



AGRICULTURE NEWS

New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets
10B Airline Drive • Albany, New York 12235 • www.agmkt.state.ny.us

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FOR RELEASE:
Immediately, Monday
March 3, 2008

COUNCIL ON FOOD POLICY TO HOLD LISTENING SESSIONS **Listening Sessions Scheduled for April 3, 2008 in NYC**

The New York State Council on Food Policy is holding two listening sessions in New York City to gain perspective from community members on several food policy issue areas and to seek opportunities to maximize collaboration among stakeholders.

Both listening sessions are scheduled for Thursday, April 3, 2008 at the Federal Office Building on 90 Church Street in Lower Manhattan in Conference Rooms A & B on the 4th floor. Session 1 will be held from 10:00 am to 12 noon; Session 2 will be held from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

The listening session is open to the public and will be an open microphone format. Anyone who wishes to participate will have three minutes to present their opinions and must also provide their comments in written format.

Comments should focus on how to strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers; how to maximize participation in food and nutrition assistance programs; and how to increase consumer awareness and knowledge about healthy eating and improve access to safe and nutritious foods.

Due to limited time and space, presenters will be accepted on a first come, first serve basis. The Council also requests that only one member per organization and only those who have not yet addressed the Council provide comments. Those who cannot attend the listening session can submit written comments at any time.

Those wishing to participate must RSVP by March 28, 2008 to Mary Ann Stockman at 518-485-7728 or maryann.stockman@agmkt.state.ny.us and indicate which session you wish to attend. A picture ID will be required by all presenters in order to be admitted into the building.

The Council on Food Policy is hosting a series of listening sessions throughout the State. The first two sessions were held in Albany and Syracuse in February. Subsequent

sessions will take place in Binghamton, Rochester and Long Island. Dates and locations of those listening sessions will be posted as they are scheduled at www.agmkt.state.ny.us/eventcal.html.

Governor Spitzer created the Council on Food Policy last year to coordinate state agriculture policy and look at ways to increase sales of New York agricultural products to New York customers. The Council will also make recommendations on developing food policy that will ensure the safe, fresh, nutritious and affordable food for all New Yorkers, especially low income residents, senior citizens and children.

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Jessica A. Chittenden
Director of Communications
NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets
10B Airline Dr., Albany, NY 12235
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NYS COUNCIL ON FOOD POLICY LISTENING SESSION
APRIL 3, 2008
FEDERAL OFFICE BLDG.
90 CHURCH ST., MANHATTAN

10:00 A.M. – 12:00 NOON

Presenter	Organization
1. Daniel LaRoche	Empire State Medical Association
2. Keri Gans	New York State Dietetic Association
3. Barbara Baron	American Dairy Association & Dairy Council
4. James Subdhi	WE ACT for Environmental Justice
5. Maggie Meehan	Greater New York Dietetic Assoc.
6. Sarita Daftary	East New York Farms!
7. Aley Kent	Heifer International/NY Farms!
8. Kate MacKenzie	City Harvest
9. Áine Duggan	Food Bank for NYC/Food Change
10. Joel Berg	New York City Coalition Against Hunger
11. Debbie Quinones	Community Board #11 *TBS
12. Bill Ayres	WNY World Hunger Year
13. Michael Humit	Greenmarket *TBS
14. Carol Parker-Dunlanson	Cornell Cooperative Extension *TBS
15. Peter Brest	Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty
16. Erica Packard	Manhattan Land Trust *TBS
17. Nick Freudenberg	Public Health Assoc. of NYS
18. Keith-Thomas Ayoob	Albert Einstein College of Medicine

***TBS – TO BE SUBMITTED**

Draft Talking Points

Daniel Laroche, MD

President, Empire State Medical Association (www.nyesma.org)

49 West 127th Street, NY, NY 10027

New York State Council on Food Policy Listening Session

Thursday, April 3, 2008

New York, New York

I'm pleased to offer these thoughts in response to the council's request for comments on food policy issues, including how to strengthen the connection between New York state food products and consumers, and how to improve access to nutritious foods.

In the inner city areas of New York with the highest health disparities in the South Bronx, Harlem, Southeast queens, and Central Brooklyn, you have fast food, poorly stocked and over-crowded supermarkets, and poorly stocked bodegas. The lack of access to healthy food in these areas directly contributes to healthcare disparities.

Education is perhaps the first line of offense in the long fight to change eating patterns and food distribution in any given neighborhood. We recommend that educational posters and billboards be placed on buildings, bustops and trainstops and public buildings advertising a healthy food chain. Australia has a pyramid food poster that they display with pictures and a listing of foods that are healthy and less healthy to educate their population. New York should have a similar poster that works to educates its residents.

Access to healthy food is a human rights issue and that the "lack of access to food in a community is an indicator of material deprivation." Material support must be given to organization such as "B-Healthy" that tries to offset the dominance of processed foods and fast food advertising in the lives of young people with political education and a sort of counter-insurgency culinary training.

We also recommend the New York State government support groups such as Just Food (www.justfood.org), which has integrated a social justice mission into its name, has been the catalyst for the establishment of 30 CSAs – Community Supported Agriculture – throughout the city, some in areas like Harlem, Bushwick and East New York. CSAs are arrangements in which people living in a given area purchase "shares" of organically-grown produce directly from local sources. CSAs provide urban families with more healthy eating choices, while also supporting family-run farms. Just as importantly, CSAs, like other local food systems, eliminate a neighborhood's dependence on far-flung corporate growers and a host of intervening processors, handlers, distributors, transporters and other middle people who have made the business of connecting urban America to food inefficient and environmentally taxing.

A study of several states found that wealthy neighborhoods had over three times as many supermarkets as low-income neighborhoods. Having more supermarkets in the neighborhood resulted in even greater fruit and vegetable consumption. Conversely, the

lack of access to healthy foods can have adverse effects on individuals' health. A diet poor in fruits and vegetables increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other illnesses that disproportionately affect people of color. Poor dietary behaviors also contribute to the obesity epidemic, which is increasing at an alarming rate nationwide.

In Harlem, two community organizations—The Community Association of East Harlem Abyssinian Triangle (EHAT) and the Abyssinian Development Corporation—worked for ten years to bring a supermarket to the community. When it opened in 1999, the 64,000 square foot, \$15 million retail center anchored by a Pathmark supermarket was one of the new real estate developments that catalyzed Harlem's recent commercial renaissance.

Community involvement was critical to the project. EHAT and Abyssinian secured project financing, leveraging three dollars of private sector funds for every dollar of public funding. They also negotiated an agreement with Pathmark to guarantee that at least 75 percent of the new jobs would go to local residents. The store has been extremely successful. Data from 1999 showed that the supermarket met or exceeded industry averages in almost every category. The store now has one of the largest produce departments in New York City. We recommend that New York City invest and partner by providing startup subsidies with supermarkets to build new supermarkets in the South Bronx, Central Harlem, Southeast Queens to provide greater access to healthier foods. Hopefully these initiatives will not have to take another 10 years. We know from studies that poor supermarket access is linked to the high incidence of diet-related diseases in many low-income neighborhoods. Plus, large grocery stores and supermarkets can serve as high volume "anchors" that generate increased foot traffic, drawing in other retail stores that sell complementary goods and services.

I would also like to focus in particular on milk and dairy products, which are especially relevant to this discussion for two reasons. First, milk is New York's leading agricultural product, accounting for half of the state's total agricultural receipts. New York milk production was 11.7 billion pounds in 2005, with an estimated value of \$1.91 billion. More important, milk is extremely important to the diets of all Americans. Milk is a particularly good source of calcium, which is very beneficial for good bone health and also helpful in regulating blood pressure and maintaining a healthy weight. Studies also show calcium can be protective against colon cancer. Dairy foods contribute more than 72 percent of the calcium in the food supply.

The federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend three cups of low-fat or fat-free milk or milk products daily for older children and adults, and two cups for younger children. A staggering 81 percent of the U.S. population fails to meet these recommendations. This is particularly a problem for women. Eighty-four percent of women ages 20 to 50 do not meet the DGA recommendation. Children, on average, come close to consuming the recommended two servings per day. Still only about half of those ages 4-8 meet the recommendation.

If the goal is to strengthen ties between New York food products and consumers, one big thing the state government can do is encourage consumption of more low fat milk and

low fat yogurt products in state and federal nutrition programs, including school meals, WIC, and child and adult feeding programs. Also, to the extent these programs offer nutrition education, information about the benefits of local food products should be included.

Taking these steps offers multiple benefits. Consuming local dairy products helps farmers stay in business. That, in turn, preserves open space and wildlife habitat. It also benefits the environment by reducing our carbon footprint. It means better air quality and reduced fuel usage. Most important, encouraging consumption of more dairy products has the potential to make New Yorkers healthier. One recent national study projected that consuming three to four servings of low fat dairy foods a day could lead to a five-year savings in health care costs in excess of \$200 billion.

Increasing the variety of low-fat dairy foods offered in nutrition programs can make it easier for consumers to meet daily nutrient intake targets. Likewise, for those who have difficulty digesting dairy, making reduced-lactose and lactose-free milk the preferred milk substitutes will make it more likely clients of these programs will get the nutrients they need.

Schools, in particular, need to increase the availability and appeal of milk and dairy products to students, who are developing important lifelong nutrition habits. The federal Child Nutrition Act recently reinforced milk's place as the preferred school beverage and gave schools the ability to offer milk anytime, and anywhere.

Milk, yogurt and cheese are nutrient-rich foods that together provide nine essential nutrients children need every day, including calcium, protein, potassium, phosphorous, vitamins A, D and B-12, riboflavin and niacin. Three servings of milk a day provide 46 percent of a child's needed daily intake of calcium, 31 percent of needed daily intake of vitamin B-12, 27 percent of both phosphorus and riboflavin intake, and approximately 20 percent of vitamin A, magnesium, and potassium intake. Finally, three servings of milk provide 16 percent of a child's daily need for protein and nine percent of a child's energy need.

A number of state legislatures have been considering bills that encourage schools to use more local farm products. In New York, encouraging more local foods in schools would necessarily encourage consumption of dairy products, given the dominance of dairy in the state's farm sector. Bills establishing a New York Farm-to-School Enhancement Fund were introduced in both the Senate and the Assembly early last year. The House bill is pending in the Ways and Means Committee, while the Senate bill is in the Finance Committee.

In Summary, initiatives must provide pre-development grants and loans, land acquisition and equipment financing, capital grants for project funding gaps and construction and permanent finance for new supermarkets in the areas of central Brooklyn, Southeast Queens, South Bronx and Harlem. Low fat, dairy foods are nutrient-rich and extremely important to a balanced diet and the economy of New York and should be a part of all food initiatives for New York.

Supermarket PSA Billboard Gas Post Green
Low fat Dairy



New York State Dietetic Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 30953 • New York, New York 10011
212.691.7906 (Fax) 212.741.9334
www.eatrightny.org

Your Link To Nutrition and Health

April 3, 2008

The New York State Dietetic Association (NYSDA), a state affiliate of the American Dietetic Association, with over 5,300 members is the largest group of nutrition professionals in New York State. The NYSDA is responding to the opportunity to submit comment on strengthening the connection between local food products and consumers. We commend the efforts of the New York State Council on Food Policy and would be happy to serve as a resource in the future endeavors of the Council. The balance of food and agriculture is an important issue to our organization and to our members.

We have given a previous statement regarding improving the balance between food and agriculture in Syracuse, New York, however, we wanted to have the opportunity to provide our input regarding the unique needs of New York City.

We recognize the health and economical benefits of "buying local," however, we also recognize the challenges that urban areas face. With limited agricultural resources in the city, we feel it is essential that residents of New York City of all income levels have access to healthy, local foods at affordable prices. We encourage the Food Policy Council to consider the following:

- Work with local city planners and policy makers to establish opportunities for urban farms
- Provide support for community-based gardening initiatives
- Support Green Cart legislation
- Develop collaborative initiatives within the city to establish mobile markets

These initiatives will help to ensure that New York City residents have access to healthy, local foods.

We ask that you also recognize the importance of education of the public in all of these initiatives and remember that members of NYSDA are happy to serve as a nutrition resource to the Food Policy Council.

Sincerely,

Keri M. Gans, MS, RD, CDN
President, NYSDA

Ray Denniston [RDenniston@jcschools.stier.org] Wed 3/12/2008 1:10 PM
Could the following comments be on FTS be incorporated in the FPC notes?? Ray

>>> Kathy Dischner <kmd13@cornell.edu> 3/12/2008 11:42 AM >>>
Hello all,

First- I wish to thank all of you, our excellent presenters, Chris, Jennifer and Ray for their information, insights, ideas and enthusiasm. I also wish to thank of all you who took the time and effort to participate and learn more about ways to help change the way you provide nutritious food for the children in your districts. We need more adults dedicated to the health and well being of our children as you all are.

Below is a list of concerns that were expressed concerning implementing a Successful Farm-to-School Program in your districts. Ray is planning on sharing these with the NYS Food Policy Council members at the upcoming meetings.

Ray-- do you have further guidance about to whom School staff can address their comments in the form of a Letter, etc. if they are unable to attend any of the future sessions?

As and FYI: The Council on Food Policy is hosting a series of listening sessions throughout the State. The first session was in Albany on February 5. Subsequent sessions will take place in Binghamton, Rochester and Long Island over the next several months. Dates and locations of those listening sessions will be posted as they are scheduled at
<<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/eventcal.html>><http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/eventcal.html>.

Concerns expressed at the 3.11.08 Farm- to-Cafeteria Workshop in Syracuse, NY from 50 participants representing 24 school districts in eight counties in CNY:

1. Problems with infrastructure that include transportation and delivery from farm to school.
2. The need to have produce processed in usable form to reduce food preparation time/labor expense to schools. (This was categorized as "value added" product needed.)
3. Schools need up-to-date Directories of Farms who can provide produce/other farm products by zip code
4. Cost factor- how to reconcile the interest for schools to purchase fresh local products, including produce with the farmer's need to profit from the sales.
5. General concerns with equipment and labor costs at school level (cost of equipment, space, logistics related to "heat and serve" only systems at many school buildings.)

I also included summaries of the presenters who shared comments at the 2/14/08 Listening Session in Syracuse. Please note comments from Roberta Harrison, CCE Agriculture Team Leader- Onondaga County and from several local farmers.

Kathy Dischner, MSED, CD/N, RD
Team Leader- Nutrition, Health and Food Safety
President- Central New York Dietetic Association
Cornell University Cooperative Extension- Onondaga County
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Barbara Baron

AMERICAN DAIRY ASSOCIATION AND DAIRY COUNCIL, INC.
219 South West Street, Suite 100, Syracuse, New York 13202-1205
(315) 472-9143 • (315) 472-0506

TO: Members of the New York State Food Policy Council

FROM: Barbara Baron, MS, RD, CDN
Director, Health Professional Communications
American Dairy Association and Dairy Council, Inc.

DATE: Thursday, April 3, 2008

RE: Statement of the American Dairy Association & Dairy Council, Inc.
New York State Council on Food Policy Listening Session
New York, New York

I'm pleased to offer some thoughts on behalf of the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council on how to strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers in New York State.

Milk is New York's number one agricultural product, accounting for half of the state's total farm receipts. Milk production in the state was 12.0 billion pounds in 2006, with an estimated value of \$1.6 billion. New York is the nation's third leading milk-producing state, behind only California and Wisconsin.

