce their food—and the feeling is mutual. For farmers, the markets also make economic sense. When Ong drives his pickup to the Stockton market, he avoids wholesale distribution costs of packing, storing, and cooling, netting as much as twice what he would from a wholesaler. Vendor gross receipts from a day here range from \$400 to \$800.

The advent of farmers' markets in California coincided with the post-Vietnam War Asian influx. The intent of the Certified Farmers' Market Program of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, launched during the late 1970s, was to ease conventional distribution regulations so that small farmers could sell their produce locally. Today's vendors—more than 4,000 farmers at the 416 certified farmers' markets—are exempt from strict size, shape, and packing regulations. This translates to less food waste as customers choose a crooked cucumber or a tiny pear for its fresh flavor, appealing texture, and high nutritional value.

Farmers' markets in Stockton have expanded to Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays at various sites, but the original Saturday market under the freeway remains the biggest. While an overpass wouldn't seem the ideal awning, this one is high and wide enough that the traffic noise, dust, and exhaust don't land here. The only cloud hanging over the market these days is a pending change in the way poor people buy food. Low-income shoppers use food stamps, as well as coupons from the WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition programs. Food stamp sales alone



average more than \$600,000 a year at the Saturday market and a recent week's take in WIC coupons was more than \$6,000. The worry is an anticipated switch to digital swipe cards. The system, called Electronic Benefits Transfer or EBT, will require farmers to buy a gadget that will automatically deduct dollars from a customer's account and deposit it in the farmer's account. Sounds simple, but the technology is complex and costly.

"A lot of the growers are not going to touch it," says Carlos Dutra, manager of the Stockton Certified Farmers' Market Association. Besides buying the card-reading machine, vendors will have to set up accounts with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, a potentially intimidating transaction for those whose English and bureaucratic skills are shaky. "Some of our farmers don't have bank accounts and aren't yet integrated into the same small-business world as are other food sellers," says Dutra, who fears the digital red tape will scare them off from the market.

Dutra takes hope from state officials' promises to find ways to ease the transition both for farmers and consumers. Stockton already got a lucky break in the scheduling of the county-by-county transition. "We will be the last market to adopt EBT," he says, smiling. "By that time, the other counties should have worked out the bugs."

As Dutra watches buyers and sellers chatting, sampling, and taking home bags bulging with fresh, high-quality local produce, he can't help but believe the digital turbulence will pass. "It's better than the grocery store," he says. "There's no competition."

The Old Oakland Farmers' Market in downtown Oakland is piloting a second model, for large markets that redeem a high volume of food stamps but have no staffed information booth. At this market, the state has been trying to work with individual farmers to help them become USDA authorized to receive food stamps and use an EBT point of sale machine. For several reasons, this model has been much less successful, with only three farmers signing up for the new system. Although the market as a whole has a high redemption, each individual farmer may not serve enough food stamp recipients to make it worth their trouble of adopting the new technology. Additionally, most of the vendors are limited English speakers, and neither the state nor Citicorp have the language ability to help them.

Such problems made it difficult for Alameda County farmers' markets to accept food stamps the first two months of EBT implementation, and five farmers' markets decided not to participate at all. The result: a deteriorating

diet and financial stress for the low-income families who shopped at these markets and the farmers who depended on their patronage.

Ethnic mom-and-pop groceries and mobile vendors, an important food source in such large cities as Los Angeles, are expected to suffer problems similar to the farmers' markets: Even where markets manage the leap to digital, elderly and disabled consumers, who depend on others to assist them or to shop for them, may be endangered, as the digital swipe card makes all of their benefits instantly accessible, increasing their vulnerability.

Only through community vigilance can EBT be made to work for low-income Californians and the food vendors who serve them. To learn more about EBT advocate groups forming in your county, get in touch with Debra Garcia at Consumer's Union: (415) 431-6747 or [garcde@consumer.org](mailto:garcde@consumer.org).

—Frank Tamborello and Jessica Bartholow,  
California Hunger Action Coalition



## Potawot Land and Community "Come Back to Life"

Juanita Samuels, an elder of the Yurok-Tolowa tribes of Northern California, is chatting with a couple of teenage girls from the Two Feathers Youth Program, about a weed called lambs quarter. To Juanita's delight, the weed is sprouting everywhere among the carrots, tomatoes, and beets of the Potawot Community Food Garden. "If you harvest, cook, and eat the tender young leaves," she tells the girls, "they'll help to keep your pipes clean."

Juanita shares her knowledge of the health-giving properties of native and cultivated plants to help fight a growing threat of diabetes, which disproportionately affects her people. She takes hope watching her teen volunteers plant broccoli, rake beds, and snack on strawberries in the Potawot garden, part of an ambitious effort linking health care, food production, and nutrition education.

**"Juanita shares her knowledge of the health-giving properties of native and cultivated plants to help fight a growing threat of diabetes, which disproportionately affects her people."**

The forty-acre site along the Mad River—whose Wiyot name is *Potawot*—once supported native villages with deer, elk, salmon, birds, and edible plants. European settlers who arrived in the mid-1850s cleared seasonal wetlands to raise oats, potatoes, clover, and eventually dairy cows. When the property came up for sale six years ago, the timing was perfect for United Indian Health Services, Inc. (UIHS), a tribal health program that has operated since 1970 in Humboldt and Del Norte counties. Executive director Jerry Simone was looking for a location

accessible to the tribal groups being served. But above all, he wanted the new facility to demonstrate a "broader approach to health... Personal well-being," he says, "is inextricably linked to the health of the community, the culture, the ecology, and local economy."

It took UIHS more than a year to complete purchase of the land with a conservation easement assuring environmental protection for half of the acreage. The group gave this protected land a Wiyot name, *Ku' wah-dah-wilth*—"Comes Back to Life." The new central clinic nestles in a forty-acre complex of orchards, organic garden, and walking trails winding through restored wetlands. The complex—called the Potawot Health Village—provides preventive and primary care, as well as

pharmaceutical services and health education for 15,000 tribal members and their families. The Community Food Garden produces vegetables without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, and uses time-honored techniques of good land stewardship associated with sustainable agriculture. This means a healthier community for people, animals, soil, and water.

On Tuesdays and Fridays a bounty of fresh vegetables harvested from the garden greets visitors to the clinic. Pints of fresh strawberries, mounds of bunched beets, and baskets overflowing with more than two-dozen varieties of fruits, vegetables, and culinary herbs sit on tables outside the entrance in a farmers' market fashion. Across the way, Lena McCovey, a UIHS Network Community Nutrition Assistant, tempts passersby with samples of such recipes as garden fresh pesto, featuring locally gathered pine nuts (a traditional food). "Many of us have lost the basic skills and joy of cooking with fresh, whole foods due to the ease and convenience of fast foods," says nutritionist Leah King. "We want to revive culinary traditions, try new foods and new ways of cooking."

Obtaining the land with a conservation easement was only the first of many innovative steps in building the Potawot Health Village. UIHS recruited Indian basket-weavers, dressmakers, gardeners, herbalists, and native-plant experts for an advisory committee to manage the easement. "The people served by the project have a stake in it," says Laura Kadlecik of Humboldt Water Resources, who consults for the Village. "Their interest and expertise, as indigenous people, made the multi-dimensional approach to health care possible." Seed money from the USDA Community Food Project grants program allowed the committee to develop a garden and hire two gardeners, who also conduct workshops and give gardening tips to anyone interested. The California Nutrition Network, a statewide public health program, provided funds for garden-centered nutrition and fitness programs. Within two years of purchasing the land, staff were coaxing vegetables from the ground and the program was growing like lambs quarter.

