



*Getting to the
Root of the
Problem*

Hunger Action Network OF NEW YORK STATE

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Hunger Alert – May 2008

1. Farm Bill Decision Postponed another 2 weeks – Calls Still Needed
2. Tues May 6th single payer lobby day and rally
3. A Benefit to End Hunger, Feast for Famine - Wednesday, May 14, 5:30 to 8 PM, Albany
4. Hunger Doesn't Take a Summer Vacation: the Summer Food Service Program
5. Healthy Schools Act Stalled
6. Faith and Hunger Network Conferences May 7 Poughkeepsie, May 17th Buffalo
7. HANNYS Adds New CSA in Long Island City; West Harlem CSA starts second year
8. State Senate Action on welfare reforms seems unlikely
9. The Global Food Crisis – At Home and Abroad; State Cuts Emergency Food Funding
10. Albany Conference on Making Food Deserts Bloom; Food Policy Council Listening Sessions

1. Farm Bill Decision Postponed another 2 weeks – Calls Still Needed

Congress yesterday voted for the 6th time to extend the farm bill deadline by 2 weeks. Negotiators reached a tentative agreement last week on how to pay for the bill, which would cost almost \$300 billion over five years, but are still resolving the policy, including how much would be paid to farmers in a time of record crop prices. President Bush has threatened to veto the bill if the subsidies to large farms aren't cut. The present agreement would still allow growers who earn up to \$950,000 annually in farm income to receive payments, far from the \$200,000 annual income cap the Bush administration originally suggested.

The Farm Bill deal would allocate \$10.2 billion in new ten-year funding for the nutrition title. It also increases farm subsidies, despite record commodity prices and farm income. Congress has added a whole new subsidy program, a permanent disaster fund, even while they are modestly trimming some ongoing subsidy programs. Bread for the World wants money shifted from subsidies to affluent landowners into investments that would benefit farm and rural families who really need help. That same shift would reduce the extent to which U.S. farm policies interfere with agriculture in Africa and other poor parts of the world.

Call Members of Congress toll-free: 1-800-826-9624. Messages: Urge members to cut the commodity subsidies and put more funds into small farmers, rural development and fruits and vegetables. Thank Members for: 1) food stamp benefit increases (especially raising and indexing the \$10 minimum monthly benefit and standard deduction); and boosting purchases in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)(raising and indexing funding).

2. Tues May 6th single payer lobby day and rally

Come join New Yorkers for Single Payer Health Care on Tuesday May 6th at the State Capitol. We will help educate legislators and state health officials about the merits of single payer health care. We will push the

legislature to pass a resolution in support of HR 676 at the federal level and support passage of state legislation for single payer. A7354 /S3107

The day will begin at 9:40 at the Emmanuel Baptist Church, 275 State St. Albany (1/2 block from the Capitol) where Hunger Action has its offices. NY State is presently studying the benefits and costs of the various approaches to universal health care. Once the studies are completed this summer, the Governor will make a recommendation as to the best model. One of the models to be studied must be a single payer system. We want to make sure that legislators understand the study process. There will also be a rally at noon on the west side of the Capitol (near AE Smith Bldg) To register. 518 434-7371 xt 1#, dunleamark@aol.com.

3. A Benefit to End Hunger, Feast for Famine - Wednesday, May 14, 5:30 to 8 PM, Albany

The Hunger Action Network of New York State's 18th annual benefit to end hunger, Feast for Famine, will be held at the Egg at the Empire State Plaza in Albany on Wednesday May 14th from 5:30 to 8:00 PM. Feast for Famine is a food and beverage tasting to raise support for Hunger Action's work in the Capital District. The food will be prepared by some of the Capital Region's best chefs, accompanied by teas, microbrews, coffee served to participants along with a silent auction.

