New York State Council on Food Policy

Governor David A. Paterson | Commissioner Patrick Hooker, Chairman

F A L L M E E T I N G M I N U T E S

Wednesday, October 20, 2010 * 9:30 am – 12:00 pm @ State Capitol Building, Albany

Commissioner Patrick Hooker opened the fall meeting of the New York State Council on Food Policy by acknowledging the tremendous progress that the Council has made since being established in 2007. This progress is due, in most part, to the collaborative spirit of the stakeholders and the agencies involved in food policy, he said. After citing the Japanese proverb, "*Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare. Action with vision can change the world,"* the Commissioner continued with a discussion about the history and the vision of food policy in New York State and the impending administration change.

INTRODUCTION

- In 1984 Governor Mario Cuomo formed the "Council on Food and Nutrition Policy" composed of seven agency heads, and supported by a 20 plus member advisory committee. Chaired by the Commissioner of the Department of Health, the 1984 Council created a 'Five Year Plan' (for the years 1988 – 1992) to improve the nutritional status of New Yorkers based on the growing evidence that a substantial number of New Yorkers are neither adequately fed nor nourished.

- Among other things, the recommendations in the 'Five Year Plan' also strived to support adequate food production, job creation, and preserve our agricultural land base. And perhaps most importantly, it provided a vision for a healthier, more productive, more prosperous, and hunger-free society. However, under the Pataki administration the Council was dissolved.

- Fortunately the vision for a healthier, more productive, more prosperous, and hunger-free society was revived in 2007 when Governor Spitzer formed the NYS Council on Food Policy (NYS CFP) by Executive Order No. 13, and it was re-affirmed in 2008 by Governor Paterson. Currently the Department of Agriculture & Markets has the privilege and the responsibility to Chair and the 'advisory groups' are bona fide members on the Council.

- One of the first tasks the NYS CFP undertook was to review the data and recommendations in the 'Five Year Plan'. We saw a number of improvements, and some would be tempted to say "we solved that," but this work is never done.

- Upon further data and policy analysis and the state listening tour, we found that many of the same health, hunger, and production issues have persisted and in some cases they have worsened. While some obstacles were overcome, other new challenges have presented themselves.

- This Council on Food Policy, supported by our administration, informed by our stakeholders, and advanced by the deliberate collaboration efforts of the members, has been able to take some significant actions to address the issues of hunger and access to safe, nutritious foods, as well as to enhance local food production and the food retail industry. We learned from our history, we gained a clearer understanding of our present challenges, and we have proposed some very sound, practical, and compelling food policy recommendations for New York.

- Today we will re-examine the past priorities and recommendations and discuss emerging food policy issues. We have to prepare a report for Governor Paterson and leave a sound document for a seamless transition.

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KEY ISSUE AREAS and RECOMMENDATIONS REVIEW

A round-table discussion followed in which Council members examined the wording and evaluated the intention of the established Key Issue Areas (KIA 1-4) to determine if they still appropriately address current food policy concerns. Since establishment, the NYS CFP has proposed fifty-one state food policy recommendations. Council members agreed that the preceding recommendations and action items remain constructive.

Numerous examples of progress made toward achieving goals and successful collaboration efforts were outlined by the Council members (not included in minutes; to be detailed in report). Some points of refinement and of redirection were proposed and discussed. Notable comments for refinement include, but are not limited to:

KIA 1. Maximize participation in food and nutrition assistance programs

- Wording does not accurately reflect the fact that some assistance programs have finite budgets and are already at or beyond feasible maximum participation, yet demand is increasing. Programs such as Meals on Wheels and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) exhaust assistance funding before meeting population need.
- Programs to be separated by those that strive to 'maximize participation' and those that are already maximized but continue to have unmet need.
- Many new tools have been developed and process has been modernized for enrollment in SNAP/food stamps program. In 2009, New York State SNAP/food stamp participation rate was above 70 percent. This is above the national average of 62.9 percent. However, the last 30 percent of eligible are the most difficult to reach. Focus needs to continue on outreach and education.

❖ Propose rewording KIA 1. as such: Maximize participation in, **and support for,** food and nutrition assistance programs.