Milk is also a core component of a healthy diet for all Americans. Milk is a nutrient-dense beverage and a particularly good source of calcium, which is beneficial for bone health, and helpful in regulating blood pressure and maintaining a healthy weight. Studies also show calcium can help protect against colon cancer. Dairy foods contribute more than 72 percent of the calcium in the food supply.

The federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends three cups of low-fat or fat-free milk or milk products daily for adults and older children. Two cups are recommended for younger children. Unfortunately, a large majority of Americans—81 percent—fail to meet these recommendations. The problem is particularly acute for women. Eighty-four percent of women ages 20 to 50 do not consume the recommended three servings of milk per day. As a group, children come closest to consuming the recommended two servings per day. Still, only about half of those ages 4-8 consume the recommended amount.

This shortfall contributes to a serious deficit in calcium intake among Americans. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, only slightly more than half of children ages 1 to 8 consume as much calcium as they need. Only nine percent of females ages 14 to 18 and 21 percent of women 19 to 30 years old meet their daily calcium requirement.

Since locally produced milk is available in every community in the state on a year-around basis, encouraging New Yorkers to consume more local milk and milk products could help ease this problem, as well as offering numerous other benefits. Increased sales for New York's 6,000 dairy farmers will boost the economy and promote tourism. Environmental benefits include preservation of open space and wildlife habitat, improved air quality, reduced fuel consumption, and a reduction in the state's carbon footprint. Most important, however, encouraging consumption of more dairy products has the potential to make New Yorkers healthier. One recent national study projected that consuming three to four servings of dairy foods a day could lead to a five-year savings in health care costs in excess of \$200 billion.

There are many steps the state can take to strengthen the link between consumers and local farms. Among them:

- Providing incentives for consumers to purchase locally produced foods – especially dairy products – through WIC, food stamps, and other nutrition programs.
- Increasing the availability of milk and other local food products in schools.
- Encouraging supermarket chains to purchase locally produced foods.
- Establishing central distribution centers for purchasing local farm products.
- Including information about the benefits of buying local foods in nutrition education programs.

Increasing the availability of local foods in schools could be particularly beneficial to New York's agricultural sector. Nutrition habits formed at a young age often continue into adulthood.

Efforts to encourage healthier options in school cafeterias can also potentially help local farmers. These efforts tend to encourage consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk and dairy products. When looking at specific foods, however, it is important to consider the complete nutrient picture, rather than just fat or sugar content. Some dairy foods, for example, contain moderate amounts of sugar and fat but are beneficial because they are rich in other nutrients. Proposals that are overly restrictive in calories or fat will be counterproductive if they result in a drop in consumption of beneficial foods. For example, limiting nutritious foods and beverages to as little as 150 calories per serving could exclude flavored milk and yogurt from school lunchrooms, despite their popularity among children and clearly demonstrated benefits to their health.

On behalf of the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council, I would be pleased to assist the Council on Food Policy as it further develops plans to strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers.

**Estimated Healthcare Savings Associated with Adequate
Dairy Food intake
by McCarron DA, Heaney RP
American Journal of Hypertension - 2004; 17(1):88-97**

Key Findings

The report projects that if Americans eat enough dairy each day as part of a healthy diet, there will be a significant impact on America's public health pocketbook by reducing total healthcare costs for the major diseases and conditions by 10 percent after just one year; 15 percent over five years.

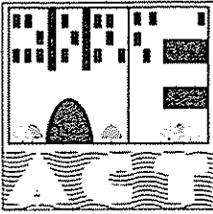
Select results include:

- Hypertension: reduce prevalence 40 percent in one year; reduce costs \$14 billion in one year, \$70 billion over five years;
- Obesity: reduce prevalence 5 percent in one year, 25 percent over five years; reduce costs \$2.5 billion in one year, \$37.5 billion over five years;
- Type 2 diabetes: reduce prevalence 5 percent in one year, 25 percent over five years; reduce costs \$2.5 billion in one year, \$37.5 billion over five years;
- Osteoporosis: reduce fracture risk 20 percent in one year; reduce costs \$3.5 billion in one year, \$14 billion over five years.

Approach and Methodology

The authors analyzed the health impact of adequate dietary calcium intake based on published scientific evidence. The findings build on the theory that it is more than the calcium in dairy that provides a nutritional source of disease prevention; it is the full nutritional profile of dairy foods, which includes proteins, multiple minerals, vitamins, carbohydrates and essential fatty acids.

To project risk reduction, the authors used percentages from the referenced studies, and then cut them by 50 percent to be conservative. To project healthcare cost savings, the authors referenced recent data published by public and private health organizations.



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TESTIMONY OF JAMES SUBUDHI ON BEHALF OF WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE FOOD POLICY COUNCIL APRIL 3rd, 2008

Good Morning Council Members,

Thank you for holding this listening session. I am here today as the Sustainability Coordinator for WE ACT for Environmental Justice to testify in support of increasing access to healthy foods in Northern Manhattan. WE ACT is a 19 year-old community-based, non-profit environmental justice organization dedicated to building community power to fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color.

Our communities are plagued with poor nutrition as a result of an abundance of fast food chains and bodegas that don't stock fresh fruits and vegetables. Moreover, super markets, when they are available, distant from where residents live and offer poor selections. Now, the few grocery stores that do service our neighborhoods are being closed at an alarming rate.

The Council should take a more active role to address the issue of access to healthy food in low-income and minority communities. Charged with this responsibility we make the following recommendations to you:

- **Ensure** that all food policies developed by the Council are community based, meaning that the conversations on food policy begin with the communities affected by the policy and are continually engaged in the process.
- **Embrace** alternative food systems, such as farmers markets, urban farming, community gardens, and CSAs, when developing food policy.
- **Ensure** funding for efforts to increase local food sourcing for the City like the New York City Whole Sale farmers Market.
- **Hold** a listening session Uptown as soon as it is possible after working hours so that working families can attend a meeting close to their homes. It is my concern that many community residents from Northern Manhattan are not here today because they are working and the meeting location is inconvenient. I have spoken with people in Northern Manhattan who are in this situation.

For more information, please contact James Subudhi at 212-961-1000, ext. 320 or james@weact.org

Deleted: 1

New York State Council on Food Policy
Listening Session in NYC
April 3, 2008

My name is Maggie Meehan. I am a Clinical Dietitian at Mount Sinai Hospital here in Manhattan and the public policy coordinator for the Greater New York Dietetic Association (GNYDA). I am also co-chair of GNYDA's special interest group, Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN). HEN's mission is to promote optimal nutrition for all people, acknowledging the interdependence of food and water security, health, agriculture, and the environment. Thank you for holding this session and for soliciting comments on local food, food and nutrition assistance programs, and increasing consumer awareness about healthy eating and food access.

Our food system is in serious jeopardy as evidenced by numerous recent recalls of tainted foods—from beef to spinach as well as escalating rates of obesity and nutrition-related chronic diseases such as diabetes. In our zeal as a society for cheap food, we have lost sight of the central role food plays in the life of every individual—socially, culturally, environmentally in addition to assuaging short term hunger and providing basic nourishment.

The New York State Council on Food Policy can contribute to improving the health of all New Yorkers—both in New York City and throughout the state—by supporting the establishment of healthy food standards for government funded and emergency food programs. In addition, the health of all New Yorkers is enhanced by efforts to create a sustainable food system. Sustainability means ‘the capacity of being maintained over the long term in order to meet the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs.’ We need to support farmers throughout the state who are raising crops (both plant and animal) that provide whole, healthy foods that help New Yorkers adhere to the USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans upon which the recently released MyPyramid is based. Support for

local crops helps local economies and reduces transportation of food and the consequent consumption of fossil fuels that contribute to global warming. Often, local, organically raised crops are also higher in micro-nutrient content such as vitamin C and lower in nitrates that pollute our air, our land, and our water.^{1,2,3} Efforts such as the Wholesale Farmer's Market contribute to improved food quality and sustainability.⁴

The Food Policy Council needs to work to ensure that lower-income residents of New York City have access to healthy, affordable foods. Recent policy initiatives such as Green Carts,⁵ which bring fresh fruits and vegetables into disadvantaged New York City neighborhoods, are moving our food system in the right direction. Presently, low-income neighborhoods suffer from a multitude of fast food restaurants and a dearth of supermarkets, delis, and bodegas selling fairly-priced, good quality fruits and vegetables. Numerous community-based organizations are working to bring better food to these "food deserts," and they need your support—financially and through policy initiatives and collaborations.

Improved access to healthy food grown locally should be accompanied by nutrition education and campaigns—through social marketing and on-the-ground instruction—to increase public awareness across the economic spectrum. Improving our food system cannot happen in a vacuum—we need outreach to consumers in all of the city's boroughs to encourage consumption

¹ Heaton, S. *Organic Farming, food quality and human health: A review of the evidence*. Soil Association. 2001. Available at:

[http://www.soilassociation.org/Web/SA/saweb.nsf/9f788a2d1160a9e580256a71002a3d2b/de88ae6e5aa94aed80256abd00378489/\\$FILE/foodqualityreport.pdf](http://www.soilassociation.org/Web/SA/saweb.nsf/9f788a2d1160a9e580256a71002a3d2b/de88ae6e5aa94aed80256abd00378489/$FILE/foodqualityreport.pdf). Accessed January 12, 2008.

² Davis DR, Epp MD, Riordan HD. Changes in USDA food composition data for 43 garden crops, 1950-1999. *J Am Coll Nutr*. 2004;23(6):669-682.

³ Halwell, B. *Still no free lunch: Nutrient levels in U.S. food supply eroded by pursuit of high yields*. The Organic Center, Critical Issue Report: September 2007. Available at: http://www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/Yield_Nutrient_Density_Final.pdf. Accessed January 12, 2008.

⁴ For additional information, please see <http://www.wholesalefarmersmarketnyc.com/>.

⁵ For additional information, please see <http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSN2738591320080228>.

of a healthy, balanced diet and, where feasible, purchase of foods from farmers' markets and through Community Supported Agriculture.

These efforts will enhance the physical health of residents of New York and the environmental health of our state.



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April 2, 2008

Dear Council Members:

Thank you for creating this opportunity for direct input from New York City organizations and residents. We commend the Governor's office for the creation of this Council on Food Policy and for your efforts to appoint members from a wide range of sectors.

I am here today to represent the members of the East New York Farms! Project in Brooklyn, New York. Since our inception in 1998, we have grown to be one of the largest and most successful urban agriculture and market creation projects in the country. We work with over 30 adult urban farmers, 25 youth leaders, and 3 upstate farmers to manage what is to our knowledge the largest market in a solidly low-income community in this country.

From this vantage point, we have much to thank the State for. The NYS Farmers Market Nutrition Program has generated hundreds of thousands of dollars for upstate and urban farmers who sell at our market. Last year alone customers redeemed over \$58,000 in Farmers Market Nutrition Program Coupons at our market, over 50% of the market's total income.

We are here today to ask the state for further support. We recommend increased funding for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, both in total people served and in the value of coupons given to each recipient. We strongly recommend this program especially in light of current changes in the WIC package to add fruits and vegetables - a development that we applaud - but that we also hope will not create a belief that FMNP is now obsolete. There is no other government program I have ever seen that so effectively meets the needs of both upstate and downstate residents.

Furthermore, we recognize the need for an increase in the supply of fresh, local foods in our neighborhood. While our market operates weekly from summer through fall, and our neighborhood has a newly opened food cooperative, this is not sufficient to meet the needs of all 180,000 members of our community. Our market has been able to create the access we have because of two strategies - 1) Our partnerships with upstate farmers, and 2) our commitment to urban farming for real food production. To further these efforts and

allow other communities like ours to create better food access, we recommend state incentives and support to encourage upstate farmers to visit low-income, often more-remote neighborhoods of the city. For example, an upstate farmer may need to drive an hour past Union Square, and pass up the higher prices his goods may have been able to fetch there, to come to our market, or many other East and Central Brooklyn communities that currently suffer severe shortages of healthful food and resulting high rates of nutrition related illness. The state can also support warehouse storage space, or the development of a wholesale farmers market in Brooklyn to make upstate farmers' trips to borough more lucrative.

Lastly, we recommend that State exert what pressure it can to both save and promote urban farmland. The urban farmers we work with grew over \$18,000 worth of fresh, organic produce for our community last year alone. The value of urban farms also goes far beyond food production to create green spaces, open spaces, gathering spaces, and instant outdoor classrooms. We ask that the state support the further development of urban agriculture as viable strategy for feeding New Yorkers.

Thank you again for your time, attention, and dedication to creating better food policies for our state.

Sincerely,

Sarita Daftary
East New York Farms! Project Director



Northern USA Program Office
408 Jay Street, Ste. 500, Brooklyn, NY 11201
phone: 718-687-1900 fax: 718-687-1990

Aley Kent

New York State Food Policy Council Listening Session
Federal Office Building, 4th Floor, 90 Church Street, New York, NY

April 3, 2008

Good Morning, and thank you for the opportunity to share some ideas with you today. My name is Aley Kent and I am the Senior Field Coordinator with Heifer International's Northern USA program. I work around the state supporting and partnering with communities that are developing local solutions to poverty, farm loss, poor health, and environmental degradation through community-led initiatives to build consumer-to-producer connections, build awareness about agriculture and health, and get high-quality food to people who need it most.

I bring from my work the perspective of those who are under-served in New York's food and agricultural system, and what is most clear from my standpoint is that those who are under-served as producers and as consumers are those who have had the least voice in shaping our food and farm policy. From new immigrant farmers who are working to start their own farm businesses, to indigenous communities who are building more culturally appropriate food sources, to urban youth who have been exploding the notion of who is a farmer in cities across the state, using innovative and creative growing, marketing, and consumer education strategies. There is a lot to learn from these programs that are already doing much to bring people closer to their food sources, and I encourage the NY State Food Policy Council to develop a mechanism by which these groups can bring their experiences and voices to the table.

Lessons from these communities lay at points all along the food chain from farm to table, and I want to share three recommendations based on these lessons learned:

1. more support at the farm level for small-scale farmers;
2. the development of processing and distribution options that are more accessible to livestock and vegetable growers, as well as to institutions and other buyers; and
3. greater investment in nutrition programs that have already proven to be successful

On one end of the food chain, farmers need better services and access to resources. Extension, RC&D councils, NYSDAM and other agencies need the resources and training to do more effective outreach to communities who are on the cusp of building new agricultural enterprises. There are countless people who want to start new farms in New York, and beginning farmers, especially immigrants, need materials and technical assistance that are appropriate to help them succeed. Hand in hand with this is the need to support land use for agriculture in New York. Tax incentive programs for landowners,

better bank linking services, and loans for new farmers can encourage the development of sustainable businesses while saving open space.

In the middle of the value chain lay the bottleneck of limited processing and distribution infrastructure. Investment here is desperately needed to connect producers and their goods with consumers, schools, and institutions, all of whom have shown a great interest in buying NY grown products. Without accessible and affordable processing and distribution options, farmers who manage small beef herds on grass will continue to struggle tremendously with even getting on the calendar at their one available meat processor, and vegetable farmers who grow a bumper crop may have to simply watch it rot in their fields. Improving processing and distribution networks also holds a tremendous business development opportunity for New York State.