The first crop of pumpkins was harvested in 2000, launching the Harvest Celebration, now an annual event. Since then, the garden has produced more than 20,000 pounds of vegetables. Managers sell the produce to WIC families and elders who use USDA Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons. Through a Community Supported Agriculture program, they sell weekly baskets of mixed produce to





## EASEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS: HELPING CALIFORNIA FARMERS STAND THEIR GROUND

eighteen families. Produce from the garden also finds its way into UIHS Elder Nutrition Program lunches, Diabetes Education luncheons, and for taste-testing activities of the California Nutrition Network. And the garden has donated more than 3,000 pounds of produce to local food banks, Indian sports tournaments, and weekend-long traditional dances.

Staff are perhaps most proud of the learning that flourishes alongside the crops. "Our nutrition education activities had been sterile, using only food models and pictures," says Nancy Flynn, nutrition services director. "The garden provides a hands-on experience, where there's a chance to reconnect to the source of food. It brings nutrition education alive."

An idea from the advisory committee for expanding the three-acre, intensive garden has borne fruit quickly. The committee invited staff from the clinic, including dentists, nurses, pharmacists, and administrators, to plant a 1,000-foot "living fence" encircling the garden. Each department cares for a hundred-foot section of berry plants, a traditional food source. "Sometimes the staff bring a sack lunch and stay to eat at the garden," says Juanita. "Gardening lifts the spirit and takes away the heaviness of work." Shonnie Mata sometimes returns to the dental department with a basket of strawberries donated by her husband Ed, the assistant gardener.

As the garden yields its cornucopia and the huckleberries and salmonberries along the waterways ripen, this land, once a hunting-and-gathering ground for the Wiyot, is truly "coming back to life." *Ku' wah-dah-wilth* teaches, heals, and feeds the spirit of a reviving community.

"Look here," Juanita calls to a teen volunteer as she leaves the garden. "Let's harvest this chickweed that is choking the strawberry plants. It tastes like fresh corn, and it's full of vitamins and nutrients!"

*Above:*  
Juanita Samuels shops  
for her "5-a-Day."

*Bottom left to right:*  
Teenagers from Two Feathers  
taste strawberries.

Two Feathers youth prepare  
a bed for planting.

A Pacific Treefrog rests  
in the Lacinato kale.

*Right:*  
Ed and Shonnie Mata in the gar-  
den on their lunch break.



It may sound funny, likening California farmers to the threatened Swainson's hawk that inhabits their fields, but farmers, too, are in trouble. California lost twenty-one farms a week between 1987 and 1992, according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture: a 6.7 percent loss. The trend slackened only slightly during the following five years, with small farms falling fastest, and figures for the period ending this year are expected to confirm the bleak trend.

Much of the farmland is being lost to development, with low-density rural housing, suburban sprawl, and golf course development the biggest culprits. Urbanization increased rapidly during the 1990s. Between 1996 and 1998 alone, the rate leapt twenty-five percent as compared to the previous two-year period, according to the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. Of acres lost during that period, 33,412 were prime farmland, with the San Joaquin Valley and southern California suffering the worst conversion rates.

Farmland loss rates are likely to be compounded because a high percentage of California farmers are reaching—or have reached—retirement age. In 1997, nearly thirty-seven percent of California farms were owned and operated by farmers older than sixty-five. While the number of farm owners in that age bracket had increased by two percent between 1992 and 1997, the number under thirty-five had decreased by an alarming twenty-seven percent. As farmers retire, many will sell to developers rather than beginning farmers. In Placer County for example, forty-seven percent of retirement-age farm owners have no one designated to take over the farm, according to a University of California Cooperative Extension study.

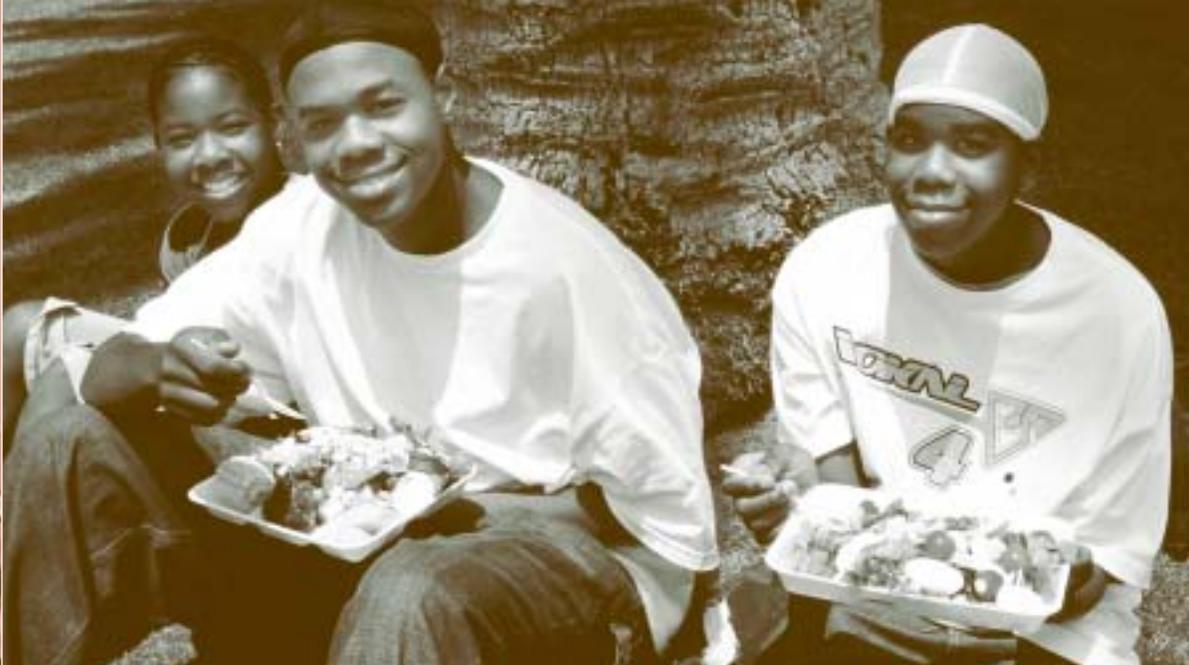
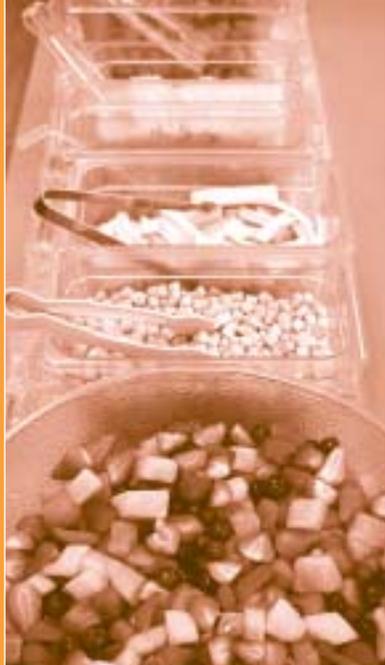
Obstacles to selling land to a farmer are often overwhelming. Urban development pressures, enormous price tags on California land, and reduced returns on sales of land for farming have thwarted the longstanding American practice of bequeathing one's land and livelihood to a child. Yet the nation's agriculture depends on the ability of a new generation to enter farming.

