

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON FOOD POLICY

December 1, 2007

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Council Chairperson

Patrick Hooker, Commissioner of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

Council Members

Mindy Bockstein, Chairperson of the New York State Consumer Protection Board

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Diane Eggert, Executive Director of the Farmers Market Federation of New York

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Daniel Gundersen, Upstate Chairperson of Empire State Development Corporation

David Hansell, Commissioner of the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

Dr. Susan Henry, Dean of the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University

Richard Mills, Commissioner of the State Education Department

Cathryn Mizbani, Senior Extension Administrator; WIC Program Coordinator of the Cornell University Cooperative Extension of Schenectady County

Liz Neumark, Chief Executive Officer of Great Performances; Sylvia Center

William Rapfogel, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

Irwin Simon, Founder, Chairperson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Hain Celestial Group, Inc

Julie Suarez, Director of Public Policy for the New York Farm Bureau

Eleanor Wilson, MS, RN, CDN, Corporate Dietitian for Price Chopper Supermarkets, Inc

Catharine Young, New York State Senator, 57th District; Chairperson of the Senate Agriculture Committee

Executive Summary

The New York State Council on Food Policy was created in May of 2007 by Governor Eliot Spitzer's Executive Order No. 13, in which it is recognized that a need exists to support the State's agricultural industry as well as to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to safe, affordable, nutritious food. The twenty-one members of the Council on Food Policy were appointed in September of 2007 after a rigorous and thoughtful selection process. The Council members include seven state agency heads and 14 members from the public and non-profit sectors. Together they represent nearly all aspects of the food system. At the time of appointment, Governor Spitzer charged the members of the Council with the tasks of helping the State coordinate its food-related policies and promote healthier communities.

In October of 2007, the Council on Food Policy held its first meeting in Albany, NY. This meeting was open to the public and well attended. The meeting consisted of short overviews of: State demographics, some of the existing food security and nutrition related programs operating in the State, and the food industry in the State. A discussion period followed in which Council members expressed their food policy priorities and offered suggestions for key issue areas to focus upon in the coming year. Many members of the public seized the opportunity to contribute their food policy related comments and concerns to the Council members.

As a result of information shared at the Council meeting, individual expertise, and consideration of public comments, Council members identified four (4) key food policy issue areas for more in-depth examination in the coming year.

Maximization of collaboration potential along agency, public and private sector lines within these key issue areas contributed to the discourse. Health concerns, such as the need to combat diet-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease strongly influence all priorities presented.

Key Issue Areas identified by the Council on Food Policy are as follows:

- 1) Maximize participation in food and nutrition assistance programs;
- 2) Strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers;
- 3) Support efficient and profitable agricultural food production and food retail infrastructure; and
- 4) Increase consumer awareness and knowledge about healthy eating and improve access to safe and nutritious foods

Researching and evaluating the efficacy of the Key Issue Areas and associated priorities to meet the objectives of Executive Order No. 13 will be the basis for Council activities in the coming year. The Council proposes to develop and recommend a specific food policy for the State that will ensure the availability of an adequate supply of affordable, fresh and nutritious food to its residents, and expand agricultural production. Additionally, the Council proposes to develop and recommend a strategic plan for implementation of the State food policy, including benchmarks and criteria for measuring progress. Further, the Council intends on offering comments on State regulations, legislation and budget proposals in the area of food policy.

Being highly sensitive to the value of stakeholder input to gain accurate perspective on the issues, the Council members are preparing to hold numerous public forums around the State. The next scheduled meetings for the Council are in May and October of 2008 or as business requires.

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I. Introduction

Governor Eliot Spitzer created the New York State Council on Food Policy by Executive Order No. 13 that was delivered on May 18, 2007 (Appendix A). In this document, Governor Spitzer specifies that:

5. The Council shall: (a) develop and recommend a food policy for the State which recognizes that it is in the best interests of the State to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of affordable, fresh, nutritious food to its residents; (b) develop and recommend State policies to expand agricultural production, including locally-grown and organically-grown food; (c) develop and recommend a strategic plan for implementation of the State food policy, including benchmarks and criteria for measuring progress in achieving State food policy objectives; and (d) offer comments on State regulations, legislation and budget proposals in the area of food policy, to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive inter-agency approach to food policy issues.