While the previous issues will make sure healthy New York grown food is available, getting it to families who need it is another challenge. One opportunity in particular is the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and Senior FMNP, which have enabled huge amounts of healthy NYS food to get to NYS people. However, the dollar value made available to pregnant and nursing women, and senior citizens each year is often less than one family spends on vegetables in a week. This dollar amount should be raised to make it worth the efforts of WIC centers, market managers, and the check recipients themselves. Also, expanding the range of what is eligible, such as meat, dairy, and locally-grown and -processed foods like canned vegetables would likely increase check redemption rates and the chances that more of the purchased food is ultimately eaten.

I thank you again for the opportunity to be here today, and greatly encourage you to consider these ideas.



New York State Council on Food Policy
New York City Listening Session
April 3, 2008

Comments by Kate MacKenzie, MS, RD
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Good morning. My name is Kate MacKenzie. I am a registered dietitian, and the Director of Program Development and Policy at City Harvest. I would like to thank the State Council on Food Policy for providing this opportunity to hear recommendations from advocates and individuals as it devises its strategic plan.

City Harvest has more than 25 years of experience fighting food insecurity and particularly inequalities related to food access. During the organization's 25-year history, not only did the rates of hunger remain high throughout the City, but diet-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes rose to epidemic proportions. Community Food Assessments showed the remarkable disparities in access to healthy food among neighborhoods. As a result, we became focused on sourcing fresh fruits and vegetables for our agency of emergency food providers. We also intentionally began to work with communities most affected by hunger and poor food access to work mutually to change food landscapes, and to ensure that the change was community driven and community led.

While I wish I could sit here and provide you with new recommendations and quick fixes that would ensure that all New York residents, particularly underserved and low-income individuals had consistent and affordable access to New York State Food, the reality is, I can't. The simple fact is, that for many years, the solutions have been offered that would maximize participation in Federal nutrition programs and ensure connections between local products and consumers. But they haven't been acted on. What I can and do encourage you to do is to seize the opportunities of ripe political, social, and environmental climates that could actually ensure action on these solutions. Dialogues about the connections of food, agriculture, health, and the environment regularly occur. This Council on Food Policy should be the driver that actually sees the recommendations happen.

Quite simply, to address each of your areas of focus, you should model Washington's State's recent law, the Healthy Kids bill (SSB-6483), which makes it easier for schools to buy locally grown food – providing markets for local farmers and nutritious, fresh local food for children. The law also increases locally grown food in food banks, as well as access to farmers' markets for low-income families. This law gives Washington the most comprehensive local foods program in the nation, and New York State should follow suit, and go further. The bill is only a \$1.5 million piece of legislation, but clearly there are multiple returns on that investment. Furthermore, even adopting components of the bill which have no price tag, such as, 1) eliminating low-cost bidding requirements for school purchases of Washington (New York)-grown food and allows schools to adopt price preferences for local food, 2) requiring the development of food procurement procedures for state entities to encourage and facilitate purchasing of Washington (New York) grown food to the maximum extent practicable, would make significant improvements.

Pennsylvania is another great example of a state working in concert with its agencies to bridge the gap between public health, economic development, agriculture, business, government, and civic sector leaders – uniting them with the shared goal of improving children's health and food

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security - while simultaneously demonstrating an opportunity new markets, business, and employment where food retailing and job needs are unmet.

In Pennsylvania, significant political support for supermarket development resulted in the allocation of \$80 million to support new stores in underserved communities, known as the Fresh Food Financing Initiative.

In both of these examples, residents have multiple opportunities to strengthen their connections to New York State products. The key to the success and actualization of the initiatives are broad and diverse coalitions that agree to specific, not all, outcomes, and unite to leverage resources for mutual benefits. The same can, and needs to happen in New York State.

Probably the area with the most recommendations for the Council is in the area of food and nutrition assistance programs. When more than 500,000 people are eligible, but not participating in the Food Stamp Program, and participation in school meals programs, specifically breakfast and summer meals, is almost embarrassingly low, one can see why. With regard to school meals, piloting and then going to scale with Universal School Meals for the City of New York would provide cost savings, but more importantly, bring needed increases in participation. Furthermore, City Harvest strongly believes that one way to increase participation is to improve the quality of food served, primarily through increases the amount of New York State product being served. City Harvest currently is working on two FAID grants from the State that have, one of which specifically focuses on bringing NY food to city schools. As a member of the Northeast Region's National Farm-to-School steering committee, and as an active member in the National and state dialogue on Farm-to-School, New York is modeling great practices and the State can encourage this by instituting a program similar to Maryland and Massachusetts which provides an additional meal reimbursement for meals that serve NYS foods.

In just a few years, from a few schools to school districts and the NYC Office of School Food, procurement of regional food in season for the public school cafeterias of New York is poised to grow dramatically. The distribution, processing and procurement systems in farm to school are applicable to other farm to institution markets. Moreover, the direct farm-to-consumer, institutional and new wholesale markets are mutually reinforcing, with significant widespread impacts for affordable, healthy food access.

There are several threats and opportunities on the horizon. Food prices are high and will continue to grow. While the implementation of new rules for the WIC program provide the opportunity for healthier food choices for women, infants, and children, the transition will not be easy. New York can implement these new WIC rules in ways that not only increase participation, but also increase connections with producers and consumers. WIC vendors should be encouraged to connect with local agriculture for product. A Farm Bill will eventually move, and there are likely going to be opportunities for New York State to take advantage of quickly. For example, the State should consider matching new Federal fruit and vegetable dollars in schools, summer food, and value-added support for processing and distribution. Promoting school gardens, and authorizing schools to grow food for consumption in their regular snack and meal programs, are other examples.

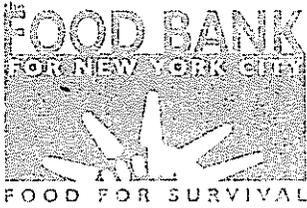
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New York State currently receives about \$20 million from the Federal Government in Food Stamp Nutrition Education dollars. California uses the same funding stream to pull down more than \$200 million dollars. Organizations from throughout the state should be encouraged to participate in the state plan, the Eat Smart New York, plan to ensure that sound nutrition education strategies can reach far more New Yorkers and shift food behaviors to those that promote health.

With so many New Yorkers struggling to make healthy eating choices, due to rising food prices, empty food banks, and competing media messages, non-profits, the private sector and public agencies need to work together for win-win solutions. This is not just New York's problem, and it is not just a national problem. It is a global problem and the debate on what the solutions are will take place right here in New York at the United Nations in just a few weeks.

In particular response to this problem, the FPC should focus on policy to encourage working with food businesses, including farmers, to provide opportunities for the purchase of affordable food by communities currently with limited choices. City Harvest has and continues to find creative solutions that bridge the emergency and market food systems, bringing healthy local food to vulnerable and at-risk communities. We're ready to use our experiences in this to help, and it's time for NYS to create a framework that can accelerate the progress and good practice that is happening on the ground.

In summary, I recommend that the Council adapt a strategic plan that will ensure action can happen in the very near-term future. In NYC, the threat of growing numbers of hungry people is real because of the rising food prices, shrinking numbers of grocery stores, and diminishing budgets. Our State has the opportunity to incredibly strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers by reconnecting people to where their food comes from. The benefit to New York State, from new markets for our agricultural bounty, to economic development, and improved health outcomes and food security are more than worth it.



Comments prepared by

Áine Duggan

for the

**New York State Food Policy Council
“Listening Session 3: New York City”**

April 3, 2008

on behalf of

Food Bank For New York City / FoodChange

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. I am Áine Duggan, Vice President for Government Relations, Policy & Research with the Food Bank For New York City/FoodChange. The Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to present comments to the NYS Food Policy Council regarding the need to maximize participation in food and nutrition assistance programs, increase consumer awareness and knowledge about healthy eating and improve access to safe and nutritious foods.

Food Bank For New York City, in conjunction with its subsidiary organization, FoodChange, works to end hunger and increase access to affordable, nutritious food for low-income New Yorkers through a range of programs and services that focus on nutrition, education and financial empowerment. As the major supplier of food to 1.3 million New Yorkers, the Food Bank procures and distributes food to approximately 1,000 emergency and community food programs throughout city. The organization provides food safety, networking and capacity-building workshops; manages nutrition education programs for schools, after-school and emergency food programs; operates food stamp outreach and education programs; operates senior programs, a soup kitchen and food pantry; coordinates the largest Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program in the country; and, conducts research and develops policy to inform community and government efforts to end hunger.

First, I would like to acknowledge the commitment of the Council to invigorate discussions about hunger, nutrition and broad food policy with new ideas from a range of different sectors, and thank you for your leadership. The anti-hunger community is very pleased that the Council is in effect as it was one of the measures outlined in the Anti-Hunger Policy Platform for New York that was developed by a collective of city and state anti-hunger organizations in 2006.

BACKGROUND AND NEED

Insufficient resources are both driving and meeting increased demand for food and nutrition assistance in NYC.

This is not surprising in light of Census data showing that approximately 1.5 million New York City residents live below the federal poverty level (approximately \$16,000 annually for a family of three).¹ Also, difficulty affording food among a larger population of New Yorkers is not unexpected given rising costs of basic necessities. For example, the cost of food at home in the New York Metro area increased by almost 10 percent from 2004 to 2007.²

Further, 2004-2006 average food insecurity data released by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in November 2007 shows that approximately one of every ten New York State households (9.8 percent or approximately 732,000 households) are food insecure. As the costs of basic necessities continue to rise in New York and throughout the United States, we will likely see rising food insecurity in future years.

1. The Need for Emergency Food

1a. Increased Demand: Recent research conducted by the Food Bank in conjunction with Cornell University shows that throughout New York City, 1.3 million residents are accessing emergency food programs (EFPs) — an increase of 24 percent since 2004.³ The 1.3 million people currently relying on New York City soup kitchens and food pantries, includes 397,000 children (up from 269,000 in 2004), 730,000 adults ages 18 to 64 (up from 599,000 in 2004) and 154,000 elderly adults (155,000 in 2004).

The increase in city residents accessing emergency food reveals a complex story about greater access of services by households in need, a growth in need among households at higher income and education levels and the inadequacy of the food stamp benefit. There has been an increase in the numbers of people who would have traditionally been considered as “doing better” turning to soup kitchens and food pantries, including people with higher levels of education and people working full-time. For example, during the past three years, there has been a 73 percent increase in the number of full-time workers relying on emergency food.

This is likely driven by the fact that low wages and fixed incomes are not keeping pace with increases in the cost of living. For the vast majority of New Yorkers relying on emergency food, high housing costs are a key factor. Of the 79 percent of emergency food program participants in the city who rent their place of residence, the annual average monthly rent accounts for 59 percent of the average monthly household income (\$570 monthly rent / \$970 monthly income) – with basic utilities added in, their cost rises to 64 percent of the average monthly income.

In addition, there has been an increase in the number of people on food stamps turning to emergency food, because food stamp benefits are insufficient and do not last through the month.

¹ *American Community Survey 2006*. United States Census Bureau.

² The US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for food at home in the New York metro area increased from 190.7 in 2004 to 208.4 in 2007.

³ *NYC Hunger Safety Net 2007: A Food Poverty Focus*. (2007). Food Bank For New York City/Cornell University. This is the second report in the *Hunger Safety Net* series which is designed to track trends in hunger and inform research-based solutions to hunger and poverty throughout the five boroughs of New York City. The report includes findings on New York City residents who rely on emergency food programs (EFPs), including soup kitchens and food pantries; the operations, resources and services of EFPs; and an analysis of New York City residents' access to private and government food assistance at varying poverty levels, including a spatial analysis of need and services. This research updates and expands upon results from *Hunger Safety Net 2004: Measuring Gaps in Food Assistance in New York City*.

For example, food stamp benefits last only one week for 24 percent and three weeks for 84 percent of EFP participants who are enrolled in food stamps.

1b. Insufficient Resources to Meet the Need for Emergency Food: In NYC (and throughout the country) there is an insufficient supply of food at EFPs to meet the increased demand at soup kitchens and food pantries. Loss of support from government-funded emergency food programs is an underlying cause of this hardship. The government sources of emergency food for soup kitchens and food pantries in New York City include The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), administered by the New York State Department of Health; and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), administered by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA).

Budget cuts and/or flat funding coupled with increased transportation and food costs, have led to a decrease in the amount of food that is available at EFPs.

Most worrisome is the dramatic decrease in the supply of emergency food through TEFAP due to severe cuts in the bonus commodity and flat-funding of the entitlement component of the program. Consequently, there is a national shortage of TEFAP food in soup kitchens and food pantries around the country, including a loss of approximately 12 million pounds of TEFAP food to New York City EFPs over the past few years, from approximately 29 million pounds to approximately 17 million pounds. As a result of these cuts, the city's emergency food network is currently experiencing the most severe food shortage the Food Bank has ever seen.

The NYS FY07/08 budget's inclusion of a \$5 million increase for HPNAP was an excellent step in the right direction that was very much appreciated by the anti-hunger community, and the further one-time infusion of \$5 million from the State and \$1 million from NYC for emergency food during the holiday season in response to the emergency food shortage crisis was a vital stop-gap measure that helped to put more food on many tables during the winter months. Unfortunately, as the flow of the one-time emergency funding has dried up, the wave of need continues to grow. In addition, the shortage of TEFAP food is now being compounded by expected cuts to HPNAP, and the city's nonprofit sector is being warned to brace itself for across the board cuts to social services in the city budget. It is important to note that the expected 2 percent cut in HPNAP funding should be viewed within the larger context of increased need and the history of the HPNAP funding level. The FY07/08 increase of \$5 million did not restore the program to the level of funding it would have been at had it not suffered cuts some five or six years ago, and had it been adjusted for inflation.

That the increased demand (from 2004 to 2007) at soup kitchens and food pantries has come at a time when basic resources for those programs are decreasing at an alarming rate is problematic and potentially catastrophic. EFPs are spending almost two-thirds (64 percent) of their budgets on food (up from 59 percent in 2004), at the expense of allocations for paid staff, rent, utilities, equipment and supplies. The percentage of EFPs open less than once per week has sharply increased from 1 percent to 12 percent while the number distributing food two or more days per week has dropped considerably. With EFPs open less frequently yet serving more people, approximately one-half (49 percent) ran out of food almost one out of every six times they were open, causing city residents looking for food assistance to be turned away.

In order to reverse this trend and equip emergency food organizations to meet existing need, multi-year funding increases indexed to inflation for all of the government-funded emergency food programs are required. In addition, we need to continue collaborative work to ensure timely passage of the Farm Bill, with sufficient funding increases earmarked to strengthen the nutrition title, including increasing entitlement funding for TEFAP to \$250 million (and indexing to inflation).

2. Improving Access to Nutritious Food for Low-Income New Yorkers

2a. Connecting Local Farmers to the Emergency Food System: In addition, strategies are needed to address the loss of private food donations in the emergency food system. Changing trends in the food industry that have resulted in a downturn in donations from the food industry have compounded the emergency food shortage. One of the ways to address this issue is to create linkages between local state farmers and the emergency food system that would facilitate an increase in the supply of local, nutritious food to soup kitchens and food pantries.

The eight food banks working to address food poverty across NYS present a dynamic opportunity to bring local nutritious food to the tables of low-income communities statewide while supporting local agriculture.

2b. New Funding Needed to Increase the Supply of Nutritious Food to EFPs: Bringing more local food into the emergency food system would also help to address the collective goal of the anti-hunger and nutrition & health education communities to continue to increase the nutritional quality of food in soup kitchens and food pantries.