Protection of farmlands and ranchlands is achieved through three basic approaches:

- Fee title acquisition of land: essentially an outright purchase.
- Conservation easements: These allow owners to keep their land, while transferring development rights to a third party who protect it in perpetuity. Land trusts, land conservation groups, and funding for easements have grown in recent years, making it easier for California owners to complete conservation easements. The California Department of Conservation has received seventy-five million dollars during the past year to pay for conservation easement work.
- Public/private partnerships calling for specific management practices on farms and ranches. For example, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service cost-share programs with farmers for such practices as limiting soil erosion and increasing natural habitat.

The population explosion in California is the biggest threat to farmland and the most urgent reason for protecting it. To conserve the land, our communities must support new generations of farmers. As the American Farmland Trust cautions, "It's not farmland without farmers." The state's food security depends on the partnerships we form with farmers to keep our land productive.

—Danielle LeGrand and Steve Schwartz, California FarmLink



## Farm Fresh Salad Bars Give Students a Healthy Choice in Santa Monica Schools

If the MacDonald children had their way, every school would offer a salad bar. Emmanuel, Eran, and Elisha MacDonald—no relation to the restaurant chain—are students in the Santa Monica public schools. As might be expected of teenagers in a fast food culture, they struggle at the cafeteria with whether to buy a hamburger or a salad piled high with farm fresh produce. Through the school district's pioneering lunch program, they're coming to understand why it might be better to select the salad.

"Both my grandparents on my father's side died of diabetes, and my grandmother on my mother's side has it," says Emanuel, using tongs to grab a leaf of chicory at a summer lunch program the schools host in a Santa Monica park. "My uncle told me it's related to being overweight; so if eating salads helps keep the weight off, I guess it's a good thing."

Tracie Thomas gives him a thumbs-up. She has been pushing local farm vegetables for the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District since the first pilot salad bar opened at McKinley Elementary in 1997. "It's great to see them choosing food that isn't going to contribute to chronic disease," says Thomas, who directs food and nutrition services for the district.

Thomas and former food service director Rodney Taylor are heroes of a burgeoning movement to bring nutritional health back to public schools. They have shepherded their Farmers' Market Salad Bar from a tiny pilot to a thriving institution serving 900 students in fourteen of the district's schools. Taylor credits a persistent parent with planting the idea.

"I was reluctant," he says, with a laugh. "Most well-intentioned projects that don't originate with the food service are successful at only one thing: failing. But this parent was persistent. He even had a grant to cover some of the initial labor costs. I couldn't help but say 'yes.'"

The parent twisting Taylor's arm was no dabbler. Bob Gottlieb, director of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) at Occidental College, had a daughter and son attending McKinley Elementary. He also had a professional ambition to link small farm viability with the fight against childhood obesity. Gottlieb knew high-quality produce from the farmers' market, full of color and flavor, would tempt even the pickiest children. "We thought if kids tried it, they would come back for seconds," says Gottlieb. "And coming back for fresh carrots or strawberries—and not French fries—meant fewer calories and better eating habits."

The problem was Taylor had already tried salad bars at McKinley Elementary. On average, only about ten percent of students chose salads in place of the standard, highly processed chicken nuggets, pizza, or hamburgers. Such low participation made the salad bar impractical. But Gottlieb and the staff of what is now the Center for Food and Justice at UEPI had the means to explore precisely why the salad bar was failing. They held focus groups, asking students and parents at McKinley about food preferences. "Complaints ranged from the pre-cut lettuce being brown to the carrots being dried out to the fruit coming out of a can," says Gottlieb. Providing samples of fresh produce, the researchers learned such tricks as offering the lime and lemon wedges Latino students like to squeeze on many fruits and vegetables.

Once Gottlieb had convinced Taylor, they took their idea to Santa Monica Farmers' Market managers Laura Avery and Ted Galvan, who were so keen on the project that they offered to deliver produce to McKinley for free. "We look out for our farmers," says Avery, "and they expressed massive enthusiasm for the project." The market also helped convince the City of Santa Monica to pledge matching funds of \$10,000, which the city has continued to give each year.



*Above left to right: Fresh fruits and vegetables await Santa Monica youth.*

*The MacDonalds enjoy their "5-a-Day."*

*Bottom: Tangelos and Granny Smith apples from the Santa Monica Farmers' Market.*

**"I realized I could positively impact the health of children, that it was my duty," says Rodney Taylor, food services director who launched the program.**

In preparation for launching the salad bar, in-class promotions and field trips to farms and the farmers' market raised student interest. Thomas took more than 1,500 students to visit farmer Phil McGrath, who grows organic vegetables and lemons on twenty-eight acres in Camarillo. "She wanted them to see where their produce comes from," says McGrath. "She'd say, 'Here's the farmer, here are the strawberries, here's the land.' They were energized from being on the farm."

That energy wound up in line at the salad bar. Participation shot up more than 700 percent. The lesson: an investment in presentation and quality of produce plus a hands-on "marketing" campaign to compete with fast food help children make the healthy choice for fresh fruits and vegetables. "To my

surprise, it worked," Taylor says, five years later. "I realized I could positively impact the health of children, that it was my duty."

The Farmers' Market Salad Bar quickly spread to other schools. "One every two weeks," recalls Thomas. While it was a challenge to expand so fast, the increase in participation brought income growth to cover new expenses. "It was our version of economies of scale," says Thomas. Using matching funding of \$43,800 from the California Nutrition

Network and an additional \$3,000 from the school district, the food service was able to give every school a Farmers' Market Salad Bar by 2001. The funding is also helping extend nutrition education into complementary arenas, such as a school garden whose harvests are featured on the salad bar and a composting program, where worms transform kitchen scraps into rich soil, completing the cycle. In 2002, the district opened the once-a-week Summer Lunch Program in Santa Monica's Virginia Park, with plans eventually to serve summer school cafeterias. Preparing, monitoring, and breaking down the salad bar is labor-intensive and the costs keep staff busy writing grants. But the Farmers' Market Salad Bar, once doubted as a parent's pipe dream, has become a roaring success, inspiring similar programs in Los Angeles, Ventura, Alameda, and Yolo counties.

Taylor added "nutrition" to his department title two years ago and Food and Nutrition Services staff throughout the district now wear aprons proclaiming it "Home of the Farmers' Market Salad Bar." The logo, drawn by a high school student, shows ethnically diverse students crowding around a server at a table full of fresh produce.

Avery, of the Santa Monica Farmers' Market, is confident the lessons of the program will last beyond the school years. As students learn where to find fresh local produce, they develop not only good eating habits but also shopping habits that support local farms. "The students bring their parents to the market," says Avery, "and when they grow up, they'll keep coming. Or so we hope."

## PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS NUMBER ONE: CHILDHOOD OBESITY

The obesity epidemic has been making headlines across the nation and has captured the attention of California policymakers in recent legislative sessions. The percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight has more than doubled in the past thirty years, according to the California Department of Health Services (CDHS), and nearly one-third of the state's children are overweight or at risk for being overweight.

While the headlines focus on weight and body size, the fundamental issue is the poor eating habits and activities of which obesity is a symptom. Children are establishing unhealthy patterns that are likely to stay with them for the rest of their lives. Only thirty percent of California adolescents met the goal of eating five servings a day of fruits and vegetables and sixty-eight percent of adolescents ate two or more high fat, low nutrient foods a day, according to a 2000 survey by CDHS. An astonishing eighty percent of children tested failed to meet fitness standards administered by California schools in 1999.

Poor eating and a sedentary lifestyle are linked to a host of health problems including diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. These problems are occurring at ever-younger ages and disproportionately affect African-Americans, Latinos, Native-Americans, and poor people. An estimated fourteen percent of premature deaths could be prevented through improved eating habits and more frequent physical activity, according to a 1999 CDHS report. This translates to 35,000 lives a year in California and fifteen billion dollars in related health care costs.