KIA 2. Strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers

- An increased focus on the interrelationship between local foods and the health of consumers was stressed.
- Good Agriculture Practices, or GAP, certification of farmers was discussed as one way to help strengthen the connection between producers and food retailers. Producer GAP certification or similar food safety documentation can bolster confidence of retail produce purchasers for sale to consumers. However, GAP certification is not always financially feasible for small and medium sized producers.
- Safe food is defined as unadulterated food as defined in Ag Law Article 17 § 200; and food safety refers to the prevention of illness, disability, and death due to foodborne diseases.
- New York should seek ways to increase education and training for our farm community to assist in marketing their products as local, healthy, and safe.
- Have increased concentration on new models of food delivery and community and individual behavior modifications.

❖ Do not reword KIA 2. at this time. Clarify in text that 'local' correlates to nutritious and safe foods.

KIA 3. Support efficient and profitable agricultural food production and food retail infrastructure

- Continue to strongly emphasize the importance of agriculture to the New York State economy and job creation.
- Examine economic potential at each level of the food system such as: redevelopment of Hunts Point Wholesale Market, promoting state institutional purchasing, and assisting small scale processors.
- Persist in recommending ways to advance a positive business climate in New York, such as reviewing licensing fees and other barriers to economic development.
- Food safety is non-negotiable. Maintain core staff and programming for food safety and inspection at New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets and Department of Health personnel.

❖ Propose rewording KIA 3. as such: Support **safe**, efficient and profitable food production and food retail infrastructure **for existing and new retail outlets**.

KIA 4. Increase consumer awareness and knowledge about healthy eating; improve consumer access to safe and nutritious food

- Issue overlaps but is distinct from other KIAs. Need to combine two concepts and broaden scope (target audience).
- Important to recognize and use culture change and changing food environment as part of overall food policy strategy.
- Grants and student interns have been successful part of spreading food system awareness under this KIA.

❖ Propose rewording KIA 4. as such: **Foster a culture of healthy and local eating for all New York State residents.**

EMERGING ISSUES, PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

Commissioner Hooker and the Council members exchanged information about current or emerging issues, policies and programs that affect the farm and food system in New York State. Below are just some of the highlights from the exchange. More details will be available in the NYS CFP Report to the Governor (anticipated release: December 2010).

- ✓ New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets is expecting to extend the Farmers Market Nutrition Program to be available for roadside farm stands. Currently, the program coupons are only acceptable by authorized farmers vending at farmers' markets.
- ✓ The Governor's Healthy Food/Healthy Community Fund, which is offering $30 million in grants and loans for the development or refurbishment for food stores in underserved, low or moderate income communities, is now accepting applications.
- ✓ New York State food bank spending is increasingly targeting local, fresh products and creating strong relationships with the agriculture community.
- ✓ Food retail stores are increasingly becoming a public relations hub for healthy, local food and agriculture awareness across income brackets and cultural communities.
- ✓ Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs (BEN) has just received a $1 million grant from the USDA to research and help disseminate information on how school cafeterias can creatively nudge students to eat healthier.
- ✓ Senior 'Meals on Wheels' programs have increased purchasing from roadside farm stands.
- ✓ Many school meal programs are creating healthier school environments and participating in the USDA "Healthier US Schools Challenge" that promotes increasing whole grains and vegetables in school meals.
- ✓ National Dietary Guidelines will be released later this year. The new guidelines will influence product development.
- ✓ The federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act is proposing to increase funding for school meals but cut funding for SNAP benefits. This is inconsistent and unsatisfactory as hunger and food insecurity affect the entire family environment.
- ✓ We are still collaborating with the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service to provide clarification on geographic preference language for procurement of local food products for child nutrition programs.
- ✓ We are witnessing a growing number of new farmers and non-traditional niche farmers interested in growing specialty crops.
- ✓ We must stress the critical importance of ensuring that the Farm Bill 2012 prominently includes farmers and farming.
- ✓ We are reminded that food is not recession proof. There is a downward price pressure on food and right now the primary concern for farmers is the cost of doing business in New York State.

"We are turning more calories into more healthy calories!"

"Keep the farmers in the Farm Bill!"

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Approximately twenty members of the public attended the meeting. Five members of the audience presented comments at the meeting; four others submitted comments for the Council's consideration. Topics covered include: Benefits of Farm to School, urban agriculture and garden-based learning initiatives; potential impact of hydraulic fracturing on local agricultural products, the environment and personal health; standard of honey legislation; and a Farm Bill briefing. Please see "Public Comments 10/20/20" on http://www.nyscfp.org/ for full text.

The meeting was adjourned at 12 PM.

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