We should note, however, that at a time when there is less food in the emergency food system and cuts to government funded emergency food programs continue to be implemented it is important to find a balance between the goal of securing as much food as possible and purchasing more nutritious food. At current funding levels the focus on improving the nutritional quality of the food can result in less food being made available to emergency food programs. Knowing that people are already being turned away at EFPs all over the city due to food shortages it would be remiss of us to forge ahead with "best intentions" that could further reduce the amount of food available at the expense of people who stand on line for hours to get something to eat and are turned away because there is not enough food to go around. Improving the nutritional quality of the food in the emergency food system is a priority for the anti-hunger community but it should be recognized that putting more expensive, nutritious food on the table for more people with less funding than in years past is an impossible equation.

Full government support for this goal warrants a new initiative that provides new funding to facilitate the procurement of more fresh produce, good quality protein and other nutritious food.

3. Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program

3a. The role of community-based food stamp outreach: In this economic environment renewed commitment to increasing the participation of eligible New Yorkers in the federal Food Stamp Program (FSP) needs to be a priority. FSP aids city (and state) residents of low-income neighborhoods by supporting their incomes (with federal funds) and making it easier for them to maintain and/or improve their nutritional intake. In addition, FSP increases economic activity in those neighborhoods through purchases in local grocery stores. Furthermore, the USDA rewards communities that engage in successful participation programs.

Research demonstrates that approximately half a million eligible New York City residents are currently not receiving food stamps,⁴ with many instead turning to emergency food programs (EFPs) and other social service organizations for their food needs. Of the more than one million city residents relying on EFPs to make ends meet, only 46 percent are enrolled in the Food Stamp

⁴ Combination of research: Fiscal Policy Institute. (2006). *Food Stamps: Increasing Access Would Boost the New York Economy*; Food Research and Action Center. (2006). *Food Stamp Access in Urban America*; Children's Defense Fund-NY. (2006). *Hunger in the Midst of Plenty*.

Program (FSP), indicating that close to 650,000 individuals who rely on soup kitchens and food pantries are not availing receiving food stamps, the vast majority of whom are income eligible.⁵ Notably, working families and elderly EFP participants have the lowest participation rates in FSP.

The downturn in the nation's economy will most likely result in reduced work hours and layoffs for many and we can expect to witness an increase in the number of low-income residents becoming eligible for food stamps, many for the first time. With a new wave of New Yorkers falling on hard times the role of community-based food stamp outreach initiatives that help eligible households learn about and access FSP will be extremely important.

But, even as economic predictions and media reports underline the need, local public support for community-based food stamp outreach is weak. For example, this past year, FoodChange's citywide food stamp outreach program, *Food Force* (a nationally recognized model), was defunded. Operating for more than a decade, this program has been the backbone of food stamp outreach for New York City, providing prescreening services in multiple languages and helping to connect the hardest-to-reach populations to the food stamp program. In FY 2007 alone, *Food Force* prescreened almost 12,000 households for FSP at sites throughout New York City, 74 percent (8,828 households representing approximately 20,600 individuals) of which were income and resource eligible for food stamps. Eligible households prescreened by *Food Force* qualify for an average benefit amount of approximately \$198.00 per month (approximately \$2,400 per year).

Similar to the lack of emergency food to meet growing need at EFPs, the community is also lacking sufficient resources to meet existing and new need for food stamp outreach. It is imperative that this trend be reversed as increased public funding to strengthen community-based food stamp outreach is a key measure needed to achieve the goal of increasing participation of eligible households in FSP.

3b. Facilitated Enrollment and Connecting Government Programs: In recent years, the exploration of facilitated enrollment models has dominated strategic thinking about increasing food stamp participation, and there is wide recognition that connecting outreach and application processes among government programs, including food stamps, health care benefits and the earned income tax credit (EITC) is a vital development.

Formalizing input from the anti-hunger community in this work would allow for the consideration that the FSP is a particularly complicated program and caution is required to ensure that the bridge-building and simplification process among government programs does not result in eliminating eligibility categories.

In addition, the anti-hunger community has a unique voice to add to developments of facilitated enrollment models, as the emergency food sector can be considered a fourth and central component in efforts to connect the previously mentioned government programs, FSP, health care benefits and EITC. The need to create linkages between programs is driven by the premise that many of the same households are eligible for a range of programs. Research and anecdotal evidence gathered from EFPs indicate that eligible households that are not enrolled in government programs typically turn instead to EFPs for help. In short, EFPs are often home to the very populations that various outreach efforts are trying to reach.

Recognizing the importance of connecting their participants with government and nutrition assistance programs, many EFPs throughout New York City conduct outreach for programs such as FSP, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and also the

⁵ Food Bank For New York City/City Harvest. (2006). *Hunger in America 2006: The New York City and State Report*.

School Breakfast, Lunch and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Research findings strongly indicate that efforts by EFPs to link participants with programs including FSP are working: FSP enrollment among EFP households increased from 31 percent in 2004 to 46 percent in 2007, and income-eligible households who have been visiting EFPs for longer than one year are 23 percent more likely to be receiving benefits.

Still, huge potential remains for strengthening this natural bridge between EFPs and government programs. For example, similar to 2004 findings, elderly EFP household members continue to have extremely low participation rates in FSP (only 19 percent of EFP households with elderly members receive food stamps). Increasing EFP staff training and resources is a further need as only one-quarter (25 percent) of EFPs have staff or volunteers who have been trained on FSP within the past 12 months and only 22 percent have FSP applications on site.

Good examples of the connection between EFPs and government nutrition programs include:

- The USDA-funded pilot Food Stamp Paperless Office System (POS), developed by the New York City Human Resources Administration in collaboration with community-based organizations, and also supported by the City Council, which allows food stamp offices to complete applications electronically and makes applying for food stamps easier for eligible individuals utilizing EFPs.
- The New York State Working Families Food Stamp Initiative⁶ which aims to expand access to FSP for low-income working families lends itself to promotion activities at EFPs as less than one-third (31 percent) of EFP households with employed members are enrolled in FSP (in contrast to almost one-half of all EFP households).

Similarly, the consideration of EFPs in targeted initiatives to connect low-income New Yorkers to other social services, including health insurance programs should be expanded. Health conditions including asthma, diabetes and heart disease are prevalent among EFP households, including one-fifth of children living in EFP households who have been diagnosed with asthma and more than one-third of elderly EFP household members who have been diagnosed with diabetes. While many EFP household members are covered by Medicaid and Medicare insurance programs, one-fifth have no health coverage, including one in every five (21 percent) EFP participants diagnosed with cancer, and 17 percent and 16 percent of EFP participants diagnosed with asthma and diabetes.

Despite these recognized linkages between emergency food and government nutrition and other programs, the vast majority of EFPs are ill-equipped to provide outreach services, as they lack funding for work beyond the provision of emergency food and are typically dependent on volunteers.

Increasing operational funding for EFPs to facilitate anti-hunger work beyond the provision of emergency food would generate stronger connections between EFP participants and the government programs for which they are eligible.

3c. Simplifying the Food Stamp Application Process: In addition, a number of steps NYS could take to simplify the food stamp application process would facilitate increased enrollment of eligible households. From a NYC perspective, finger-imaging remains a barrier to participation in the program. At any time it does not make sense to spend tax dollars on a costly process, like finger-imaging, at the expense of deterring eligible households from applying and losing the opportunity

⁶ Part of the New York State Working Families Food Stamp Initiative will be implemented first in New York City and several upstate counties before being implemented statewide.

to draw down federal dollars into the local economy – most especially when there is no data to support that the process is in any way effective as a fraud control measure and plenty of evidence to suggest it is an unnecessary burden, not least of which is the fact that the process remains in only four states. In these difficult economic times it makes even less sense to spend money on an unnecessary process that contributes to leaving federal dollars on the table.

Eliminating finger-imaging as part of the application process would facilitate increased enrollment of eligible New Yorkers in FSP.

4. Improving participation in Child Nutrition Programs

4a. School Breakfast and Lunch: Increasing access to child nutrition programs is necessary to combat New York's extraordinarily high levels of child hunger and food insecurity. As previously mentioned a little less than one third of the 1.3 million NYC residents relying on emergency food are children under the age of 18, many of whom are not participating in school and summer meals programs. A wide range of factors prevent full participation in these vital child nutrition programs, including economic, social, psychological, logistical and administrative barriers.

In NYC schools ongoing exemplary efforts to improve the quality of food in cafeterias coupled with both in-classroom and community based nutrition education for children and youth via the CookShop Program (operated by FoodChange with Food Stamp Nutrition Education funding administered by USDA) provide young people with access to and knowledge to inform better food choices. But the food is only one part of the equation. Reducing the stigma associated with school meals is one of the foremost necessary steps in the effort to increase program participation. Too often children decline to participate in school lunches and school breakfasts because they fear their classmates' ridicule. Current program structure also invites distinctions between low-income and wealthier students, providing only the former with free and reduced-price meals. The availability of competitive food in vending machines and elsewhere also encourages low-income students to spend their money on less nutritious food, while further increasing the stigma associated with school meals. The NYC universal breakfast program has been instrumental in helping to fight the stigma issue, and this is a model that should be expanded to lunch and replicated statewide.

In addition to these administrative and psychosocial barriers, logistical and economic challenges further undermine program participation. School overcrowding very often results in excessively staggered lunch schedules, leaving some students with lunch periods shortly after the beginning of the day and immediately before day's end. Limited space and a lack of adequate staffing also impede the expansion of school meals. When school breakfast is not incorporated into the school day, parents often find it difficult to arrange for the necessary transportation, particularly low-income families with little flexibility in their work schedules. Further exacerbating each of these difficulties is the lack of awareness regarding school lunch and school breakfast among families with children, and the inability of schools to conduct effective outreach.

Needed measures include ensuring that universal breakfast and universal lunch programs are available throughout the state, creating incentives for nutritious grab-and-go meals, providing incentives for meals in the classroom, encouraging school districts to prepare more meals on site, funding initiatives to increase the amount of fruit and vegetables on the menu and appropriating increased funding for outreach.

4b. Summer Food Service Program: Like school breakfast and lunch, a variety of socioeconomic, logistical and administrative barriers circumscribe SFSP participation. Complicated reimbursement processes that often underestimate program costs deter many providers from opening host sites. Children and parents often have difficulty arranging transportation to SFSP sites, particularly in rural communities and among low-income families with inflexible working schedules. Further exacerbating each of these problems is a lack of awareness regarding SFSP among low-income families with children.

Increasing SFSP participation requires measures that would simplify the reimbursement process for SFSP providers, expand the number of sites in areas of high need and increase funding for outreach to families with children.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate goal of our work at Food Bank For New York City/FoodChange is to ensure that all New York City residents have local, permanent access to affordable, nutritious food. This includes the long-term goal of ensuring that all city households have sufficient resources to purchase their own food and that the current dearth of food retail outlets in low-income communities be addressed. In recent years, hard work and dedicated efforts to improve access to healthy food for low-income New Yorkers, steered and supported by public and private partnerships, have enjoyed unprecedented achievements, and we are on the cusp of taking nutrition and health education to a new level.

But, today, we are not facing, but already in the midst of a crisis that holds the potential to unravel much of this work. While the goal to improve the nutritional quality of food for all New Yorkers is a priority that several sectors concerned with food policy the immediate reality is that need has increased in the city, and continues to grow so that more people are turning to EFPs and becoming eligible for food stamps. Yet, resources that were in place to help connect families and individuals with emergency food services and food stamps are being cut. It is time to be realistic about the impossibility of doing more with less.

Food Bank/FoodChange encourages the NYS Food Policy Council to prioritize and promote strategies to address food poverty in New York State, including:

- Addressing the increased demand for emergency food by promoting multi-year funding increases, indexed to inflation, for government-funded emergency food programs and, in the near-term, advocating for timely passage of the federal Farm Bill with increased funding to strengthen the nutrition title;
- Improving access to nutritious food for low-income New Yorkers by promoting initiatives that would facilitate linkages between local farmers and the emergency food system and advocating for new funding to support ongoing work to increase the nutritional quality of emergency food;
- Promoting measures to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, including new funding to support community-based food stamp outreach programs, increasing operational funding to allow EFPs to generate stronger connections between EFP participants and the government programs for which they are eligible, formalizing input from the anti-hunger community in ongoing work and discussions to develop facilitated enrollment models that connect various government programs and simplifying the food stamp application process by eliminating the finger-imaging requirement; and,
- Improving participation in the Child Nutrition Programs by advocating for the availability of universal breakfast and lunch programs throughout the state, incentives for grab-and-go and in-classroom meals, preparation of more meals on site, funding to increase the amount of fresh produce on the menu and support for outreach to families and children.

Thank you for taking time today to hear about food policy concerns in New York City and for your ongoing work to prioritize access to affordable, nutritious food in low-income communities.



J Berg

**Testimony of Joel Berg
Executive Director, New York City Coalition Against Hunger**

**Before the New York State Council on Food Policy
Listening Session**

April 3, 2008

Introduction

Good morning. I am Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger (NYCCAH), which represents the more than 1,200 food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City, and the more than 1.3 million low-income New Yorkers forced to obtain food from these charities. This testimony is submitted on their behalf. Thank you for holding this vital listening session.

The bad news is that hunger and food insecurity continue to be grave problems throughout urban, rural, and yes, suburban, New York State, and are growing. The good news is that, despite the State's budget challenge, the State can dramatically reduce these problems – at virtually no cost to the State – by significantly increasing participation in the federal Food Stamps and child nutrition programs and by better connecting the state's farmers directly with consumers.

Background on Hunger in New York State and New York City

Even when the stock market was still roaring in 2006, the number of hungry and food insecure residents did not decrease state-wide, according to USDA. In order to most accurately assess food insecurity, USDA compares averages for three-year time periods. In the 2001-2003 time period, an average of 10.0 percent of state households suffered from food insecurity; that figure was 9.8 percent for the 2004-2006 time period. USDA described the change in the state as far too small to be statistically significant.

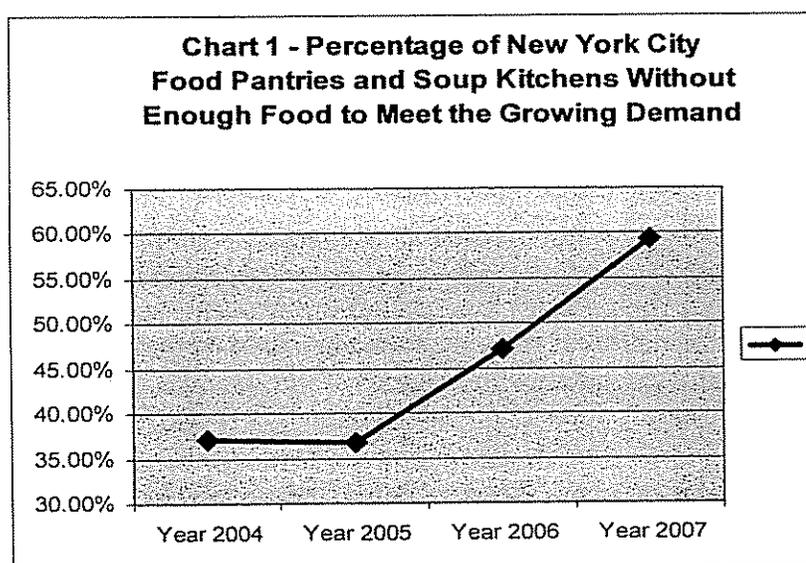
USDA estimates only the percentage of food insecure households statewide, not the raw number of people who are food insecure, since such raw numbers are somewhat less statistically valid. Still, NYCCAH used the USDA data to calculate the best approximation of the numbers, very roughly estimating that the number of people who lived in food insecure households statewide in New York in 2004-2006 averaged 1.891 million people.