Some of the participating restaurants, coffeehouses, and microbreweries include: Bayou Café, Bongiorno's, Brownstone Catering, Cascade Mountain Winery and Restaurant, Dakota Steakhouse, DeJohn's Restaurant & Pub, DiviniTea, El Loco Mexican Café, El Mariachi Mexican Restaurant, Healthy Community Harvest, Jack's Oyster House, Justin's, McCadam Cheese, Miss Albany Diner, Moon & River Cafe, My Linh, New World Home Cooking, Olde Saratoga Brewing Co., Rock Hill Bakehouse, Shalimar, V & R Restaurant, and Yono's. The event is co-sponsored by CSEA, PEF, Albany Public School Teacher's Association, NYS Nurses Association, Metroland and Times Union. Suggested price \$45. Call 518 434-7371.

4. Hunger Doesn't Take a Summer Vacation: the Summer Food Service Program

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federal nutrition program to supplement the free meals that low income children 18 and under receive at school during the school year. The meals are prepared and distributed by a sponsor, which could be a school, church, or community group. The meals are then distributed to sites, which include public pools, parks, churches, food pantries, and other public spaces. There is no documentation requirement on the part of the child. As long as the site services a population that is at least 50 percent under the poverty line, all children under 18 can receive a free meal. Despite the availability of these government funds and the simplicity of the program, the SFSP remains underutilized. While over 70 percent of eligible children in New York State participate in the school lunch program, less than 20 percent of these children participate in the SFSP. This is mostly due to a lack of public information about the program, as well as a lack of participating sponsors and sites. Please consider becoming a site. The last day to sign up is May 16th. For more information, contact Veda Myers at 212-741-8192 ex. 2#. Lets work together to end child hunger!

5. Healthy Schools Act Stalled

The Healthy Schools Act, which was close to agreement last year, was dropped from the budget. We are hopeful that the Governor, Senate and Assembly will come to agreement but negotiations appeared to be stalled over a number of issues. Senator Saland and Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan are the chairs of the Education Committees. The School Board Association also tends to oppose state requirements to improve nutrition for students.

This bill would require the State to establish nutritional standards for foods and beverages in elementary and secondary schools. The bill would expand the existing school breakfast mandate; school districts would be required to establish a school breakfast program in middle schools and high schools that participate in the

Federal School Lunch Program. Schools would need to develop local school wellness policies. This bill would increase access to and affordability of healthy school meals by increasing the State subsidy on reduced priced meals, effectively making these meals free to eligible students. Finally, recognizing the potential costs associated with offering healthy food options, this bill would increase the State subsidy on all meals effective October 1, 2009.

This bill is as an important effort to improve the nutritional status of children in NY, including addressing the growing problem of obesity among children which has resulted in escalating rates of diabetes, precursors to heart disease, asthma and other serious diseases in our children. This bill will help develop healthy eating habits at a young age so they may live longer and healthier lives. It will help to significantly decrease health care costs by preventing and reducing rates of chronic diseases in our children as they grow into adulthood.

6. Faith and Hunger Network Conferences May 7 Poughkeepsie, May 17th Buffalo

The annual mid-Hudson Faith and Hunger Network conference will take place at the Lunch Box at 29 N. Hamilton St., Poughkeepsie on Wed. May 7th from 6 to 9 PM. Mark Dunlea from Hunger Action and Derrick Boykin from Bread for the World will talk. Senator Saland, Chair of the Senate Education Committee, has been invited to speak about the Healthy Schools Act. Buffalo will host their 9th annual Faith and Hunger conference on Sat. May 17th from 9:15 AM to 2 PM at St. Joseph's University Church, 3269 Main St., Buffalo. Contact Kelly Ann Kowalski at 716 882-7705 to register. Dunlea and Boykin will speak about welfare, universal health care and third world poverty and economic development.