The ensuing report is in response to directives of Executive Order No. 13 that mandating, among other things, that:

6. The Council shall issue a written report on the first day of December each year on: (a) the activities of the Council during the preceding year; (b) recommended food policies for the State; (c) recommended changes to the strategic plan; (d) an account of the progress made in achieving the goals of the Council; and (e) actions which are necessary to implement the recommendations of the Council and effectuate the purposes of this Order.

II. History: 1984 New York State Council on Food and Nutrition Policy

Based on the *New York State Five Year Food and Nutrition Plan 1988-1992 (1987)*

In 1984 evidence indicated that a substantial number of New Yorkers were "neither adequately fed nor nourished... despite state and federal initiatives to

improve peoples' access to an adequate diet and promote public understanding of ... good nutrition". At that time Governor Mario Cuomo established the New York State Council on Food and Nutrition Policy "to address and access this problem, and to propose ways to correct it" in the form of a Five-Year Plan. Seven heads of state agencies involved in food and nutrition programs were appointed by the Governor with the Commissioner of Health serving as Chairperson. A twenty-two member advisory committee to the Council included representatives from agricultural, nutrition, food production and consumer interests.

The four purposes for the plan were to:

- 1) Promote good health and prevent food and diet-related diseases;
- 2) Alleviate and ultimately prevent hunger through increased access to food and resources;
- 3) Support food production in NYS while preserving environmental resources and jobs; and
- 4) Promote the development and economic viability of the state's food processing, marketing, and distribution industries.

In 1987, after reviewing available data, evaluating existing state programs and soliciting comments from interested parties at public meetings, the Council on Food and Nutrition Policy produced the *New York State Five Year Food and Nutrition Plan 1988-1992*. The basic goal of the recommended Food and Nutrition Policy as outlined in the *Plan* was "not only to provide adequate nutrition in an accessible and affordable manner, but to strive to achieve efficient growth in agricultural production, job generation, food security and expanded markets for goods".

As stated in the document, the 1984 Council on Food and Nutrition Policy concluded that:

- Nutrition programs are failing, often to a very significant degree, to reach or meet all the needs of their target population;

- New York State should press federal officials for more money and more state control of these initiatives; and
- Further erosion of New York's agricultural industry would not be in the state's interest if it is to achieve its goal of nutritional adequacy for all its citizens.

To correct the inadequacies found; to promote new initiatives; and to improve effectiveness of programs, twenty recommendations were proposed for food and nutrition policy in New York State. A comprehensive set of goals, objectives and recommended actions followed. A recap of the "Recommendations" from the *New York State Five Year Food and Nutrition Plan 1988-1992* with current (2007) status reports from the respective state agencies that the original recommendation was directed to is located in Appendix B.

Data tables from the *New York State Five Year Food and Nutrition Plan 1988-1992* have been updated with recent data results to parallel the 1987 data. When available, new programs and /or relevant data have been included that illustrates the state's response to meet a specific demand in the food and nutrition arena (Appendix C).

III. Activities of the New York State Council on Food Policy in 2007

A. Executive Order No. 13 Issued On May 20, 2007, Governor Eliot Spitzer issued Executive Order No. 13 announcing the creation of the Council on Food Policy (Appendix A). At that time, Governor Spitzer said:

"Ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to safe, fresh and nutritious food is a top priority that the Council on Food Policy will be addressing head-on" ... and that ... "The Council will bring the public, producers and government together to explore ways in which we can improve our existing food production and delivery systems, expand capacity, and in particular, address the critical needs of children and low-income New Yorkers. Additionally, by expanding the sale of locally grown products, we can help struggling farmers, and expand the local agriculture and state economy."