Given that the national and state economy created so much wealth for the people at the top of the economic ladder last year when these numbers were collected, it is disturbing that hunger and food insecurity remained at these very high levels.

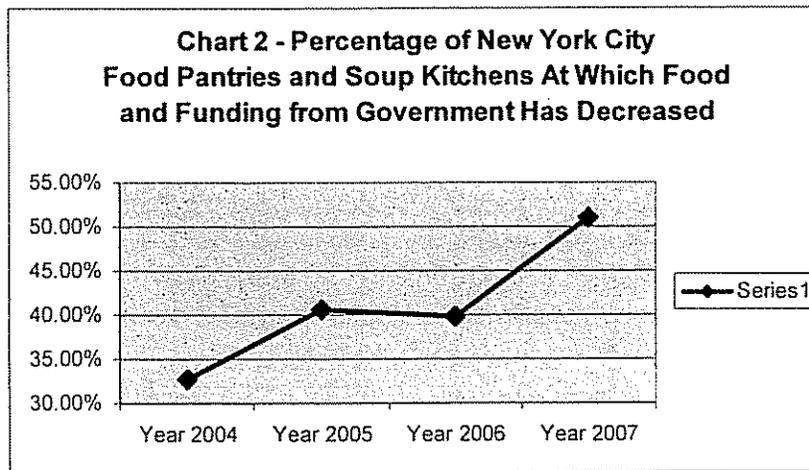
In just New York City alone, the Coalition's estimates, based on federal data for 2006 at the state level, that 1.3 million New York City residents – one in six city residents – still lived in households that were food insecure, meaning they could not afford an adequate and consistent supply of food. New York City must pay \$2.65 billion per year due to health care spending, reduced worker productivity and other spending caused by this high level of food insecurity, according to Coalition calculations based on a national study by Dr. Larry Brown of Harvard University.

I regret to report that the Coalition's annual survey of soup kitchens and food pantries, which we released in November 2007, found that the number of people who were forced to use these programs soared in New York City in 2007, while food stocks drastically declined, forcing half of these programs to ration food. The Coalition's survey estimated that pantry and kitchen use increased by 20% in 2007, on top of the 11% increase in 2006 estimated by last year's survey. The accelerating increase in hunger provided one of the first concrete signs that the local economy started a significant slow-down. Fully 59% of agencies – a record number – said they lacked the resources to meet their growing demand in 2007, a sharp increase from the 48% who lacked such resources in 2006. The Coalition's entire survey, entitled: *Rising Food Lines, Sinking Economy: Increase in NYC Hunger is Early Proof of Economic Slow-Down*, is available at www.nyccah.org. Given that hunger continued to increase in the city even when the economy was still strong last year, it is no wonder that now, when the economy is weakening, lines at pantries and kitchens are getting even longer. This proves the old adage that when the economy gets a cold, people in poverty get pneumonia. To make matters even worse, federal cut-backs have slashed the remaining food stocks at these feeding programs. The Bush Administration cut the amount of federal commodities provided to the city's pantries and kitchens by the Food Bank for New York City by 12 million pounds last year.

As Chart 1 below demonstrates, 59% of agencies – a record number – said they lacked the resources to meet their growing demand in 2007, a sharp increase from the 48% who lacked such resources in 2006.



Also, as Chart 2 below illustrates, likely because of the large cuts in federal commodities, the percentage of agencies at which government food and funding decreased went from 33% in 2003 to 51% in 2007.



Other findings of the survey:

- 81% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of people in the last 12 months. 40% said this number increased “greatly.”
- Of the populations that increased “greatly” at responding agencies, the fastest growth was seen among families with children, immigrants, and senior citizens.
- 80% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of families with children over the last 12 months (versus 4% reporting a decrease, and 16% reporting no change).
- 71% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of seniors over the last 12 months (versus 6% reporting a decrease, and 23% reporting no change).
- 64% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of working people over the last 12 months (versus 11% reporting a decrease, and 25% reporting no change).
- 83% of responding agencies believe that their need will continue to increase in the next six months. 34% of responding agencies believe it will increase “greatly.”
- 53% of respondents reported using their own personal money “often,” “always,” or “sometimes” to support their feeding programs.
- While it is by definition impossible to fully count the number of times people were not served because they were turned away, the Coalition’s rough estimate, based on survey responses, indicates that 52% more people were turned-away in 2007 than in 2006.

- 90% of responding agencies said they would like to improve the nutritional quality of the food they distribute. When asked to indicate the top way to accomplish that goal, 53% needed more fresh fruits and vegetables, 35% wanted more nutritious canned and dried foods, 7% wanted nutrition education for their clients, and 5% wanted nutrition education for their staffs.

The Underutilization of Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs in New York

In recent months, the situation has gotten even worse, as food prices are increasing, the Federal government has failed to enact a new Farm Bill to address these issues, and it seems likely that State funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) for this year will be less than last year. Perhaps worst of all, existing federal nutrition programs continue to be highly underutilized.

Despite the State's Working Families Food Stamps Initiative, which we strongly support and for which we greatly thank OTDA Commissioner David Hansell, there are still massive barriers reducing food stamps participation in New York City. Food Stamp Program participation actually declined by more than 5,000 people in February on top of a smaller drop in January, defying national trends of soaring participation. While food stamps participation nationwide will soon reach its historic peak, the City's new numbers show that participation locally is now 23% below the historic peak

Participation in March 1995, the historic peak month, was 1,458,300 people. The Giuliani Administration equated food stamps with welfare and used a multitude of methods – both legal and illegal – to kick eligible New Yorkers off the food stamp rolls. By the start of the Bloomberg Administration, participation had dropped to 798,396 people a massive 659,904-person (45%) drop. Yet most of the people removed from the rolls remained eligible.

Due to both a worsening economy and limited access improvements, there was some, albeit uneven, participation progress during the Bloomberg Administration. By December of 2007, participation had climbed to 1,129,368 people. While that number was 41% higher than at the start of the Bloomberg Administration, it was still 328,932 people (22%) lower than the peak participation rate of 1,458,300 people in March 1995. Today, we have a tanking economy, increasing lines at soup kitchens and food pantries, intensified State, City, and non-profit food stamps outreach efforts, skyrocketing food prices, record numbers at City homeless shelters, and soaring food stamps rolls nationwide. Yet food stamps program participation actually decreased in New York City in January 2008 by 69 people and in February of this year decreased by a startling 5,301 people. There is something still very wrong with access.

Thus, the current (February 2008) participation level of 1,123,998 people is 334,302 people (23%) lower than the peak level of 1,458,300 in March 1995, even though the current national level is almost equal with the peak historic level. At this rate, it is increasingly likely that the City will fail to meet the State's food stamps enrollment targets. As I will detail later in this testimony, there is clear evidence that one of the key causes of under-participation in these programs are access barriers put in place by the City, some of which violate Federal law and some of which undermine the State's efforts to ensure more working families get aid.

Thus, in just the city alone, failures in government policies are keeping food stamp benefits away from hundreds of thousands of low-income New Yorkers, depriving them of literally hundreds of millions of dollars in federal entitlement spending that could be going to feed their families. Much of that money could have also gone to the state's small farmers and food processors.

The food stamps access situation isn't that much better statewide. USDA estimated that, in 2005, only 62% of the state's residents eligible to receive Federal food stamps benefits received them. This would mean that more than 1.1 million state residents were eligible for but not receiving this vital benefit. Of eligible people in working families, only 48% received the benefit. New York has the 32nd worst overall participation rate in the nation, and the 39th worst rate for working families. If the State enrolled only half of the people eligible but not receiving benefits, that would provide benefits to an additional 550,000 New Yorkers (of whom approximately 275,000 would be children), bringing an estimated \$1.5 billion – yes, billion - in additional federal benefit funds into the state's economy.

The State is also lagging when it comes to participation in child nutrition programs. According to the Food Research and Action Center, only 38% of the children in the state who receive free or reduced-price lunches also received free or reduced priced breakfasts, making New York the 40th worst state in terms of the lunch to breakfast ratio. If the percentage of kids receiving lunch who also receive breakfast were increased to 60%, that would provide breakfasts to an additional 252,241 low-income children, bringing an extra \$54 million per year in federal funding into the state's schools.

Nationally, only about 57% of eligible women and children participate in the national Women Infants and Children (WIC) Program. There is strong evidence that New York State's participation rate is even lower. New York also lags in participation in the national Summer Meals and After-School Snacks Programs.

Dysfunctional Local Food Systems

Low-income neighborhoods and communities not only face hunger, poverty, and gaps in government assistance, but also suffer from broader community food insecurity as a result of dysfunctional food systems that characterize low-income neighborhoods across the U.S. Such communities lack: access to fresh produce, direct ties to small and medium-sized farmers, and adequate knowledge of nutrition. These inner-city problems in turn exacerbate the threat to the broader regional food system. Vast numbers of potential urban consumers are cut off from small and medium-sized farmers, and farmers are cut off from potential income that can preserve their land against encroaching development. Given the increasing evidence that food insecurity and obesity are twin roots of the same problem – malnutrition – and that both are often caused by a lack of affordable, nutritious food, it is no wonder that obesity is also rapidly rising in low-income neighborhoods.

Not only does hunger exist in America despite obesity, it may actually be a key *contributor* to the growing obesity problem among low-income Americans. That's hard for most people to believe, but it's true.

An analysis by the Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University and the Food Research and Action Center found that hunger and obesity not only “pose separate and distinct health risks, but also can co-exist in the same household.” How can that be? Shouldn’t hunger make people skinnier not fatter? In fact, some hungry people *do* lose weight. Among the Americans characterized by USDA as having very low food security (what used to be called hunger), 46 percent lose weight some time during the year. But it is even more common for such households to report that they “relied on a few kinds of low-cost foods to feed their children” (96 percent) and “couldn’t feed their children balanced meals” (87 percent).

It is thus likely that, while some of the very hungriest and poorest Americans eat so little that they lose weight, many others, with marginally more ability to get food (either through limited food purchases, meager food stamps allotments, or pantry donations) eat food of such poor nutritional quality that they gain weight.

When forced to ration food, poor people often must choose foods that give them the feeling that their stomachs are full for the least possible cost. Such foods are often rich in calories and fat, but low in nutritional benefits. A \$1.50 slice of high-fat, high-calorie pizza will surely satiate a hungry person faster than \$1.50 worth of grapes or tofu. A survey of Seattle-area supermarkets found that 20 cents spent on cookies would provide the same amount of food energy as 95 cents spent on carrots. A national study found that “poverty and food insecurity are associated with lower food expenditures, low fruit and vegetable consumption, and lower-quality diets ... The association between poverty and obesity may be mediated, in part, by the low cost of energy-dense foods and may be reinforced by the high palatability of sugar and fat.”

Plus, when hungry people are forced to eat at irregular intervals, they frequently overcompensate during the meals they do get by eating portion sizes that are larger than their body actually needs at that moment. There is also some reason to believe that physiological changes may occur to help the body conserve energy when diets are inadequate. The body can compensate for periodic food shortages by becoming more efficient in storing calories as fat.

Not only that, a full array of more nutritious foods are rarely available at the small corner grocery stores and bodegas that are the main food source in New York’s poorest neighborhoods. In these shops, it far easier to find potato chips, soda, and pork rinds than fresh lettuce and broccoli. Topping it off, poor people are less likely to be able to afford gym memberships, have space in their homes in which to exercise, or have safe public parks at which they can exercise outdoors.

Are income-related factors the only reasons for obesity? Of course not. Plenty of non-poor Americans are obese. The bottom line is, that unless you are one of the rare people genetically blessed with perpetual thinness, if you either eat too much food, eat the wrong kinds of food, or burn too few calories, you’ll gain weight. Some people, like me, can blame at least some extra weight on bad genetics. All my family members (even those who don’t overeat) are a little heavy, and even when I successfully trained for and ran the New York City Marathon, I didn’t entirely succeed in wiping out my pot belly. (In truth, however, most of the blame for my extra weight must be placed on my addiction to New York’s world class bagels, pizza, and Chinese fried dumplings).

It's hard enough for people of any income category to keep their weight in check, but the emotional and-physical tolls of poverty and food insecurity make the challenges that much harder.

This is a difficult issue to take on, but we must, because the stakes are so high. In New York City, deaths from diabetes skyrocketed by 71% between 1990 and 2003. Black diabetics died at three times the rate of white New Yorkers with the disease, and Hispanic New Yorkers shouldered the greatest increase in death from diabetes since 1990 - a rise of 169%. Residents of neighborhoods where diabetes was most prevalent –among them East Harlem, the South Bronx, and Brooklyn's Williamsburg and Bushwick (all of which are very low-income neighborhoods) – died of diabetes at seven times the rate of those in the least-affected parts of the city. They also were hospitalized 10 times more than those on the Upper East Side (a wealthy neighborhood). "It can be a risk factor if people are more likely to be overweight or obese and less physically active because they live in a particular neighborhood where they don't have access to resources such as parks and nutritious food," said Dr. Shadi Chamany, the head of diabetes prevention and control for the City.

Nationwide, because obesity plays a role in so many serious diseases, it increases health care costs by 36% and medication costs by 77%. Obesity now costs the country more in health care expenses than smoking.

The twin problems of obesity and hunger are directly tied to the fate of small farmers. We already know how bad it is for consumers and the environment when just a few oil companies control most of the world's energy supply. But we are only starting to see the devastating impact upon consumers and upon public health when just a handful of food companies control most of the world's food supply. Prices go up, nutritional concerns are minimized, family farmers are driven off their land, and food investments in low-income rural and urban areas are reduced (leading to food deserts). All these forces increase both hunger and obesity.

People who grow food and people who eat food are fully dependent on each other. Farmers need consumers, and vice versa. But these connections are frayed.

People who work on these issues like to throw around the term "food systems," a wonkish term that basically means the entire interlocking web of food production, processing, distribution, and consumption – from farm to fork. Today's food systems are dysfunctional, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. Too many neighborhoods bear the costs of buying food but not the income and economic growth associated with producing, processing, and selling food.

Farmers need strong consumers to stay economically healthy. And in return, to stay physically healthy, consumers need strong farmers.

Unfortunately, the future of small and medium size agriculture in America is grim. According to USDA, American farmers are more than four times more likely to be above the age of 65 than below the age of 34. About 27 percent of farm operators report their age as 65 years and older. In contrast, only seven percent of self-employed workers in other industries are 65 years or more. In New York State, according to a study by Constance C. Adams, the average age of the operator (a male in 98 percent of the families) is just over 51 years.

Nationwide, average farms were about three times as large in 2002 as in 1835. Small farms tend to make so little income today that households operating small farms typically receive substantial off-farm income. For households operating limited-resource or retirement farms, however, more than half of off-farm income comes from unearned sources—such as Social Security, pensions, dividends, interest, and rent—reflecting the advanced age of operators on those farms. Also, in a trend that should alarm everyone, the nation's farm land is rapidly being devoured as it is being turned in to condominium developments, golf courses, and shopping malls.

