

For more information, please contact us at:

Hunger Action Network of NYS

275 State Street, 4th Floor
Albany, NY 12210
(518) 434-7371 • Fax (518) 434-7390

260 West 36th Street, Suite 504
New York, NY 10018
(212) 741-8192 • Fax (212) 741-7236

www.hungeractionnys.org • info@hungeractionnys.org



*Urban Delights youth enjoying produce.
Syracuse, NY*

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Establishing a NYS Council on Food Policy



“The basic goal of food and nutrition policy is not only to provide adequate nutrition in an accessible and affordable manner, but also to strive to achieve efficient growth in agricultural production, job generation, food security and expanded markets for goods.”

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Dear Hunger Action Network Supporter,

This fall we will elect a new Governor and all the members of the state legislature. It is urgent that we all make a concerted effort to educate our legislators about the importance of the NYS Food Policy Council (FPC) so they will place it high on their list of priorities for next year. We must also continue to educate ourselves and our communities about the role the Food Policy Council could play on issues such as hunger, poverty, nutrition, environmental protection and sustainable agriculture.

A Council on Food Policy would have a variety of benefits for New York. It has as its starting point the food and health needs of low-income communities but it also addresses a broad range of problems affecting our entire food system: disappearing farmland and inner city supermarkets, increasing poverty and hunger, diminishing family farms, economic opportunity, community development, the environment, rural community disintegration, inadequate green space, and diet-related health problems.

We cannot end hunger without a strong local agricultural system. This booklet outlines the concept of community food security and how the Food Policy Council would assist with promoting community food security. A Food Policy Council did exist during the Cuomo administration. Re-establishing it has received bipartisan support as well as the endorsement of the NYS Farm Bureau, dietetic groups, anti-hunger organizations and sustainable agriculture groups.

Contact Information for Gubernatorial Candidates

Democratic candidates:

Eliot Spitzer
330 Madison Avenue
19th Floor
New York, NY 10017
Phone: 212.529.2006
Fax: 212.979.2607
Email: Spitzer@spitzer2006.com

Thomas Suozzi
Friends of Tom Suozzi
P.O. Box 112
Carle Place, NY 11514
Phone: (516) 741-5315

Republican candidate
John Faso
Friends of John Faso 2006
P.O. Box 10278
Albany, NY 12201
Phone: (518) 465-2006
Fax: (518) 465-2007
info@johnfaso.com

Libertarian candidate
John Clifton
Elect Clifton Inc.
165-90 Baisley Blvd., #415
Jamaica, NY 11434
Phone: (877) 769-4014
Electclifton@spamarrest.com

Green Party candidate
Malachy McCourt
Phone: (631) 587-2911
rhill3@optonline.net

TAKE ACTION NOW!

- **Contact the gubernatorial candidates and tell them we need a Council on Food Policy!** The New York State 2006 gubernatorial election is November 7th. Contact information and a sample letter are included.
- Fill out the enclosed form to sign onto the Community Food Security Legislative Agenda for NYS. Please fax it back to (518) 434-7371 or mail it to: Hunger Action Network of NYS, 275 State Street, Albany, NY 12210
- Have your organization join a statewide coalition to receive updates and coordinate activities on the Food Policy Council & other CFS issues. We will have monthly or bi-monthly conference calls starting this fall. Email Dunleamark@aol.com to join!
- Send the attached CFS sign-on form to your State Senator and Assemblyperson. To find out who represents you, go to www.vote-smart.org or contact Hunger Action.
- Educate others about the purpose of a Council on Food Policy.
- Join our listserv to receive up to date information about the FPC and other legislative items. Email Dunleamark@aol.com to join.
- Download our Community Food Security Report, which provides further details on Community Food Security and the Food Policy Council. Go to: www.hungeractionnys.org
- Become a member of Hunger Action!

What is Community Food Security?

According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, "food security means that food is available at all times; that all persons have means of access to it; that it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety; and that it is acceptable within the given culture. Only when all these conditions are in place can a population be considered food secure".

Food for Growth in Buffalo points out that ensuring food security differs from the concept of feeding the hungry. Emergency food programs (EFPs) are a short-term measure that only treats the symptom of a societal problem. Food security in contrast requires proactive steps to create a community food system that enhances citizens' access to nutritious and affordable food at all times.