In Executive Order No. 13, Governor Spitzer recognizes that hunger in New York is a serious problem and further, that access to affordable, fresh, nutritious food, including fresh fruit and vegetables, especially for children, is a serious problem facing many families. Food insecurity is defined by USDA as a condition that arises from lack of money and other resources to acquire food. Research supports the link between food insecurity and health, nutrition and children's development. It is further noted that one in five low-income households buy no fruits or vegetables (fresh or processed) on a weekly basis (USDA 2005, ERR-29. USDA Agriculture Info Bulletin 792-5 2004). According to The Food Bank Association of New York State, approximately 2.1 million New Yorkers currently utilize Emergency Feeding Programs (EFP) to meet their food security need.

B. Council Members Appointed After a thorough consideration of the great number of qualified candidates drawn from state, local, private and non-profit entities interested in serving on the Council on Food Policy, Governor Spitzer appointed the members of the Council on September 19, 2007 ([Governor's Press Release/0919072](#)). At that time Governor Spitzer said: "The members of this Council will bring new and diverse expertise to this important policy area." The Council has been designed so that advocates and representatives from all areas of food system are embedded in the structure of the Council proper. This structure is significant in that it affords uninterrupted opportunities for not just comprehensive inter-agency collaborative efforts but system wide collaboration efforts.

Council members include State agency heads from the Department of Agriculture and Markets; Department of Health; Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance; Department of Economic Development; Office for the Aging; State Education Department; and the Consumer Production Board. The Council will also benefit from the expertise and insight contributed by the Dean of the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University; an anti-

hunger advocate; two food assistance organization representatives; a nutritionist; a school food administrator; a farm organization; and three representatives from the food industry (producers, distributors, processors, retailers) one of which is involved in organic production; and members with food policy related experience recommended by the Majority and Minority Leaders from both houses of the Legislature.

C. Agriculture and Markets to Chair The Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets serves as the Chairperson of the New York State Council on Food Policy. Governor Spitzer recognizes that agriculture is a critically important industry to the State of New York and that there are significant environmental, health and economic benefits to the State and its residents from expanding agricultural production, including locally-grown and organically-grown food ([Governor's Press Release/0919072](#)).

The mission of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets is to foster a competitive food and agriculture industry that benefits producers and consumers alike. Agriculture makes up one-quarter of the State's land area and contributes immensely to the quality of life in New York State by generating economic activity and producing wholesome products to nourish our families. The Department works diligently to promote a viable agricultural industry, foster agricultural environmental stewardship, and safeguard our food supply (<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/TheDepartment.html>).

D. First Meeting of the Council The first meeting of the New York State Council on Food Policy was held on Monday, October 15, 2007 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in Room 250 of the New York State Capitol Building. This meeting was open to the public.

After introductions and reviewing the objectives of the Governor's Executive Order No. 13, the Council members heard short presentations about New York

State demographics and the variety of federal and state food and nutrition programs currently in place. Presentations were delivered from representatives from the NYS Education Department, Department of Health, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Office for the Aging, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Food Bank of NYS and Smart Growth.

Approximately twenty-five members of the public were in attendance. During an open-microphone session members of the public shared their comments and concerns with the Council members. The Council also received, and continues to receive public comments in writing.

In the afternoon, Council members shared what they believed to be some of the key issue areas to explore more in depth over the coming year. From these comments and subsequent statements from the Council members, a document was produced that outlined the “Key Issue Areas” that the Council members plan to explore in the next year. Health concerns, such as the need to combat diet-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease strongly influence all priorities and actions proposed. Ultimately, the Council members agreed to seek avenues where collaboration can be maximized to meet the expressed needs of our communities and our State.

E. Key Issue Areas Identified The Council on Food Policy is charged with developing a food policy for the State to ensure an adequate supply of affordable, fresh, nutritious food to its residents and to expand agricultural production, including locally-grown and organically-grown food. While New York farmers produce an abundance of milk and dairy products, vegetables, fruits, meat and poultry products; and New York State offers a vast array of food assistance programs, some of our most vulnerable residents have little or no access to fresh, affordable, nutritious food. At the same time, some food assistance programs are not meeting their full potential and local farmers are having difficulty marketing their goods.