As processors and distributors snare an ever-increasing share of the food system's dollars, small farmers get less and less. Nationwide, out of a \$4.00 gallon of milk, dairy farmers get \$1.60; out of a pound of bread that retails from \$2.49, farmers gets 10 cents; of two pounds of lettuce that retails for \$1.79 cents, farmers get 28 cents; and, out of one pound of sirloin steak that sells for \$7.99, farmers gets 94 cents. Farmers are also continuously exposed to greater risk than people in virtually any industry: if there is too much or too little heat, too much or too little rain, frost, hail, or an infestation of insects, they can lose their whole crop. If food prices – which fluctuate more wildly than prices for most other things – plummet, farmers can lose their entire profit, and go further into debt. It is obvious why so many farmers need a second (and often third) source of income to survive.

While increasing the consumption of organics and locally grown foods are important goals, too many activists act like they are the only goals. Sometimes they even scoff at the notion that lower food prices could ever be a good thing, because that would automatically mean that the environment was harmed and small farmers were shafted. Even if all those things were the case, we can't ignore that lower food prices are better for low and middle income Americans. Lower prices can mean the difference between having a meal and not having a meal. While there are many good reasons to slam companies such as Wal-Mart (such as their low wages and inadequate benefits for workers), we do need to keep in mind that their lower prices do provide genuine relief to struggling families.

We also have to be careful to make clear that small-scale community food security projects can't feed the nation. One of the largest and most innovative community food security groups in the nation, Growing Power in Milwaukee, started creating a ten-story glass building that will grow fish, fruit, herbs, vegetables that they say will provide enough food for 10,000 people. That's truly a remarkable accomplishment, and those 10,000 people will surely be healthier and happier lives because of it. But I must also point out that Milwaukee has a population of about 600,000, so even one of the largest such projects in the nation is feeding less than two percent of the population of its hometown. Yes, we need to expand such efforts nationwide, but we also must realize that people still need to get their food through the dominant food systems – mainstream supermarkets, restaurants, and convenience stores.

Concrete Ways to Increase Food Stamps Access

We greatly applaud the State for removing the assets limit (previously \$2,000) for all food stamps food stamps applicants, which made it nearly impossible for families to save money for college, retirement, or other vital purposes and still be able to obtain food stamp benefits.

By eliminating the limit on resources that families can own and still receive food stamp benefits, the State is making it easier for parents to feed their families and at the same time be able to save money to send their kids to college, buy a first home, start a small business, and/or open a retirement account. This new policy is perfectly in line with the long-held contention of many advocates that the very best long-term way to reduce hunger is to empower low-income families to develop the assets they need to climb out of poverty and enter the middle class.

Despite this progress, we still have the Food Stamps Program access problems in New York City detailed above. Many outreach efforts assume the greatest problem is that low-income people don't know they are eligible for food stamps. I think a far greater problem is that many who know they are eligible, can't take the time, or don't want to face the hassle in applying under the current, onerous application system. Permit me to suggest concrete steps the State can take to fix these problems:

1) End finger-imaging for all families and individuals, including all those in New York City.

Let me be clear: not only is finger-imaging punitive and wasteful, it undermines a key other component of the State's Working Families Food Stamps Initiative by forcing families who would have otherwise been able to avoid visits to government offices to visit such offices solely to provide a finger image.

Commissioner Hansell recently testified that, if the City failed to meet its food stamps enrollment targets, the State would enforce its previous plan to end finger-imaging for working families in every part of the State. It is now clear that a) it is highly unlikely the City can meet the targets and b) the hunger crisis is growing so rapidly that we can't afford to wait for further proof of the City's failures, particularly when the City, also in a budget crunch, is wasting \$800,000 of our tax dollars a year on this useless process.

The facts will show that one of the reasons for the City's continuing under-participation in the Food Stamp Program is the continued requirement of finger-imaging, and the even more onerous related requirement that families who ordinarily could have conducted all their business with HRA over the phone still have to physically visit an HRA office (often leaving work to do so) to be finger-imaged.

Given that 46 states have no fingerprinting requirement at all for food stamp benefits – and further given that fingerprinting wastes money, fails to prevent significant fraud, and discourages eligible people from applying – we had hoped that Governor Spitzer would, as he promised in his campaign, eliminate finger-printing for all New Yorkers. He did not. He took the far more limited approach of trying to eliminate finger-imaging only for families with someone working 30 hours or more. Despite this, misinformed attacks from the *New York Post* and political enemies of the Governor falsely slammed the Governor for eliminating all finger-printing.

The Governor's initiative focused only on helping working families obtain food stamps as "work supports," which is a professed central goal of Mayor Bloomberg's own anti-poverty initiative. In defending the City's position on finger-imaging, HRA Commissioner Robert Doar recently testified before the City Council that finger-imaging deters fraud and has no negative impact upon legitimate applicants. Below I will present hard data disproving both those claims.

A May 2007 report from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) stated the following:

“Nationwide, four states currently use finger imaging of food stamp applicants to prevent households from applying more than once for benefits. (USDA) FNS (Food and Nutrition Service) officials commented that the agency has not concluded that finger-imaging enhances program integrity and that it may have a negative effect on program access by deterring certain households from applying.”

Thus, even under the Bush Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has found no proof that finger-imaging significantly reduces fraud and has expressed worries that it may deter people from applying.

Even more telling is a March 2007 report from the highly respected Urban Institute, in which they described the impact of "biometrics" (a technical term for finger imaging):

“Our results suggest that the use of biometric technology can lead to as much as a 4.3 percentage point decline in food stamp receipt. We find a significant negative relationship between the use of biometric technology and food stamp receipt for all four of our household populations. This finding is consistent with Bartlett et al. (2004) who find that biometric technology reduces the likelihood that food stamp applicants will complete the application process.”

While a 4.3% decrease may not seem like a lot, given that we estimate that at least 500,000 New York City residents (many of whom are in working families) are eligible for, but not currently receiving, food stamp benefits, it does mean that 21,500 eligible people will not apply simply because of this requirement. That costs the city’s economy a whopping \$31 million per year in federal nutrition assistance benefits.

When you add in the impact of requiring the extra office visits, the number of people harmed by this policy is far higher.

Another way of looking at the 4.3% deterrence rate is that one out of every 23 otherwise eligible low-income households won't apply for the food their family needs solely due to this requirement.

In contrast, Commissioner Doar testified to this Committee last November that the City detected only 31 cases of fraud through finger-imaging in 2006. Given that about 1.1 million people in the city received food stamps in 2006, that means that only one in 34,991 food stamps applicants committed fraud and were caught by finger-imaging. To prevent fraud by only one in nearly 35,000 people, the City denies benefits to one in 23 families in need.

The Commissioner testified that the City spends \$800,000 yearly on finger-imaging. Since that system only caught 31 people, which means the City spends \$25,806 per person caught.

If those 31 people had not been caught, and if they each received the average food stamps benefit, then all 31 would have received a total of about \$46,000 in benefits. In other words, the City is spending \$800,000 of non-federal dollars to stop the potential waste of \$46,000 in federal dollars. Thus, the City is spending 17 non-federal dollars for every one federal dollar saved.

Another way to look at it is that, to prevent 31 people from getting \$46,000 federal benefits for which they are *not* entitled, the City is preventing 21,500 people from getting \$31 million in benefits for which they *are* entitled. Thus, for every dollar this process save federal taxpayers, it costs New York City's economy (and hungry families) \$674.

Now, the City may respond that such statistics are unfair because they don't take into consideration that people are deterred from fraud in the first place because this system exists. But neither they nor anyone else has ever provided a shred of evidence that such a deterrence effect exists.

It would be just as credible for me to claim that the mere fact that I am testifying here today has deterred a large asteroid from destroying Manhattan. Of course, you can't prove that it hasn't, but unless I can prove that it has – or unless supporters of finger-imaging can prove that it deters fraud – those claims just aren't credible.

No wonder that none of the other 57 counties in the state – including those managed by very conservative upstate county executives or county legislatures – objected to the Governor's common-sense focus on working families. No wonder that 46 of the nation's 50 states don't waste their tax dollars on finger-imaging systems.

In his testimony to this Committee last November, Commissioner Doar said that it was unfair to compare the four states that finger image (NY, CA, TX, AZ) to all other states since the states that do finger-image have such large populations. Consequently, in the data below, I not only compare these four states to the nation as a whole, but to the four most populous states that don't finger image (Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida, and Illinois).

Here are USDA's reported payment error rates for Fiscal Year 2007:

Four states that finger-image	6.93%
Next largest four states that don't finger-image	5.97%
National average of all states and the District of Columbia	5.49%

Here are USDA's Food Stamps participation rates for calendar year 2005 (the most recent year for which these statistics are available):

For **all** eligible people

Four states that finger-image	60%
Next largest four states that don't finger image	69%
National average of all states and the District of Columbia	65%

For all eligible **working** people:

Four states that finger-image	48%
Next largest four states that don't finger-image	67%
National average of all states and the District of Columbia	57%

Thus, working people are particularly underrepresented and particularly harmed by the current processes.

In sum, finger-imaging gives us the worst of both worlds: it both harms participation *and* fails to reduce program error.

There are a number of effective ways to fight fraud other than finger-imaging already in use – such as computer matching – which advocates fully support. It is crucial to point out that, when large-scale fraud does occur in the Food Stamp Program (an occurrence far less common than 10 years ago), the perpetrators are usually food retailers – who fraudulently bill the government for non-existent customers, or City employees – who fabricate non-existent households. Fraud carried out by individual food stamps recipients – the only type of fraud detected by finger-imaging – comprises a relatively small percentage of government funds lost due to fraud. Thus the extraordinary effort to detect fraud among individual families deflects vital attention and resources away from far more productive methods of fraud prevention.

Benjamin Franklin once said: “Never confuse motion with action.” That phrase certainly applies to the process of finger-imaging food stamps applicants, which creates the public perception that there is “motion” that it is fighting fraud, but accomplishes very little “action” to reach that goal. I hope all the facts compel you to change your mind on this vital topic.

2) Immediately force the City to comply with Federal law by making all food stamp

determinations within 30 days. The City still continues to routinely violate federal law by failing to provide food stamps benefits within 30 days of people applying. The 30 day deadline was set decades ago, before the advent of modern technologies, so it should be easier to meet than ever. Given modern computer systems, New York City’s HRA could – and should – make food stamps benefits available to eligible applicants within just a few days. Yet in 2005, according to HRA’s JobStat reports, City job centers failed to meet the 30-day federal processing deadline for food stamps applicant households in 8.0% of all cases. Encouragingly, in response to a 2005 campaign questionnaire from the Coalition Against Hunger, Mayor Bloomberg said that he would ensure that HRA complied with the 30 day deadline. Yet in 2006, HRA was even worse, missing this legal deadline in nearly 20% of all cases. In 2007 and in January of 2008, HRA improved a bit, but still failed to meet this legal deadline at jobs centers in more than 8% of all cases. See: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/hamilton.pdf>.) That means that, for one in 12 households applying, they not only don’t get the food help they need within the few days that would be most efficient and compassionate, they don’t even get it in the full month required by law. If City fire fighters and police officers failed to respond that frequently, the city would be outraged. As a practical matter, when low-income families who urgently need food hear through the grapevine that other families have faced such delays, they are far less likely to apply for food stamps, and instead rely upon immediate (although highly inadequate) help from charitable pantries and kitchens. Thus, the State should take immediate action to solve this issue.

3) Require all municipalities, including New York City, to accept a waiver to enable able bodied adults without dependents (know as ABAWDs) to continue to obtain food stamps while looking for work.

The City’s continued refusal to accept the ABAWD waiver contributes to the city’s hunger crisis in two significant ways. One, it discourages unemployed people from applying for food stamps, since they are worried that the great effort involved in obtaining benefits in the first place will not be worth it if they are removed from the program after a few months

simply because they cannot find work. Two, it removes people from the food stamp rolls who desperately need help.

I once again note that obtaining the waiver does not eliminate the requirement that all able-bodied food stamps recipients seek employment; it simply allows those seeking employment, but not able to obtain it, to continue receiving food stamps. When an ABAWD waiver is in place, federal law still requires that all able-bodied food stamps recipients make a good-faith effort to look for work.

Even if the City accepts the waiver, ABAWDs can still be required to participate in job search, workfare, or other employment activities, and be sanctioned (terminated/denied) if they do not comply and/or do not have good cause. If the City again refuses to accept this common-sense waiver, the State should use its existing authority to direct the City do so.

4) More aggressively use existing authority to allow a wide range of people with hardships (including transportation issues) to conduct food stamps interviews over the phone rather than in person at a government office. New York City still forces people with long travel times, large families, or full-time jobs to go in person to government offices to apply. The greatest irony of all is that people are often forced to take a day off work (often losing wages) to go to a City office to prove, among other things, that they are working.

5) More aggressively and more rapidly fix problems with, and ease the processes for, food stamps re-certification. Given that New York City will often add many people to the rolls just months after removing large numbers from the rolls proves there are many fundamental re-certification errors still in place.

6) Move rapidly to expand pilots to allow people to apply on-line for food stamps at pantries and kitchens – and provide funding to do so. The State should ensure that application sites use all available waivers and not violate the intent of the project by forcing applicants to also go to government offices. The State should also include all these efforts in its official plans, so that the Federal government would automatically provide an additional dollar for every non-Federal dollar spent.

Concrete Ways to Increase Child Nutrition Program Participation

1) The single best way to rapidly decrease child hunger is to provide universal, in-classroom school breakfasts, as a number of pilot sites have already done. I recently visited one such site. Just a first weeks after the pilot started, it was already reducing child hunger and improving educational performance. Unlike traditional school breakfast programs in which low-income students must arrive at school early and go to a separate lunchroom to eat (which significantly increases stigma and decreases participation), the pilot allows all children to eat breakfast together as part of their first period of instruction. I learned that the pilot significantly reduced tardiness, improved attendance, and increased student attentiveness in the afternoon. The percentage of the school's children obtaining breakfast at school skyrocketed. When I asked students if they would have had any breakfast at all if they had not had that school breakfast that day, at least half raised

their hands to indicate that they would have gone hungry had it not been for their school breakfast. The students indicated that both they and their parents loved the new breakfast program.

We hope the State can work collaboratively with school districts, the teachers and custodians unions, and parents to rapidly expand this vital program to every school in the State. We will also communicate with our federal elected officials to urge them to give New York City and every school district in the nation the resources to do so.

2) The State should accelerate efforts to enable schools and other institutions to buy fresh products directly from the state's agricultural producers. This will both improve nutrition and aid farmers.

3) WIC outreach should be coordinated with food stamps outreach. It makes no sense that funding streams – and thus work – for these two types of outreach, which overlap greatly, are separated due to bureaucratic divisions.

4) The State should make a special effort to increase participation in the federal After-School Snacks/Suppers and Summer Meals Programs. Even though the benefits for all these programs are paid for entirely by the federal government, all these programs are highly under-utilized throughout New York State. The State should reduce paperwork for nonprofit sponsors of such projects (which is now easier to do under Federal law), and provide hands-on technical assistance to enable non-profit groups to meet the administrative requirements that remain.

How the State Food Policy Council Can Help Address Other Food System Problems

The other good news is that the Food Policy Council could effectively tackle all these problems. Neither the government nor communities can solve the large and complex problems of hunger and food insecurity on their own, but they can solve those problems if they work together. However, only government has the resources, scope of work, and community legitimacy to take the lead in tackling these problems. Perhaps the most important goal of this process should be improving the coordination between state agencies that administer nutrition assistance and food security programs.