Public education has proven woefully inadequate in promoting healthy behaviors. Adults and children are the target of intensive marketing campaigns promoting super-sized sodas, fast foods, and high-calorie snacks. The automobile and passive leisure-time activities including television, movies, and video games keep Californians off their feet. Unhealthy foods and pastimes are often more readily available in

schools and communities than healthy eating options and walking, biking, or other exercise opportunities. This is particularly true in neighborhoods where the majority of residents live near or below the poverty line.

The Strategic Alliance to Prevent Childhood Obesity seeks to reframe the debate about obesity, poor eating, and physical inactivity from a matter of individual choice and lifestyle to an issue of the environment, demanding corporate and government accountability. Schools have opened their doors to soft drink and fast food vendors far more often than to local farmers. The federal government subsidizes corn for cheap corn syrup products, rather than promoting sustainable farming. Health care institutions ignore prevention—many hospitals allow the fast food industry to set up shop in their lobbies—and are stuck with treating the end results of food-related diseases.

The Strategic Alliance focused first on reducing access to soda and junk food in schools, and helped pass Senate Bill 19 (Escutia 2001), establishing state nutrient standards for beverages, snacks, and side dishes sold in schools. It has also partnered with community groups to pass school district regulations in Oakland and Los Angeles that limit sales of carbonated soda beverages. While many groups work to increase access to fresh food through projects like Farmers' Market Salad Bars, the Strategic Alliance will continue to work the other side of the street, fighting the encroachment of unhealthy products and habits on our public spaces.

—Paul Leung and Leslie Mikkelsen,  
Strategic Alliance to Prevent Childhood Obesity



## Community Organizing in Oakland Opens Gateway to Good Food

Before Gateway Foods opened, eighty-nine-year-old Ruby Slaughter bought high-priced groceries from the meager selections at neighborhood liquor stores. It was that or hail a cab out of town. "I would spend seven dollars for a taxi to the Rockridge Safeway," says Slaughter, a longtime resident of west Oakland, where the last grocery store closed in 1993. The Rockridge Safeway is a about a ten-minute drive. "Now I just walk on over to get what I need."

Across from Slaughter's apartment is Gateway Foods, a grocery store you might expect to find in Beverly Hills: twelve well-stocked aisles of high-quality produce, yeasty-smelling breads, fresh meats, even a stand selling fresh coffee and baked treats. With Gateway Foods, all the recommended fare of the USDA food pyramid—in delectable variety—has come to Slaughter's once-forgotten neighborhood.

The cornucopia didn't materialize overnight. For five years, community groups including the West Side Economic Development Corporation, the East Bay Asian Economic Development Corporation, and a coalition of churches and neighborhood improvement groups called the Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) rallied for a full service supermarket. They approached Safeway and Albertson's. Both declined, citing, as do most chains, plenty of reasons for sticking to the suburbs. In the case of west Oakland, these ranged from slim profit projections to the specter of looting.

So why would Notrica's Family Markets of Los Angeles decide to try? "We knew if we had the patience and truly listened to and responded to what the community needed, people would come to the store, and tell their friends," says Sean Loloee, co-owner of Gateway Foods, a Notrica's store.

Unlike a large chain, Notrica's competitive advantage lies in serving the specific interests of a given community. In west Oakland, that means

perceiving the tastes of 32,000 residents, mostly extremely low-income seniors, working poor families, and unemployed young adults, all of whom rely on public transportation. While Asian-Americans and Latinos have begun to move in, most west Oakland residents are African-Americans who came to the neighborhood nearly thirty years ago to work at a naval supply center and army base, both of which closed during the 1990s.

Notrica's had plenty to do before Loloee could stock the shelves of Gateway Foods. To start with, the available building, home to a 27,000-square-foot market that had declined and failed along with the military jobs, was in bad shape. "It was dirty and disgusting," says Adel Moradi, co-owner of Gateway. "We basically had to gut the store and start from scratch." With the help of the Reverend Ken Chambers, city councilwoman Nancy Nadel, and other community activists, Notrica's garnered \$500,000 in city redevelopment funds to renovate. Notrica's ended up spending two-and-a-half times more than the government assistance. But they got the job done in time to top the excitement of a new millennium with the opening of Gateway Foods on January 12, 2000.

Besides meeting ethnic preferences, the market has to keep its prices low. "That's a big help to senior citizens," says eighty-three-year-old Odies Mills, as he chooses fresh okra for a vegetable stew. Some of Mills neighbors come to the store on a free shuttle running through senior housing projects mornings and afternoons, four days a week.

For youth, Gateway Foods offers jobs with educational incentives. College-bound students at McClymonds High School receive training at Gateway during hours that do not conflict with studies. Those who maintain their GPA get a \$1,000 scholarship. One recent graduate now attending UCLA was guaranteed summer jobs during college and

With Gateway Foods, all the recommended fare of the USDA food pyramid—in delectable variety—has come to Slaughter's once-forgotten neighborhood.





## THE GROCERY GAP: SUPERMARKETS HAVE ABANDONED INNER CITIES

In the early 1990s, the abandonment of inner city neighborhoods by supermarkets began making headlines. The House Select Committee on Hunger heard testimony on the problem in 1992. Yet little came of the attention: five years later, supermarkets nationwide still were not reinvesting in depressed neighborhoods, according to a University of Michigan study. In 2001, the Farmers' Market Trust found huge inequities in supermarket access between rich and poor neighborhoods in such cities as Philadelphia, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Los Angeles, with white communities nationwide enjoying the best access and African-American communities the worst.

Here's why it matters:

- Fewer supermarkets means less competition, which leads to higher prices and lower quality. Low-income people spend three times more of their disposable income on food than middle-income people, according to a University of California, Los Angeles, study, so even a slightly higher price is significant.
- Transportation adds an additional cost and logistical burden. Low-income people are less likely than middle-income people to own cars and more likely to rely on public transportation. Where supermarkets are few and far between, even public transportation may not be viable. The result: many inner city residents are forced to shop at small corner stores which rarely stock fresh produce and meat, and often charge high prices.
- When the most readily available foods are highly processed, high in fat, and low in nutritional value, diet-related illnesses rise. A 2002 report by the World Health Organization, for example, linked food insecurity to obesity.

To fight the trend, inner city residents, private corporations, and public agencies are teaming up to attract or develop supermarkets, improve transportation, and encourage market managers to stock fruits and vegetables attractive to specific ethnic communities. Dallas offered incentives to the Minyard's supermarket chain to construct five stores in the city's blighted south end. A similar five-store project in Rochester, New York in 1998 brought a market to at least one neighborhood that had gone without for nine years. Austin, Texas, and Knoxville, Tennessee, have designed bus routes connecting underserved residents with supermarkets. And the Mexican-owned supermarket chain, Gigante, appeals to the growing Spanish-speaking community in Southern California with Spanish-language signs and a Latino-oriented product mix. In some cities, community groups have helped develop supermarkets, giving residents a feeling of ownership. In others, residents have organized to improve inner city access to food stamps or require city contractors to pay a mandated "living wage."

The bad news is: some thirty-one million Americans live in homes with limited or uncertain access to adequate nutrition and 7.8 million live with at least one member experiencing the pain and weakness of hunger. The good news is: through improving access to supermarkets, an involved community can make a difference.

—Amanda Shaffer, *Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College*

received an additional small cash bonus. "These motivated kids are the future of the neighborhood," says Loloee.