The recurring Key Issue Areas emerging from the October 15, 2007 Council meeting and follow-up statements from the Council members fall under four broad categories. These categories are as follows:

- 1) Maximize participation in food and nutrition assistance programs;
- 2) Strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers;
- 3) Support efficient and profitable agricultural food production and food retail infrastructure; and
- 4) Increase consumer awareness healthy eating and improve access to safe and nutritious food.

Council members identified a number of specific priorities to be explored within each Key Issue Area as described below.

1) Maximize participation in food and nutrition assistance programs

- a) Increase education about assistance programs and benefits using traditional and non-traditional outreach strategies such as in job placement offices, places of worship, schools, drug stores, and farmer's markets;
- b) Encourage increased collaboration among State agencies administering the programs by co-enrolling participants for benefits and/or making enrollment more user friendly;
- c) Create incentives to purchase nutritious food with food stamps;
- d) Explore options for ensuring that food assistance programs have adequate quality and stable quantities of resources needed to meet demands;
- e) Increase number of markets / outlets that are capable of receiving food stamps; and
- f) Perform an assessment of methods to ease program participation in food and nutrition assistance programs and identify strategies to address the challenges.

2) Strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers

- a) Support initiatives in schools for healthy food choices: look to change consumption behavior of youth as well as introduce youth to food system dynamics (explore potential to incorporate farm and/or food related topics and experiences in curriculum);
- b) Create avenues for local farmers to produce for state institutions and other food service programs (schools, universities, nursing homes);
- c) Address volume requirements on buying- promote aggregate selling / buying of produce;
- d) Research the feasibility of expanding local / community food security initiatives to the state level (such as examples taken from “Regional Community Food Projects”, farmer’s market incentives, Veggie Vans, CSAs and wholesale markets); and
- e) Consider culture, age and geographic region of all consumers to best serve their needs.

3) Support efficient and profitable agricultural food production and food retail infrastructure

- a) Encourage local products procurement preference when possible;
- b) Foster partnerships with grocers to drive local preference;
- c) Improve marketing, promotion of nutritious products- research models of market development and behavioral economics;
- d) Perform an assessment of obstacles and methods for easing business development in NY;
- e) Address obstacles of marketing retail food products in target areas (urban and rural) such as transportation / delivery issues and lack of access to grocery stores / supermarkets
- f) Explore possibilities to increase regional food processing infrastructure; and
- g) Seek opportunities to maximize utilization of incubator programs and cooperatives.

4) Increase consumer awareness and knowledge about healthy eating; and improve access to safe and nutritious foods

- a) Increase awareness of obesity and diet related diseases- focus on professionally recommended, data-driven prevention initiatives;
- b) Increase consumer awareness of food ingredients, nutritional value, processing and allergens through labeling and other forms of consumer outreach;
- c) Provide farmer / producer education opportunities about "best practices"; and
- d) Continue to educate consumers of where their food comes from and nutritional value thereof.

IV. Activities Proposed for the New York State Council on Food Policy in 2008

Plan for Year 2008 The Council members have acknowledged the importance of implementing evidence-based best practices that will obtain measurable results. The Council members are also highly sensitive to the value of stakeholder input to gain accurate statewide perspectives on the issues. Therefore, in order to adequately assess the "Key Issue Areas" outlined, the Council members identified some supporting steps that need to be taken. Supporting steps include:

- 1) Researching successful food security initiatives, local and national, that may be applicable to New York State's agenda;
- 2) Reviewing and reconsidering the "Recommendations" from the New York State Council on Food and Nutrition Policy's *Five Year Food and Nutrition Plan 1988-1992*;
- 3) Organizing / facilitating a communication avenue for the members (such as videoconferences and a website); and

- 4) Planning a listening tour of up to six sites that embody a food-related policy area. This listening tour should begin early next year.

The next full meetings of the Council on Food Policy are to be scheduled for the Spring and Fall of 2008. During those times, the Council members will develop and solidify specific action items, benchmarks and / or recommendations for a State food policy. Throughout the year the Council members will actively explore the potential of pursuing specific priorities of the Key Issue Areas.