Through the Council, the State should energetically forge innovative partnerships with nonprofit groups, private businesses, and individual citizens – as well as with federal, city, county, town, village, and tribal government agencies – in order to help communities solve problems of food insecurity and hunger. The Council should also increase and improve State technical assistance to such government entities, as well as to nonprofit groups, in order to build long-term local structures to increase food security.

Not only could the Council unite Upstate and Downstate constituencies by increasing the purchase of nutritious, state-grown food by low-income residents, the Council could be vital in decreasing hunger and food insecurity by improving the coordination between varied State agencies regarding the management of overlapping Federal nutrition assistance programs.

Food should be a central organizing tool of neighborhood development, uniting communities through: community gardens; farmers markets; nutrition education; new supermarkets; food cooperatives; and the development of food-related small businesses. Community gardens can reclaim empty lots from drug-pushers and reduce crime. New food businesses can create jobs and raise community income. Farmers' markets give neighborhoods central gathering spaces and nurture a feeling of the "public commons" that is so often lost in today's society. All large real estate development projects should include plans for food, including roof-top gardens and greenhouses, affordable supermarkets, and farmers' markets in public spaces.

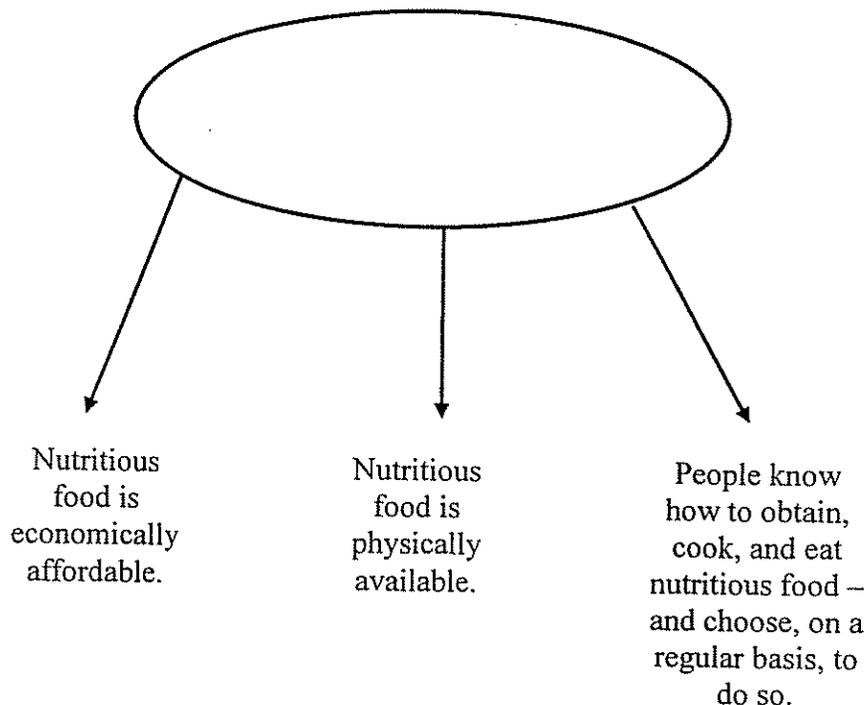
Specifically, the Council should:

1) Further promote farmers' markets, community gardens, and Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects and increase their interaction with Federal nutrition assistance programs. It is vital to make sure such efforts are both physically available and economically affordable.

2) Maintain strong support for the New York City Wholesale Farmer's Market. It would be a grand tragedy if the fall of the former Governor led to the death of this vital project, which would aid both upstate producers and downstate consumers.

3) Bolster nutrition education and obesity-prevention activities. Such efforts much be based on on-the-ground realities.

The Three Legs of Good Community Nutrition



As the graphic above demonstrates, for a community to have good nutrition, three things need to happen: food must be affordable; food must be physically available; and individuals and families must have enough education know how to eat better and regularly choose perform the extra work necessary to do so. If you don't have all three legs of this table, the table will collapse. Yet all too often projects only focus on one of the three. Many provide nutrition education, lecturing people that they should eat better, but make food no more available or affordable – an approach destined to fail. Sometimes, food is brought into low-income neighborhoods, but not at prices most people can afford. That won't work either. All these issues must be addressed at once by the Council.

4) Provide tax breaks, loans, and other incentives to bring new supermarkets into – or upgrade existing supermarkets in – low-income neighborhoods and towns. The incentives should only be given to supermarkets that will provide nutritious food choices.

5) Make the process through which faith-based and secular nonprofit groups contract with the State to fight hunger and improve nutrition both more streamlined and more accountable.

The main source of State funding for more than 2,000 food pantries, soup kitchens, and food banks across New York is the State Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP). The Council should work to ensure that this program – as well as other relevant grant programs and contract opportunities – be made more accessible and results-oriented, as well as more integrated with other anti-hunger and food security efforts in other State agencies. For instance, the Council should ensure that, if funding for this program is increased (as it should be), some of this new funding is used to support stepped-up efforts at pantries and kitchens to enroll their clients in food stamps, WIC, and school meals programs. The Council could also work with the State Commission on National and Community Service to increase the number of New Yorkers involved in volunteer activities and national service assignments that fight hunger and improve nutrition.

6) Promote the start-up of food-related micro-enterprises and small businesses.

7) Propose that the federal government take the lead in tackling these problems. Specifically, the federal government should:

- Enact an innovative new program that would simultaneously increase the scope and effectiveness of federal nutrition programs and decrease the size and complexity of the government bureaucracies that run them. The nation should combine the existing Food Stamp Program with most of the existing other federal nutrition assistance programs. My colleague Tom Freedman has suggested that such a new program be called the “American Family Food, Opportunity, and Responsibility” (AFFORd) program. More low-income Americans would be eligible for this program than the existing, separate, programs - and eligibility determination and application processes would be dramatically simplified. Under current federal law, families must earn below 130 percent of the poverty line to get food stamp benefits and free school meals, but they must live below 185 percent of the poverty line to obtain WIC benefits and reduced-price school meals. These conflicting guidelines result in both increased government bureaucracy at the federal, state, and local levels and decreased access to food. Eligibility for all these programs under the new AFFORd program should be set at 185 percent of the poverty line. There should be a single, short, universal

- federal application for AFFORd benefits, which Americans could complete easily online or during an office visit. Not only would this reduce government paperwork and bureaucracy, it would dramatically increase the amount of nutrition provided to low-income families, particularly working families.
- Provide funds to make school breakfast universal, and provide it to all students free of charge – regardless of family income – in every one of the nation’s homeroom (first period) classrooms.
- Re-launch the USDA Community Food Security Initiative (which I coordinated during the Clinton Administration) and give it concrete resources. USDA should also provide many more resources to aid small farmers with direct marketing.
- Significantly increase funding for the Community Food Project Grants (which was funded at only \$5 million in 2007), but require more of the funding be focused on projects that are integrated with the Food Stamp Program.
- End corporate agriculture welfare, and focus resources on aiding truly struggling small farmers, particularly those growing fresh fruits and vegetables. The federal government should also better protect drinking water by increasing aid for conservation measures that work on small farms.
- Greatly expand funding for existing programs that that provide WIC Program recipients and low-income seniors with extra buying power at farmers’ markets.

I would hope that State would aggressively lobby the federal government to enact these improvements.

Conclusion

Despite the need for far more federal leadership, my testimony has made it clear that federal inaction is no excuse for State inaction. Massive progress could be made by the State alone using existing federal programs and existing federal funding.

The former chair of the House Agriculture Committee, Congressman Kiki de la Garza (D-TX), used to quiz audiences with a riddle: “When does a nuclear submarine need to rise out of the water?” People would guess, when it needed air; but he explained that it could turn the water into oxygen. Other would guess that it would rise when it would run out of fuel, but the Congressman would explain that the nuclear fuel would last for years. When no one could guess, he’d answer the riddle: “When it ran out of food.” Given that food is basic human need, it is amazing that people almost always failed to figure out his riddle. More broadly, it is amazing how often food is overlooked in so many vital policy discussions. It is encouraging that this Council is working to rectify that frequent omission.

Thank you.

NEW YORK STATE FOOD POLICY COUNCEL

: TESTIMONY- April 3, 2008--NYC

My colleagues have eloquently summarized my opinions and suggestions on several issues regarding school food, Food Stamps, Farmers Markets and Community Supported Agriculture. I would like instead to help reframe and rename several issues.

FOOD STAMPS - In the new Farm Bill we hope that Food Stamps will emerge with a new name and additional funding. This is an excellent opportunity for advocates and government officials to reframe Food Stamps for what it has become: a nutrition supplement and a wage supplement in our low wage economy. It is a vital part of our fraying safety net for working poor families and seniors, especially as we move toward a possible recession and escalating food prices at the same time. It is also a time to reinforce the role of the program as the first line of defense against hunger. That means outreach programs to enroll more eligible recipients, eliminating barriers like finger imaging and complicated applications and a change of attitude in Food Stamp offices across the country from one of blocking people to welcoming and assisting them to receive their benefits in a timely and courteous manner. The Council should be a leading force in our state on this issue.

SCHOOL MEALS - We provide FREE textbooks and FREE transportation to most children no matter what their income. There are not two lines for school buses; one for kids who pay and another for kids who ride free. There should not be two lunch lines; one for kids who pay for lunch and another for kids who receive free lunch. This policy discourages older kids from eating what they term "poor food" or "welfare food". Since we know that good nutrition aids comprehension and kids learn better and cause less problems when they are not hungry, school meals should also be FREE. We need to invest in our children's health and education and save vast amounts of money and valuable time by eliminating needless paperwork. We hope the council will support our work to move the Food and Nutrition Service of USDA to allow New York to implement a free lunch plan similar to the one operating successfully in Philadelphia for fifteen years.

FARMERS MARKETS – The growth of farmers markets in the past decade has been promising but the simple addition of portable EBT machines that take Food Stamp cards and credit cards is making a significant breakthrough in providing more income for struggling farmers and encouraging farmers markets in poorer and mixed neighborhoods. The Council should partner with numerous agencies and communities throughout the state to facilitate investment in these business changing machines.

FARM TO FOOD BANK – Several states have funded food banks to purchase fresh food from family farmers to be distributed within their system. This helps the farmers to make additional income, provides nutritious food to hungry people and fights obesity and diet related diseases that are especially prevalent in poor children. We will be happy to share models from other states like Ohio and Louisiana.

COMMUNITY GARDENS-URBAN GARDENS-SUBURBAN GARDENS – During WWII people grew food in their own Victory Gardens. It was seen as smart and patriotic. The Council should encourage GOOD FOOD GARDENS that would help improve nutrition and health and be a cool thing to do.

Bill Ayres - Co-Founder and Executive Director of WHY(World Hunger Year)



METROPOLITAN COUNCIL ON JEWISH POVERTY
ACTS OF CHARITY • DEEDS OF KINDNESS צדקה וגמילות חסדים

New York State Council on Food Policy Listening Session

April 3, 2008

Testimony of Peter Brest

Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

Good morning. My name is Peter Brest and I am the Chief Operating Officer of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty. Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty is a non-profit, city-wide organization that has been serving the poor, elderly and recent immigrants in the New York City area for more than 35 years. As the umbrella agency to a neighborhood network of 25 local Community Councils, Met Council strengthens families and neighborhoods throughout New York City.

Today I want to focus on one of Met Council's most important programs, our Kosher Food Network, and its role in helping low-income individuals to make ends meet and maintain independent living. We provide regular monthly packages to over 13,000 households and as many as 50,000 families during the Passover holiday. The program operates in collaboration with almost 100 community-based organizations throughout the five boroughs. Met Council obtains bulk food from the Food Bank for NYC as well as donations and direct purchases from manufacturers and wholesalers. Met

Council supplements these food packages with a separate program that provides food vouchers to low-income households as well as home delivered kosher weekend meals to the frail elderly.

We estimate that approximately 60% of the needy recipients of our food program are elderly. From Coney Island to Williamsburg to Washington Heights, we see many senior citizens lined up on the days on which food is distributed, waiting patiently for packages that supplement whatever food they are able to purchase on their fixed incomes. The Jewish community councils and our own Crisis Intervention program report that the need for food assistance among low income families is often particularly acute at the end of the month before social security or SSI checks arrive, when rent payments are looming and when much of the previous month's check has been used up. When times are tight and the families are faced with the choice of paying for rent or other needs such as medicine and food, they will almost always take care of rent first and skimp on other items. These are the situations where supplemental food is critical to maintaining decent nutrition and health.

Unfortunately, our food program now faces its greatest challenge since its inception. As has been well publicized in the press, the shelves of the Food Bank for NYC, as well as pantries around the city and the entire country, have a lot less food than they have in the past, leaving soup kitchens and neighborhood pantries to cut back on food distributions and scrounge for food from other sources. These shortages appear to be primarily due to the cutbacks in the federal government's surplus food program and the lack of action on the Farm Bill, but they are exacerbated by decreased donations

from food manufacturers, wholesalers and retail outlets, which now find more profitable ways of disposing of excess product than donating them to food pantries and soup kitchens. Met Council's program is no exception. We are facing a shortfall in food supplies of 25-40% for the coming year at the same time that demand for supplemental food is rising and the cost of living for the poor in NYC, especially the elderly poor, is continuing to outstrip any increases in household income. We are very concerned that as food pantries and soup kitchens are forced to curtail their hours of service or even close due to a shortage of supplies, the increasing need for food among the poor will place even greater pressure on those sites that manage to stay open.

The shortage of surplus and donated food is particularly acute for agencies that depend on kosher food supplies. These agencies already face a shortage of kosher food stocks from government programs such as EFAP and TEFAP, where typically 75% of available items are not kosher. And the shortage is even more significant when it comes to supplies of protein, since kosher meat and poultry is simply not available to kosher food pantries from these government sources, leaving them to depend almost entirely on canned tuna to provide protein to low-income clients.

Met Council and our network of community-based agencies strongly support the passage of the federal Farm Bill with as generous an allocation of funds for the surplus food program as possible. We also urge New York City and New York State to help close the gap in funding for supplemental food through direct allocations to the network of food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the city and state. Without these efforts, Met Council, like many

other organizations, will be forced to reduce their shipments and distributions and we will see more empty shelves at food pantries and more empty shelves in the homes of low-income New Yorkers.

**To improve health and control obesity in New York, stop promoting unhealthy foods
Testimony to the New York State Council on Food Policy, April 3, 2008, New York City**

The most significant public health and nutritional challenge facing New York in the coming decade is to reverse the epidemics of obesity and diabetes that are imposing a growing burden on the health and finances of New Yorkers. Some experts warn that if present trends continue, our children and grandchildren will have shorter life spans than we do, a reversal of more than a century of public health progress.¹ In recent years, obesity and diabetes have increased significantly in New York City, State and nationally. Between 2002 and 2004 alone, according to a recent Health Department report, NYC adults city gained a collective 10 million pounds.² In addition, current patterns of obesity and diabetes impose a higher burden on the poor and on Blacks and Latinos than on the better off and whites, thus increasing the already unacceptable inequities in health among these groups.