Notrica's promise to staff the store with neighborhood residents helped it win the support of the city. Managers provide training for adults as well as youth and locals have taken nearly ninety percent of the fifty-four jobs.

The exterior of Gateway Foods reflects Loloee's pride in the community that made his store possible. Instead of the more famous Golden Gate Bridge, a mural shows the local Bay Bridge. The interior is equally neighbor-friendly. Aware that sixty-five to seventy-five percent of African-Americans are lactose intolerant, Gateway Food stocks plenty of lactose-free milk products and dairy substitutes. They house these, along with the dairy products, under a jutting red "barn" so it's easy to direct people where to go to fill their need for calcium.

### Surprisingly, less than two years after opening, Gateway Foods already is turning a profit.

When Notrica's decided to make the leap into west Oakland, they figured it might take four years for the store to break even. Surprisingly, less than two years after opening, Gateway Foods already is turning a profit, and Loloee plans to start plowing proceeds into such improvements as an organic produce section and an on-site barbecue.

The community groups have their eyes on Easmont Mall in east Oakland for another Gateway Foods, and Loloee and Moradi, flush with victory from a gamble others dared not take, are set to bid again.

"Think about it," says Loloee. "You have a clean, well-lit, nicely decorated store that is stocked with affordable, culturally appropriate foods, staffed with local residents, and managed by people who care about the community: you have all the ingredients for a successful inner city supermarket."

*Above left to right: Ruby Slaughter enjoys a seventy-two foot aisle of fresh produce.*

*Sean Loloee, Slaughter, and Adel Moradi take pride in their "community store."*

*Bottom left to right: Mural celebrates Gateway's fresh produce.*

*Gateway serves west Oakland with affordable prices.*

# Marketing Program Helps Placer County Save Its Farms



Janice Thompson is typical of Placer County farmers: her Twin Brooks Farm is surrounded by new housing developments. To stay afloat in a sea of homes, Thompson and her husband, Francis, three years ago opened a specialty store, Newcastle Produce, a custom-built storefront adjacent to the gold country town's former fruit-packing sheds. The specialty at Newcastle Produce is locally grown food. Thompson now sells much of her own produce to her own store. She also joined a nonprofit organization called PlacerGROWN, which helps identify her food as locally grown even when it's sold elsewhere.

"Placer County residents are coming to value fresh, locally grown food when they see it labeled on the shelf," says Thompson. "The label allows them to vote with their food dollars to keep farming viable in Placer County."

California's population has burgeoned during the past two

decades, converting farmland to rural estates and other non-farm uses. Placer County's losses have far exceeded other "suburbanizing" areas. Farmland acreage here has dropped thirty-five percent since 1978.

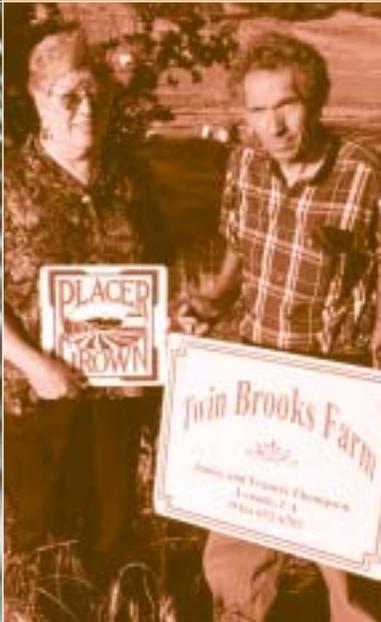
The PlacerGROWN program, started in 1994, helps farmers stay in business amid development fever. "It may look like just a little sticker but it is full of meaning," says Sharon Junge, director of Placer County Cooperative Extension. "The history, the people, the foothills of this beautiful area are all packed into that label. It offers people a choice of meaningful food."

Along with the label, PlacerGROWN offers a host of promotional services, including an annual Farm Trails guide, distributed free of charge to consumers. The guide features a local harvest calendar, stories of farmers, and a map showing farms and their products. Similar information is posted on

the PlacerGROWN web site—[placergrown.org](http://placergrown.org)—where one chatty teaser offers menu ideas: "OK,... so you're wondering what to cook tonight. Check here for the latest recipes...We have vegetarian dishes, lactose-free ideas and more...just a click away!" The web site will eventually allow farmers to post their products online and consumers to order them with a click. "Anything and everything to make it easier for people to support local agriculture," says Becki Carlson, executive director of PlacerGROWN.

PlacerGROWN this year began recruiting consumer members, who receive a Farm Trails guide with discount coupons redeemable at participating farms, roadside stands, and the Foothill Farmers' Market. Consumers have boosted PlacerGROWN membership by a third, to 210, which is good news for the farmers. "I just heard about someone who got the book and went to the farmers' market for the first time," says Carlson.

## WHY FAMILY FARMS MATTER



The United States used to be a nation of farmers. Before World War II, when farms numbered three times what they are today, farmers were the backbone of American communities and the model for family values. Now that their ranks are thinned—they comprise less than two percent of the population of California—it is easy to forget how crucial they are to our economy, environment, and cultural well-being. Despite the decline in farm numbers, California agriculture is still relatively decentralized compared to other industries. Small farms mean more equitable economic opportunities, better stewardship of the land, and a culture of responsibility and freedom—traditions Americans have valued since the founding of our nation.

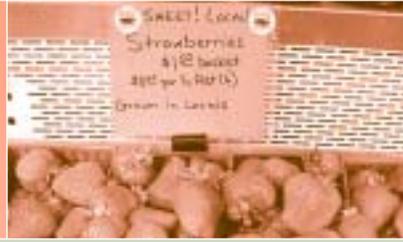
Agriculture plays a huge part in the California economy. While gross value in farm production was more than twenty-seven billion dollars in 2000, the impact on the economy was far greater. High input costs in tractors, pumps, fertilizers, seeds, and labor make every dollar's worth of production worth ten dollars to the economy. Add food processing and marketing and the significance skyrockets.

Left: Francis Thompson walks the irrigation lines at Twin Brooks Farm.

Top left to right: Labels for locally grown food attract increasing numbers of shoppers.

Janice Thompson works the phone at Newcastle Produce.

Below: Janice and Francis Thompson fourth generation farmers on this Loomis-area land.



"Her response was, 'If I had only known what I was missing!'"

Placer County 4-H and Future Farmers of America are selling the coupon books as fundraisers, splitting the proceeds between their agricultural youth projects and PlacerGROWN. Carlson hopes schools will begin using the coupon program as a healthful alternative to candy in fundraising for sports, uniforms, and field trips.

Despite the bleak statistics on farmland loss, plenty of beginners are still eager to try farming in Placer County. PlacerGROWN has joined with the county Cooperative Extension to host an annual Farm Conference, offering seminars and classes for some 200 participants, including new farmers and specialty crop growers, consumers, and educators whose interests range from blueberries to wine grapes to mandarin oranges. When Placer County held the first Mountain Mandarin Festival nine years ago, there were

only eight Owari Satsuma mandarin orchards in the County. Now there are almost forty. "When you celebrate what is special—in this case, the soils, warm days, and cool nights of the foothills that pack these mandarin oranges with flavor—people want to be a part of it," says Joanne Neft, who

needed to act on preservation goals spelled out in their 1994 general plan. They appointed Neft to chair a citizens' advisory committee to develop ways to assess and conserve farmland and open space. The committee created Placer Legacy, a county program dedicated to purchasing farmland

is under contract to the Placer County Agricultural Commission and focuses specifically on improving local markets for all agricultural producers. Her position is one-of-a-kind in the state.