In a community food system, food is grown, produced, processed and disposed at a local level. Since locally produced and distributed food reduces dependence on long-distance food sources, a community food system increases community self-sufficiency. A community food system has the potential to promote ecologically friendly food cultivation methods and encourage community development. Such a system can also have a significant impact on economic development because it creates locally based employment and provides opportunities for people to raise themselves out of poverty.

According to the Community Food Security Coalition, the term Community Food Security was developed in 1994 by advocates seeking comprehensive solutions to the nation's food and farming crises. It integrates many different fields, such as public health, ecology, community development and economic development into a comprehensive framework for meeting a community's food needs.

There are five basic principles to Community Food Security (CFS):

Low-Income. CFS focuses on meeting the food needs of low-income communities. In addition to providing food to the hungry, it includes job training, business skill development, urban greening, farmland preservation, and community revitalization.

Community sustainability. CFS builds up a community's food resources to meet its own needs. These resources may include supermarkets, farmers' markets, gardens, transportation, community-based food processing ventures, and urban farms.

Self-reliance/empowerment. CFS seeks to build individuals' abilities to provide for their own food needs.

Local agriculture. CFS builds better links between farmers and consumers, helping to strengthen consumer knowledge and concern about their food source.

Food system. CFS emphasizes collaboration among many partners involved in farming, processing, distributing, marketing and consuming food products.

Some key problems that a Food Policy Council should address:

Lack of Availability of nutritious food

- ▶ A lack of supermarkets with fresh fruits, vegetables, and meat
- ▶ Community members are forced to cut back on food portions or skip meals
- ▶ Individuals and families are dependent on emergency food programs (EFPs) or soup kitchens and food pantries
- ▶ Food pantries and soup kitchens are overwhelmed and overextended
- ▶ Culturally appropriate food is inaccessible to ethnic and immigrant groups
- ▶ Problems accessing Food Stamps or using Food Stamps Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards at farm stands, farmers' markets, or food buying clubs
- ▶ Not enough adequate community gardening projects

Summary of NYS Council on Food and Nutrition Policy Bill

A Food Policy Council bill for NYS (A10461/S7618) has been introduced by As. Felix Ortiz. Senator Cathy Young introduced the bill in the Senate. *Summary:*

To establish a State food policy council to develop comprehensive, coordinated state food policies with the goal of providing a plentiful, accessible, affordable, safe and nutritious food supply, comprised of locally produced foods as much as possible, so that all citizens of the State are able to eat a healthy diet and avoid hunger and have the opportunity to support a vibrant local farm and food economy.

The Council would consist of the Commissioners or Directors of: Health, Agriculture & Markets, Temporary & Disability Assistance, Education, Aging, Children & Family Services, General Services, Economic Development, Labor, Transportation, Environmental Conservation, State Emergency Management, and others. Establish an Advisory Board to the Council of at least 15 members representing the issue areas of agriculture, anti-hunger, nutrition, food businesses, and labor.

The Council would report every December on: the prevalence of hunger and food insecurity, the nutritional well-being of various population groups, and the status of agriculture and the food industry in the State. The report would include recommendations of state policies and actions to meet the following goals: reducing hunger by providing affordable, nutritious food, from local producers whenever possible; the adoption of diets by New Yorkers that promote health and prevent disease, using foods from local producers whenever possible; increased consumer demand for New York farm products; a profitable food producing system which maximizes production of nutritious foods, protects the environment, and provides sufficient income for farm families and farm workers; economic viability for food processing, marketing and distribution industries; and, increased effectiveness and coordination of food, farm and nutrition programs.

For text of the bill, go to <http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=A10461&sh=t>

Potential Outcomes of a Council on Food Policy

The primary outcome of Food Policy Council activities should be a change in food and/or agriculture policy. Examples of public policy changes catalyzed through FPCs in other states include:

- Improving research, monitoring, and evaluation efforts to help communities assess and strengthen food security.
- Changes in the motor vehicle requirement for food stamp eligibility
- Implementation of increased EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) equipment at farmers' markets
- Urban agricultural resolution to conduct an "Agricultural Inventory" of city-owned property directing appropriate bureaus to identify city-owned land which may be available for community gardens or other agricultural uses
- Procurement rule change allowing correctional facilities to purchase locally grown food
- Creation of new forms of insurance for small producers
- Development of a simplified application for food stamp benefits
- Implementation of "Farm to School" and "Farm to Cafeteria" programs.