7. HANNYS Adds New CSA in Long Island City; West Harlem CSA starts second year

A new Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program is being launched in Long Island City, Queens as a comprehensive solution to a variety of shortcomings in the neighborhood's food structure. CSA is a way to create a relationship with a local farm to receive a weekly basket of produce. By "buying" a share with the The Farm at Millers Crossing, people become members of the CSA. There are subsidized prices and revolving loan funds for low-income participants. Then, each week during the growing season (June-Nov) the farmer delivers your share of produce to a central distribution site. The LIC CSA's distribution site is housed at The Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement; a community based non-profit organization that offers comprehensive services to the youth, adults, seniors and families who in reside in Queensbridge Houses. The LIC CSA hopes to increase the amount of fresh vegetables eaten by residents of Long Island City as well as tackle food affordability issues by offering a variety of flexible payment options that are viable for the neighborhood and appropriate for our farmer. For more information contact Danielle Seidita at (212)741-8192 ext 5# or dseidita@hungeractionnys.org.

8. State Senate Action on welfare reforms seems unlikely

There are a number of issues that the Assembly and the Governor continues to push to improve the welfare system that lack support in the Senate. Assembly Social Services Committee Chair is pushing legislation (A10467) to increase the Earned Income Disregard by increasing the amount of the disregard to 67% (from about 50%) and by eliminating the Standard of Need (which right now cuts working people off public assistance while they are still several thousand dollars below the federal poverty line). The EID is how much money welfare participants can keep from jobs; without the EID, their benefits would be reduced by the amount of the wages.

OTDA and the Assembly would also like to make permanent the law the allows work study and internships to count as work for welfare participants. The Senate prefers to just keep on extending the law every two years.

9. The Global Food Crisis – At Home and Abroad; State Cuts Emergency Food Funding

Rising food costs are contributing to longer lines at emergency food programs and growing hunger. While the cost of food rose by 4.7 percent from March 2007 to March 2008, the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (the mix of food items on which low-income people rely) rose even faster. 5.6%. Yet the recent state budget cut funding for emergency food by 2% (school meal programs were also cut by 2%). The state budget also failed to include the extra \$5 million released by the Spitzer administration last Thanksgiving.

One columnist in the Wall Street Journal advised Americans to invest in “food”, since the prices are just going to get higher, just as gas is doing. The most recent government data shows food inflation for the average American household is now running at 4.5% a year. And some prices are rising even more quickly. The latest data show cereal prices rising by more than 8% a year. Both flour and rice are up more than 13%. Milk, cheese, bananas and even peanut butter: They're all up by more than 10%. Eggs have rocketed up 30% in a year. Ground beef prices are up 4.8% and chicken by 5.4%.

Rising food prices are fueling the global hunger crisis. It is taking an immense toll on the world's poorest people, who typically spend up to 80 percent of their income on food. The World Bank estimates that food prices have gone up by 83 percent globally over the last three years. As many as 100 million more poor people could be made worse off by this burgeoning hunger crisis. After 30 years of progress against hunger and poverty, that is a setback that the United States and the rest of the world cannot afford to let happen. Bread for the World is urging Congress to take action in the pending farm bill.

10. Albany Conference on Making Food Deserts Bloom; Food Policy Council Listening Sessions

Hunger Action is planning a conference in Albany to focus on community food security and urban agriculture. The conference is intended to help develop an agenda for the Food Policy Council. It had been scheduled for Friday May 30th but we are thinking of moving it to the following Friday June 6th since the Food Policy Council has now schedule a listening session on LI on the 30th. Topics include: Strategies to Improve Nutritional Impact of Federal Nutrition Programs; What can NYS do to promote a local food economy; and Innovative Approaches to Bringing Fruits and Vegetables into Low-Income Communities

The Council has scheduled listening sessions for: **May 5, Rochester** 1 to 3pm in conjunction with the Rochester Public Market at Le Lemon Grass II, 285 North Union Street, Rochester. **May 29 Harlem** from 5 to 7pm at the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building 163 West 125th Street, New York. **May 30 Long Island.** 11am to 1pm at the Riverhead Town Hall, 200 Howell Avenue, Riverhead, Long Island. RSVP with Mary Ann Stockman at (518) 485-7728 or maryann.stockman@agmkt.state.ny.us