"California is a land of abundance yet we import thirty-eight percent

**"The history, the people, the foothills of this beautiful area are all packed into the PlacerGROWN label. It offers people a choice of meaningful food."**

as director of the Placer County Agricultural Marketing Program works closely with PlacerGROWN. "So they plant. And then they sell. And then we have agriculture."

Neft's own job grew out of another Placer County effort to save farms. The Placer County Board of Supervisors realized four years ago that, under the onslaught of development, they urgently

or development rights. So far, Placer Legacy has spent \$400,000 on farmland conservation easements protecting 320 acres and is working to place another 1,700 acres in easements.

Neft's committee also urged Placer County to provide marketing assistance for farmers; the supervisors responded by creating the program Neft now heads. She

of the produce we eat," says Neft. "Isn't it silly? There is a better way: support farmers to stay in business, preserve the land that is the foundation of their business, educate and build leadership that values the land and food." Adds farmer Thompson, "Any culture that places a value on agriculture will not go hungry."

Farms cover 27.8 million acres—or twenty-eight percent—of California. The way farmland is managed has immense implications on the quality of our land, water, and air. Family farmers and resident farm operators have intimate knowledge of the ecosystems and microclimates of the lands that provide their livelihood and our food. To keep independent farmers on the land—passing along their understanding of life cycles and conservation—we must act quickly to provide incentives. We must reward financially-strapped and struggling farmers when they make special efforts to practice environmental stewardship.

Family farmers strengthen our social fabric. Children in communities where businesses are locally owned are more likely to have a sense of empowerment and personal potential. Farmers living on or near the land they farm rely on local businesses and participate in the community.

Pollsters say farmers still rank among the messengers the public trusts most. Yet some economists advocate letting the family farm die so that

water and land can be dedicated to industry and housing, which they consider to be of higher economic value. They overlook the contributions farms make to a stable economy, a working landscape, and a healthy society.

Consumers, increasingly, are recognizing that contribution. Through farmers' markets, community supported agriculture memberships, and other strategies, many are developing a personal connection to their food. Farms in California host more and more festivals, tours, educational programs for children, even bed-and-breakfast guests. Through these programs—and such new products as salad mix in the 1980s and heirloom tomatoes in the 1990s—California family farms will continue to survive, innovate, and provide in the twenty-first century.

*—Judith Redmond and Leland Swenson, Community Alliance with Family Farmers*



## Neighborhood Ride Shuttles Stranded to Food and Work

They look like airport minibuses carrying passengers on a tropical vacation. But the twenty-five shuttle buses of Sacramento's Neighborhood Ride—adorned with palm trees, sunbursts, and silhouetted cottages—have a more urgent mission, whisking once-stranded residents of low-income neighborhoods to jobs and grocery stores.

"Everybody can ride," says Jim Sanford, as he and his wheelchair rise slowly on a shuttle's electronic lift. "Nobody wants to be dependent on someone bringing them food. The shuttle helps us get out in the community and do what we can for ourselves."

Conceived by a coalition of local groups seeking transport for disabled residents, homebound seniors, and welfare-to-work participants, Neighborhood Ride serves the north Sacramento communities of Carmichael, Citrus Heights, and Del Paso Heights, charging only fifty cents a ride. Each van holds as many as sixteen passengers, including two wheelchairs. Disabled riders who hold a pass called Paratransit get curb-to-curb service for a dollar.

As the three-year pilot project draws to a close, nearly 12,000 Sacramentans are riding, all but one route is earning a profit, ten more shuttles are about to be added, and prospects for the post-pilot phase are bright. The project was launched with three million dollars from the federal Congestion, Mitigation, and Air Quality fund, but the regional transit district that operates it believes its popularity will keep it in the black.

"They cast their votes by riding," says Bill Draper, spokesman for the public corporation Sacramento Regional Transit. "We're going to give it a go."

The success of Neighborhood Ride is one reason such neighborhood groups as the Mutual Assistance Network of Del Paso Heights are optimistic

about prospects for north Sacramento. Consider how the shuttles are transforming one essential aspect of life here: eating.

Hunger crept up on these north Sacramento communities as it often does in America, ushered in not by crop failure or drought but by gradual shifts in federal policies and Wall Street strategies. As McClellan Air Force Base shrank and closed in the 1970s and 1980s, the neighborhoods' fortunes declined. During the same era, supermarkets across the nation were consolidating into megastores. One by one, Safeway, Raley's, and Lucky's slipped away from north Sacramento. Residents perceive the smaller stores left among the broken glass and windblown trash to be unsafe, unsanitary, and understocked with fresh food, according to a study by the Sacramento Hunger Commission, one of the groups supporting Neighborhood Ride.

In the days before Neighborhood Ride, Hunger Commission surveys painted a bleak picture of residents' exhausting, expensive, and dispiriting scramble to bring home fresh food. The luckiest complained only about rising gas prices; they had access to a car to drive the six or seven miles to a supermarket. Those who rode buses often exceeded the ninety-minute maximum on a single fare and had to pay \$3.50 for an all-day pass to reach a grocery store. They complained that drivers sometimes deliberately passed up people with grocery bags, and that perishable items suffered during long waits at hot bus stops. Some opted to spend as much as twenty dollars on a taxi. Others made long or dangerous treks on foot: at least four people, including a mother holding a baby, were killed crossing a railroad track that cut half a mile off the route to a convenience store in Del Paso Heights. No wonder requests for emergency food were rising in the area: as Neighborhood Ride took off, eleven emergency food sites were serving 16,550 meals a





## LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORS JOIN FORCES TO IMPROVE FOOD CHOICES

The location of streets, stores, homes, and schools is intensively planned in California. Yet access to food, our most basic necessity, remains largely unplanned. When food is an afterthought, many communities are left stranded without grocery stores, farmers' markets, gardens, or the transportation to get to them. Many Californians find healthy food a luxury they cannot afford.

Community Food Assessment has emerged as a powerful tool in planning for and securing access to food for city residents. During a Community Food Assessment, residents, activists, social workers, local organizations, faith-based groups, health care professionals, college and university staff, farmers, and others come together to examine where and how people get food in their community. They explore and address a wide range of issues, including hunger, diet-related diseases, diminishing green spaces, and lack of economic opportunity in low-income neighborhoods.

Depending on the size of a given community and the issues confronting it, methods may include:

- Mapping locations of grocery stores, community gardens, farmers' markets, corner stores, and food banks
- Comparing prices and quality of food in stores
- Reviewing statistics and studies, for example, census information
- Conducting interviews and surveys of community members.

As strengths and weaknesses of the food system become clear, participants in an assessment form a plan of action. In the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood of San Francisco, for example, surveys of residents revealed little access to large grocery stores. The plan focused instead on the many small corner stores. The group won commitments from corner store owners to stock fresh produce, healthy snacks, and nutritious food choices.

Other examples of Community Food Assessment actions:

- In the Del Paso Heights neighborhood of Sacramento, an assessment identified a need for improved public transportation to markets supplying fresh, nutritious, affordable food. The group's research and advocacy helped implement the Neighborhood Ride shuttle.
- Also in Sacramento, an assessment generated a new bus route that connects underserved neighborhoods to a grocery store on the opposite side of a freeway.
- In Berkeley, an assessment brought about increased collaboration between local growers and the Berkeley Unified School's Lunch Program providing lunches to nearly 9,000 children.
- In Los Angeles, increased awareness sparked establishment of the Community Food Security Coalition in 1994.