Lack of Affordability

- ▶ Lack of fresh affordable foods at supermarkets
- ▶ Farmers' markets and local growers' produce can be more expensive
- ▶ Organic foods can cost more
- ▶ Prices for food are higher at convenience stores and bodegas that tend to be located in lower income areas where supermarkets are unavailable
- ▶ Low-income families are forced to choose between food and paying for other household bills such as rent, home heating costs, medical costs, gas for the cars, etc.

Unsustainable and Environmentally Irresponsible Food System

- ▶ Not enough locally produced food grown without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and fertilizers
- ▶ Fertilizer runoff pollutes lakes and streams (eutrophication that leads to algal bloom) and contaminates groundwater (cause of Blue Baby Syndrome)
- ▶ Wind erosion of exposed farmland decreases fertility of soil and increases water pollution
- ▶ Synthetic fertilizer production is dependent on oil, a nonrenewable resource
- ▶ Cattle and hog feedlots often store their animal waste in lagoons that can contaminate groundwater and cause respiratory problems in local residents
- ▶ Planting monocultures destroy biodiversity
- ▶ Big farms dependent on government subsidies for commodity crops while small farms do not receive enough aid
- ▶ Small farms are bought by big agribusiness because they can no longer make a profit in a saturated market or pay off debts
- ▶ Current agriculture policies export US grown crops internationally and undercut competitor's prices so other nations are forced to sell export their crops or let it go to waste
- ▶ Local producers have to compete with less expensive food produced in foreign countries with lax labor and food safety laws
- ▶ Transportation of food produced across the country or imported uses a lot of fuel and the carbon dioxide produced further exacerbates global warming

Why Create a Food Policy Council?

When former Governor Cuomo established such a Council during the late 1980's, he stated "the basic goal of a food and nutrition policy is not only to provide adequate nutrition in an accessible and affordable manner, but also to strive to achieve efficient growth in agricultural production, job generation, food security and expanded markets for foods."

A NYS Council on Food Policy should be re-established, pulling together the various state agencies that work on health, hunger, food, and agriculture issues. Food Policy Councils help convene multiple stakeholders in a food system, providing a forum for a comprehensive examination of a food system. Councils enable different parts of the food system and government to learn more about what each does and consider how their actions impact other parts of the food system. Councils create an environment in which people are able to ask questions usually not asked, such as "How much food eaten is raised locally?" or "Does the state make efforts to purchase local food?"

FPCs provide a mechanism to develop specific priority objectives for a food sector, e.g. reducing the incidence of hunger, expanding rural economic development, and improving the administration of state programs. The Councils provide a forum to discuss emerging issues such as local foods, direct marketing, small farms and other "new agriculture" developments, which fall outside traditional "farm" programs.

FPCs convene individuals and government agencies that do not typically work directly with each other nor are they asked to be involved when farm and agricultural policy is discussed. They foster a comprehensive approach to analyzing food system issues, addressing the inner-workings of the different parts of the food system and the need for coordination and integration of actions if policy goals are to be achieved. For example, if a key objective is to increase markets for locally produced food, a Council can play a role to consider how decisions at all levels of a food system - not just farmers or governmental officials, but also food buyers, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers - factor into public policy decisions.

Joel Berg, Executive Director of the NYC Coalition Against Hunger and former director of Community Food Security for USDA during the Clinton administration, has outlined eight goals for a food policy council in NY:

- Strengthening the Federal nutrition assistance safety net by supporting the full and efficient use of the Food Stamp; WIC; School Lunch; School Breakfast; Summer Food Service; and Child and Adult Care Feeding Programs.
- Increasing economic and job security by helping low-income people obtain living wage jobs and attain self-sufficiency.
- Catalyzing or enhancing state and local infrastructures to reduce hunger and food insecurity.
- Increasing the amount – and improving the nutritional quality – of supplemental food provided by nonprofit groups by aiding food recovery, gleaning, and food donation programs, while helping front-line agencies to coordinate and harmonize their services.
- Improving community food production and marketing by aiding projects that grow, process, and distribute food locally and regionally, including farmers' markets, farm-top-institution projects, and community supported agriculture. Bolster the ability of such projects and entities to utilize food stamp and WIC benefits.
- Increasing both the availability of low-cost nutritious food and the education necessary to obtain and prepare such food, thereby combating both malnutrition and obesity.
- Boosting education and awareness by increasing efforts to inform the public about nutrition, food safety, and community food security. Educating the public by using the "bully pulpit" of high-profile government offices to increase public awareness of the causes of food insecurity and highlight innovative community solutions to hunger.