Changing this future –helping more people achieve and maintain healthy weights-- requires action in three broad areas. First, New York needs to make it easier for its residents to find and afford healthy food, especially in poor neighborhoods. Second, the city needs to make it easier for all residents to move more, to find safe affordable places to exercise, to walk more and to engage in other forms of daily physical activity. Fortunately, New York is beginning to take steps in the right direction in these two areas. The third change, however, is more difficult. It requires reducing the promotion and availability of unhealthy food. In my testimony, I will explain why I think the promotion of unhealthy food play such a strong role in the obesity and diabetes epidemics and suggest some specific actions that New York State can take to reduce promotion of unhealthy food.

Promotion of unhealthy food describes activities designed to encourage people to eat more high fat, sugar, salt or calorie foods and beverages, often highly processed and low-nutrient products. It includes advertising, promotional activities, pricing practices, retail distribution, and public policies that cause people to consume more unhealthy products. Why is promotion of unhealthy foods important? Imagine a group of people trying to stop using crack or heroin. Put these well-intentioned individuals in a place where they are bombarded with incessant messages to smoke or shoot up; where heroin or crack is available in every household, street corner, convenience store and workplace; and priced so that anyone can afford them. Would this environment encourage people to quit or just say no? Well, that's the food environment that confronts most New Yorkers, especially those living in low-income neighborhoods. And unless we're willing to consider how to change that environment, our hope for reducing obesity and diabetes and of improving the nutritional status of New Yorkers is significantly compromised.

The basic facts of human biology are simple: if you take in more calories than you use, you gain weight. Thus, even if people eat more fruits and vegetables and switch to low fat milk and brown rice and spend more time walking or biking but still drink a quart of soda daily and down a Big Mac, they are likely to gain weight. That's why most nutritionists now agree that the central nutritional message of today should be "Eat less".

Unfortunately, we have allowed the food industry to create an environment that gives the opposite message: Eat more. Children are bombarded by television ads for unhealthy food.

According to a 2007 national study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, children see several thousands food ads per year and the vast majority are for unhealthy products such as candy and snacks, high sugar cereals or fast food.³ New York State is home to thousands of fast food establishments that spend hundreds of millions of dollars persuading us to consume happy meals that will make us and our children overweight and prone to chronic diseases and premature death. Many of our schools continue to sell or even promote sweetened drinks that have been firmly linked to obesity. In many neighborhoods, unhealthy food is more available and cheaper than healthy food.

While the food industry has played a significant role in creating the environment that encourages obesity and diabetes, it is not fair to blame the industry alone. While some food companies are beginning to act more responsibly, for the most part food executives are simply following the rules that require them to maximize returns for their shareholders. To change our food environment, city, state and federal government will need to reclaim its responsibility to protect public health. To that end, I propose the Council on Food Policy recommend these actions:

1. End the sale and promotion of commercial food in all New York state public schools. Our schools should be a safe space from exhorting our children to consume unhealthy products.
2. Impose a small tax on designated unhealthy foods such as sweetened beverages and dedicate its revenues to subsidized healthy foods and to counter-advertising campaigns, which in the case of tobacco have been demonstrated to be effective in changing youth behavior.
3. Support schools, youth and health organizations to create nutritional campaigns to help New York State residents analyze and resist advertising for unhealthy foods and create counter-advertising campaigns to challenge deceptive messages.
4. Restrict promotion of unhealthy foods in designated areas (e.g., close to schools) and use zoning laws to reduce density of fast food establishments in neighborhoods with high rates of obesity and diabetes.

To reverse the epidemics of obesity and diabetes will require considering these and other policies to reduce the promotion of unhealthy food. Convincing elected officials to be willing to challenge the food industry will require mobilizing health officials, parents, food advocacy groups and others to insist that the people of New York State want government to take seriously its responsibility to protect the health of the public.

Nicholas Freudenberg, DrPH is Distinguished Professor of Public Health at Hunter College, City University of New York and Past President of the Public Health Association of New York City. Email: nfreuden@hunter.cuny.edu

¹ Olshansky SJ, Passaro DJ, Hershow RC, et al. A Potential Decline in Life Expectancy in the United States in the 21st Century. *N Engl J Med* 2005;352(11):1138-45

² Van Wye G, Kerker BD, Matte T, Chamany S, Eisenhower D, Frieden TR, et al. Obesity and diabetes in New York City, 2002 and 2004. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2008; 5(2). http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2008/apr/07_0053.htm. Accessed 29 March 2008.

³ Gantz W, Schwartz N, Angelini JR, Rideout V. Food for Thought Television Food Advertising to Children in the United States, Kaiser Family Foundation, 2007. Available at: <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/7618.pdf>

Keith Ayoob

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April 3, 2008
New York, NY

Good Morning,

I'm Dr. Keith Ayoob, and I'm an Associate Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and a pediatric nutritionist for 24 years at the RFK CERC at Einstein. I am not being compensated in any way for presenting here.

We're here to find ways to strengthen the connection between local foods and consumers and how to improve access to safe and nutritious food. Essentially, we're talking about how to get New York foods into New Yorkers in the best way possible, to benefit everyone from the farmer to the consumer.

As a pediatric nutritionist I love this idea. Fewer than 1 in 10 children get enough fruits and vegetables and too often the fruits and vegetables come from too far away. I also know that in the zeal to have kids eat more nutritiously, many people get so vigilant and restrictive that the whole process backfires. In the quest for a perfect diet they sacrifice what could be a better diet.

A clear example, and what this session is about, is a problem that occurred in NYC schools last year. There was an effort to remove flavored low-fat milk from NYC schools. The idea of some was that kids should get as little sugar as possible, even in a nutritious drink like milk. However, a lot of kids like the low fat flavored milk, and the nutrients in low-fat milk are absolutely essential to their growth and development.

Right now, nearly 7 in 10 kids already lack adequate calcium in their diets. The end result of removing low-fat flavored milk from NYC schools was that there was a further 10% decline in milk consumption. Over the whole of NYC schools, that would mean 100,000 kids on average, weren't drinking milk – New York milk – during the school day. Sure, they were getting a little less sugar during school hours, but did they get less sugar overall? Not likely. Why? Because if they don't drink milk at lunch, they end the school day with less protein and less fluid in their bodies. After school, they're hungry and thirsty, and they'll likely go to the corner store and buy a large, 24-oz bottle of some soda or punch that will have more added sugar in one bottle than the kids would get from a week's worth of nutritious flavored low-fat milk during school.

This restrictive philosophy in the schools is ridiculous and leading nutrition and medical organizations agree. I am first to admit that too much sugar isn't good, but the 2005 US Dietary Guidelines for Americans allow for some added fat and sugar with the specific

recommendation that such calories be used to drive the consumption of nutrient-rich foods like milk. They even cite flavored milk as an example:

In some cases, small amounts of sugars added to nutrient-dense foods, such as breakfast cereals and reduced-fat milk products, may increase a person's intake of such foods by enhancing the palatability of these products, thus improving nutrient intake without contributing excessive calories. (2005 US Dietary Guidelines for Americans, pp. 36)

The science bears this out. A large study of over 7000 children published April 1 in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association found that children who drank flavored milk actually tended to have LOWER body mass indices, a measure of weight-for-height, than children who were not milk drinkers. The American Academy of Pediatrics has a position against overly restrictive eating patterns because they are not practical or appropriate for children.

Milk is a local food. Dairy farms are the cornerstone of NY state agriculture. And if 100,000 children are drinking less milk daily, no one is benefiting here. In addition, what children are substituting in place of milk is most certainly not as nutritious, not local, and only the most liberal definition would consider it a food.

As you make policy, I urge you to look at the larger picture and look at the science. Kids need more fruits, vegetables and low-fat milk, and I want them to drink New York milk, just like I want them to have NY fruits and vegetables. Letting them have milk their way (still in keeping with national school lunch guidelines) benefits them and benefits NY farmers. It's a win-win, and it doesn't get better than that.

Thank you for your time,

Keith-Thomas Ayoob, EdD, RD, CD/N
Pediatric Nutritionist

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

POLICY STATEMENT

Organizational Principles to Guide and Define the Child Health Care System and/or Improve the Health of All Children

Committee on Nutrition

Prevention of Pediatric Overweight and Obesity

ABSTRACT. The dramatic increase in the prevalence of childhood overweight and its resultant comorbidities are associated with significant health and financial burdens, warranting strong and comprehensive prevention efforts. This statement proposes strategies for early identification of excessive weight gain by using body mass index, for dietary and physical activity interventions during health supervision encounters, and for advocacy and research.

ABBREVIATION. BMI, body mass index.

INTRODUCTION

Prevention is one of the hallmarks of pediatric practice and includes such diverse activities as newborn screenings, immunizations, and promotion of car safety seats and bicycle helmets. Documented trends in increasing prevalence of overweight and inactivity mean that pediatricians must focus preventive efforts on childhood obesity, with its associated comorbid conditions in childhood and likelihood of persistence into adulthood. These trends pose an unprecedented burden in terms of children's health as well as present and future health care costs. A number of statements have been published that address the scope of the problem and treatment strategies.¹⁻⁶

The intent of this statement is to propose strategies to foster prevention and early identification of overweight and obesity in children. Evidence to support the recommendations for prevention is presented when available, but unfortunately, too few studies on prevention have been performed. The enormity of the epidemic, however, necessitates this call to action for pediatricians using the best information available.

DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

Body mass index (BMI) is the ratio of weight in kilograms to the square of height in meters. BMI is widely used to define overweight and obesity, because it correlates well with more accurate measures of body fatness and is derived from commonly available data—weight and height.⁷ It has also been correlated with obesity-related comorbid conditions in

adults and children. Clinical judgment must be used in applying these criteria to a patient, because obesity refers to excess adiposity rather than excess weight, and BMI is a surrogate for adiposity. The pediatric growth charts for the US population now include BMI for age and gender, are readily available online (<http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts>), and allow longitudinal tracking of BMI.⁸

BMI between 85th and 95th percentile for age and sex is considered at risk of overweight, and BMI at or above the 95th percentile is considered overweight or obese.^{9,10} The prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity is increasing at an alarming rate in the United States as well as in other developed and developing countries. Prevalence among children and adolescents has doubled in the past 2 decades in the United States. Currently, 15.3% of 6- to 11-year-olds and 15.5% of 12- to 19-year-olds are at or above the 95th percentile for BMI on standard growth charts based on reference data from the 1970s, with even higher rates among subpopulations of minority and economically disadvantaged children.^{10,11} Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also indicate that children younger than 5 years across all ethnic groups have had significant increases in the prevalence of overweight and obesity.^{12,13} American children and adolescents today are less physically active as a group than were previous generations, and less active children are more likely to be overweight and to have higher blood pressure, insulin and cholesterol concentrations and more abnormal lipid profiles.^{14,15}

Obesity is associated with significant health problems in the pediatric age group and is an important early risk factor for much of adult morbidity and mortality.^{15,16} Medical problems are common in obese children and adolescents and can affect cardiovascular health (hypercholesterolemia and dyslipidemia, hypertension),^{14,17-19} the endocrine system (hyperinsulinism, insulin resistance, impaired glucose tolerance, type 2 diabetes mellitus, menstrual irregularity),²⁰⁻²² and mental health (depression, low self-esteem).^{23,24} Because of the increasing incidence of type 2 diabetes mellitus among obese adolescents and because diabetes-related morbidities may worsen if diagnosis is delayed, the clinician should be alert to the possibility of type 2 diabetes mellitus in all obese adolescents, especially those with a fam-

carbonated beverage intake has been linked to obesity⁸⁷; therefore, the sale of such beverages should not be promoted at school. Pediatricians are encouraged to work with school administrators and others in the community on ways to decrease the availability of foods and beverages with little nutritional value and to decrease the dependence on vending machines, snack bars, and school stores for school revenue. Regarding physical activity, advocacy is sorely needed for physical education programs that emphasize and model learning of daily activities for personal fitness (as opposed to physical education limited to a few team sports).

New initiatives for pilot projects to test prevention strategies have been funded by the National Institutes of Health and other organizations, but a long-term commitment of substantial funds from many sources and to many disciplines will be needed to attack this serious, widespread, and potentially intractable problem. Support for development and testing of primary prevention strategies for the primary care setting will be critical. Likewise, investment of substantial resources will be required for development of effective treatment approaches for normalizing or improving body weight and fitness and for determining long-term effects of weight loss on comorbidities of childhood obesity. Collaboration and coalitions with nutrition, behavioral health, physical therapy, and exercise physiology professionals will be needed. Working with communities and schools to develop needed counseling services, physical activity opportunities, and strategies to reinforce the gains made in clinical management is also important.

Pediatric referral centers will need to develop specialized programs for treatment of complex and difficult cases, and for research into etiology and new methods of prevention and treatment. Efforts are needed to ensure adequate health care coverage for preventive and treatment services. Even when serious comorbidities are documented, insurance reimbursement is limited.⁸⁸ Lack of reimbursement is a disincentive for physicians to develop prevention and treatment programs and presents a significant barrier to families seeking professional care.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

1. Prevalence of overweight and its significant comorbidities in pediatric populations has rapidly increased and reached epidemic proportions.
2. Prevention of overweight is critical, because long-term outcome data for successful treatment approaches are limited.
3. Genetic, environmental, or combinations of risk factors predisposing children to obesity can and should be identified.
4. Early recognition of excessive weight gain relative to linear growth should become routine in pediatric ambulatory care settings. BMI (kg/m^2 [see <http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts>]) should be calculated and plotted periodically.
5. Families should be educated and empowered through anticipatory guidance to recognize the impact they have on their children's development

of lifelong habits of physical activity and nutritious eating.

6. Dietary practices should be fostered that encourage moderation rather than overconsumption, emphasizing healthful choices rather than restrictive eating patterns.
7. Regular physical activity should be consciously promoted, prioritized, and protected within families, schools, and communities.
8. Optimal approaches to prevention need to combine dietary and physical activity interventions.
9. Advocacy is needed in the areas of physical activity and food policy for children; research into pathophysiology, risk factors, and early recognition and management of overweight and obesity; and improved insurance coverage and third-party reimbursement for obesity care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Health supervision
 - a. Identify and track patients at risk by virtue of family history, birth weight, or socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, or environmental factors.
 - b. Calculate and plot BMI once a year in all children and adolescents.
 - c. Use change in BMI to identify rate of excessive weight gain relative to linear growth.
 - d. Encourage, support, and protect breastfeeding.
 - e. Encourage parents and caregivers to promote healthy eating patterns by offering nutritious snacks, such as vegetables and fruits, low-fat dairy foods, and whole grains; encouraging children's autonomy in self-regulation of food intake and setting appropriate limits on choices; and modeling healthy food choices.
 - f. Routinely promote physical activity, including unstructured play at home, in school, in child care settings, and throughout the community.
 - g. Recommend limitation of television and video time to a maximum of 2 hours per day.
 - h. Recognize and monitor changes in obesity-associated risk factors for adult chronic disease, such as hypertension, dyslipidemia, hyperinsulinemia, impaired glucose tolerance, and symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea syndrome.
2. Advocacy
 - a. Help parents, teachers, coaches, and others who influence youth to discuss health habits, not body habitus, as part of their efforts to control overweight and obesity.
 - b. Enlist policy makers from local, state, and national organizations and schools to support a healthful lifestyle for all children, including proper diet and adequate opportunity for regular physical activity.
 - c. Encourage organizations that are responsible for health care and health care financing to provide coverage for effective obesity prevention and treatment strategies.
 - d. Encourage public and private sources to direct funding toward research into effective strategies to prevent overweight and obesity and to maximize limited family and community re-