Community Food Assessments elsewhere have led to new farmers' markets and community gardens, nutrition task forces, community food resource guides, expanded WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, and "fellowship kitchens" providing free, healthy meals. Though assessments are as varied as the neighborhoods involved, their research has this in common: it never gathers dust on a shelf. Assessments spark action for rapid results and lasting change.

*-Tori Kjer, Community Food Security Coalition*

**As the three-year pilot project draws to a close, nearly 12,000 Sacramentans are riding, all but one route is earning a profit, ten more shuttles are about to be added, and prospects for the post-pilot phase are bright.**

month in Del Paso Heights and an adjacent neighborhood known as North Sacramento. People were coming to depend on services that were meant to be stop-gap, and the churches and other charities providing them were stretched to the limit.

"The money they save by taking Neighborhood Ride can go towards more food," says Peggy Roark of the Hunger Commission, which supports the shuttles by producing and distributing advertising fliers.

The jaunty blue and green vans are the link to many points of hope in north Sacramento. Del Paso Boulevard, the once crime-ridden thoroughfare that runs through the heart of the neighborhoods, is becoming an art center, with galleries, restaurants, and shops spurred by a local redevelopment group. The Greater Sacramento Urban League's new million-dollar building, housing programs in work preparation, literacy, and economic development, rises from the center of Del Paso Heights. Del Paso Nuevo, a leafy new apartment complex for homeless families, will soon bring potential passengers to the only Neighborhood Ride route that hasn't yet turned a profit.

While the shuttle service links residents to the basics of food and work, it also brings fun within reach. "We can go downtown to see a show," says Sanford. "You couldn't do that before. Even kids like to ride. All they had to do before was hang around. Now, it's fifty cents to get to a soccer game. We're all more mobile."

*Above left to right: Brenda Lee and Jim Sanford board the shuttle.*

*Franklin Anderson shops at Arcade Market, a stop on Route 18 in Del Paso Heights.*

*Bottom left to right: A new shuttle makes its rounds. Affordable fares and "route deviations" make this ride accessible.*

# Resources that Promote Community Food Security

## ANTI-HUNGER

### **California Association of Food Banks**

[http://www.cafoodbanks.org/index\\_main.html](http://www.cafoodbanks.org/index_main.html)

Phone: (916) 456-2232

### **California Food Policy Advocates**

<http://www.cfpa.net>

Phone: (415) 777-4422

### **California Hunger Action Coalition**

<http://www.cfpa.net/chac>

### **California Nevada Community Action Association, Inc.**

[www.cal-neva.org](http://www.cal-neva.org)

Phone: (916) 443-1721

### **Foodshare**

<http://www.foodshare.org>

Phone: (860) 688-6500

## COMMUNITY GARDENING AND URBAN AGRICULTURE

### **American Community Gardening Association**

<http://www.communitygarden.org>

### **University of California Master Gardeners**

<http://www.mastergardeners.org>

## FARM TO SCHOOL

### **Center for Food and Justice, Urban and Environmental Policy Institute**

<http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/cfj/index.htm>

Phone: (323) 341-5095

Contact: Anupama Joshi

## FARMERS' MARKETS AND DIRECT MARKETING

### **California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets**

<http://farmersmarket.ucdavis.edu>

### **Local Harvest**

<http://www.localharvest.org>

### **University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program**

<http://sarep.ucdavis.edu/cdpp/farmersmkt.htm>

Phone: (530) 752-7556

## FARMLAND PRESERVATION

### **American Farmland Trust**

<http://www.farmland.org>

California Regional Office

Phone: (530) 753-1073

### **The California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection**

<http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/index.htm>

### **California Farmland Conservancy Program**

Phone: (916) 324-0850

### **Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program**

Phone: (916) 324-0859

### **California FarmLink**

<http://www.californiafarmlink.org>

Phone: (707) 829-1691

### **The Land Trust Alliance**

<http://www.lta.org/findlandtrust/CA.htm>

Phone: (202) 638-4725

### **The National Farm Transition Network**

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/nftn/homepage.html>

### **The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service**

<http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/>

(or to search the office in your county)

[http://oip.usda.gov/scripts/ndISAPI.dll/oip\\_public/USA\\_map](http://oip.usda.gov/scripts/ndISAPI.dll/oip_public/USA_map)

## FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

### **California Department of Social Services**

<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/default.htm>

### **California WIC**

<http://www.wicworks.ca.gov>

### **Federal Nutrition Programs**

[http://www.welfareinfo.org/federal\\_nutrition\\_programs.asp](http://www.welfareinfo.org/federal_nutrition_programs.asp)

## FOOD POLICY COUNCILS AND REGIONAL FOOD NETWORKS

### **Berkeley Food Policy Council**

<http://www.berkeleyfood.org>

# Publications of the Community Food Security Coalition

## **Community Food Security News**

*Edited by Andy Fisher. Quarterly*

The *Community Food Security News* is a newsletter with timely articles, conference updates, and other information about a variety of topics related to community food security. Past issues have included articles on the Community Food Projects program, Community Supported Agriculture in low-income communities, and a special issue on Schools and Food. (Free annual subscription with membership)

## **What's Cooking in Your Food System:**

### **A Guide to Community Food Assessments**

*By Kami Pothukuchi, Hugh Joseph, Hannah Burton, and Andy Fisher. 2002 (125 pp)*

This guidebook provides information about Community Food Assessments—a creative way to highlight food-related resources and needs, promote collaborations and community participation, and create lasting change. (\$18 + shipping)

## **Urban Agriculture and Community Food Security in the United States:**

### **Farming from the City Center To the Urban Fringe**

*By the Urban Agriculture Committee of the Community Food Security Coalition.*

*Primary author: Katherine H. Brown. Contributors: Martin Bailkey, Alison Meares-Cohen, Joe Nasr, Jac Smit, Terri Buchanan. 2002 (30 pp)*

(Available on the CFSC web site)

## **A Guide to Community Food Projects**

*By Maya Tauber and Andy Fisher. 2002 (9 pp)*

This guide features case studies of seven diverse and innovative projects funded by USDA's Community Food Projects grant program. It also includes basic information about the CFP program and sources for more information. (Available on the CFSC web site)

## **The Healthy Farms, Food and Communities Act: Policy Initiatives for the 2002 Farm Bill and the First Decade of the 21st Century**

*By Andy Fisher, Bob Gottlieb, Thomas Forster, and Mark Winne. 2001 (16 pp)*

This policy document proposes a legislative initiative to be incorporated into the 2002 Farm Bill, and a broader set of policy principles and legislation endorsed by CFSC. Both policy platforms create the basis for furthering the goals of healthy farms, healthy food, and, ultimately, healthy communities. (Available on the CFSC web site)

## **Healthy Farms, Healthy Kids:**

### **Evaluating the Barriers and Opportunities for Farm-to-School Programs**

*By Andrea Azuma and Andy Fisher. 2001 (62 pp)*

This report documents the barriers and opportunities for school food services to purchase food directly from local farmers. Case studies and policy recommendations are included. (\$12 + shipping)

## **Getting Food on the Table: An Action Guide to Local Food Policy**

*By Dawn Biehler, Andy Fisher, Kai Siedenburg, Mark Winne, Jill Zachary. Community Food Security Coalition and California Sustainable Working Group. 1999 (70 pp)*

The guide includes a department-by-department inventory of local programs, policies and functions that provide opportunities for supporting community food security. The guide also includes case studies, advice from experienced food policy advocates, a resource guide, and federal funding sources. (\$10 + shipping)



**California Healthy Cities**

<http://www.civicpartnerships.org/default.asp>  
Phone: (916) 646-8680

**Hayfork Food Network**

<http://myweb.ecomplanet.com/RAND8049>  
Phone: 530-628-5547

**Marin Food Policy Council**

[http://www.eecom.net/projects\\_school.htm](http://www.eecom.net/projects_school.htm)

**Los Angeles Food Justice Network**

[frank@lacehh.org](mailto:frank@lacehh.org)  
Phone: (213) 439-1070

**Pasadena Food Policy Council**

[msaenz@ci.pasadena.ca.us](mailto:msaenz@ci.pasadena.ca.us)  
Phone: (626) 744-6163

**Sacramento Hunger Commission**

<http://www.communitycouncil.org>  
Phone: (916) 447-7063

**San Francisco Food Systems Council**

Phone: (415) 252-3853

**West Contra Costa County Food Security Council**

Phone: (925) 313-6839

**HEALTH ADVOCACY**

**The Strategic Alliance to Prevent Childhood Obesity**

<http://preventioninstitute.org/strategic.html>  
Phone: (510) 444-7738, ext. 311

**NUTRITION EDUCATION**

**California Department of Health Services**

<http://www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/>

**California Nutrition Network/California 5-a-Day**

<http://www.ca5aday.com>

**Project Lean**

<http://www.californiaprojectlean.org>

**PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES**

*Promoting Healthy Eating with Community Food Security Projects: From the Ground Up* (Publication available in print and CD-Rom)

<http://www.CA5aday.com>

Phone: (916) 323-0594

Contact: Rosanne Stephenson

*USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit* (Publication)

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan02013>

Phone: (800) 999-6779

**SUSTAINABLE AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE**

**Appropriate Transfer Technology for Rural Areas**

<http://www.attra.ncat.org>

Phone: (800) 346-9140

**California Certified Organic Farmers**

<http://www.ccof.org>

Phone: (888) 423-2203

**California Organic Program—California Department of Food and Agriculture**

<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/fveqc/organic.htm>

**California Sustainable Agriculture Working Group**

<http://www.calsawg.org>

Phone: (831) 457-2815

**Californians for Pesticide Reform**

<http://www.pesticidereform.org>

Phone: (415) 981-3939

**Community Alliance with Family Farmers**

<http://www.caff.org>

Phone: (530) 756-8518

**Ecological Farming Association**

<http://www.eco-farm.org>

Phone: (831) 763-2111

**Organic Farming Research Foundation**

<http://www.ofrf.org>

Phone: (831) 426-6606

**University of California Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Production**

Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture

<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs>

Phone: (831) 459-2321

**Hot Peppers and Parking Lot Peaches:**

**Evaluating Farmers' Markets in Low-income Communities**

*By Andy Fisher. 1999 (61 pp)*

Farmers' Markets, WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, case studies, Electronic Benefit Transfer, farm stands, policy issues, guidelines for successful markets, and policy recommendations. (\$10 + shipping)

**Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City**

*By Linda Ashman, et al. 1993 (400 pp)*

The product of a year's work by six researchers, *Seeds of Change* is perhaps the most thorough documentation of an urban community's food system. Sections on hunger, nutrition, food industry, supermarket industry, community case study, farmers' markets, urban agriculture, joint ventures, and food policy councils. (\$30 + shipping)

**Community Food Security:**

**A Guide to Concept, Design, and Implementation**

*Edited by Hugh Joseph. 2000 (57 pp + appendices)*

This guidebook details such issues as the concept of CFS, community food planning, needs assessments, building collaborations and coalitions, project implementation, entrepreneurship, funding, program sustainability, case studies, and multiple attachments. (\$10 + shipping)

## Order Information

Coalition members receive a 20% discount. Fill out the order form online or contact the Coalition directly by phone or fax. Please specify the publication. Provide credit card information or mail a check made payable to:

**Community Food Security Coalition**

PO Box 209

Venice, CA 90294

Web [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)

Phone 310-822-5410

Fax 310-822-1440

For more information and for additional copies of this book call Community Food Security Coalition 310-822-5410.



## Councils Make Governments Focus On Food

It started with a simple question from Robert Wilson. If food is a basic human need—on par with water, housing, sewage treatment, garbage collection, gas, and electricity—why don't city governments have a department of food?

Wilson, a professor of urban planning at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, figured the need for such departments was obvious: inequities in food access based on gender, wealth, and race had been growing for decades, as Americans lost access to land and the ability to grow or even shop for food in their own neighborhoods. Wilson realized food security could no longer be left to the private sector. It required action by local jurisdictions.

From Wilson's idea grew the food policy councils that are sprouting across America. Food policy councils work to support local food systems, sustainable agriculture, and equitable access—from non-emergency sources—to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate, high quality food. Some councils are appointed by mayors, city council members, or county boards of supervisors and staffed by government employees. Others are an all-volunteer mix of public officials—from health, housing, and economic development departments—and residents drawn from

homeless populations, community gardens, farmers' markets, public schools, and child care facilities. Perhaps they don't quite meet Wilson's vision of official Departments of Food: most operate on shoestring budgets. But they've made big strides toward Wilson's goal of giving food a footing in public policy—and not only at the local level. Connecticut, Iowa, Utah, and North Carolina have formed statewide food policy councils.

Councils allow stakeholders—those affected by changes in food system policies—to respond quickly as issues emerge. They have organized campaigns to sway local governments in

support of healthy school lunch programs, created new bus lines to take low-income shoppers to outlying supermarkets, and gained funding for such food access programs as new farmers' markets. They strive for continuous, broad recruitment, openness to new project ideas, and high participation rates. Besides working on public policy, they engage colleges in community-based research projects, host speakers on a variety of topics, and promote healthy food choices through nutrition education, cooking classes, taste tests, and recipe dissemination at community events. From the first food policy council, founded in Knoxville, Tennessee in the late 1970s, the movement has grown to include councils in Hartford, St. Paul, Portland (OR), Toronto, and many other cities.

In California, food policy councils have taken a community-driven approach in Los Angeles, Pasadena, Berkeley, San Francisco, Marin County, and other areas and have begun to show results:

- The Berkeley Food Policy Council in 2001 gained passage of a municipal food policy that encourages fresh, local, and organic foods to be served in the institutional food programs run by the city. The council spawned the Farm Fresh Choice program (see page 2) and assisted in the development of a school district food policy.
- The Los Angeles Food Security and Hunger Partnership in the late 1990s convinced the city council to provide \$100,000 a year for food access programs. The money has gone toward new farmers' markets, community gardens, a fresh-food access guide, and community organizing projects.
- In Marin County, the Food Policy Council gained inclusion of food security language into many parts of the county's general plan, which is currently under review. The plan incorporates food security as a key element in county government planning.

Perhaps most importantly, food policy councils put healthy food on the radar screens of local and state governments—so that American families can put healthy food on the table every day.

—Kate Clayton, Berkeley Department of Public Health and  
Andy Fisher, Community Food Security Coalition

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*Above:*  
PlacerGROWN onions from Twin Brooks Farm.

*Left:*  
Red corn offering from the small plot of Ediogenes "Eddie" Luviano Rumbos at the Urban Garden of the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.

**Back Cover:**

*Background :*  
At work at AMO Organics in Hollister.

*Top left:*  
Sacramento Neighborhood Ride en route to a grocery store.

*Top right:*  
Building community at the LA Regional Food Bank's Urban Garden.

*Bottom left:*  
PlacerGROWN helps Twin Brooks Farm market its produce.

*Bottom right:*  
Gateway Foods sells affordable produce in west Oakland.

