

New York State Council on Food Policy

Commissioner Patrick Hooker, Chairman

S U M M E R M E E T I N G M I N U T E S

Monday, June 28th 10:00 am – 1:00 pm @Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building, Harlem

Commissioner Patrick Hooker welcomed the audience and guest speakers. Commissioner Hooker then recapped the New York State Council on Food Policy's (NYS CFP) mission and key issue areas.

The mission of the NYS CFP is to recommend policies to the Governor that preserve and enhance agricultural food production in New York; and ensure that all New Yorkers have adequate access to safe, affordable, fresh and nutritious foods, especially by children, low-income individuals, the senior population, and other at risk or under-represented citizens.

NYS CFP key issue areas are: 1) Maximizing participation in food and nutrition assistance programs; 2) Strengthening the connection between local food products and consumers; 3) Supporting efficient and profitable agricultural food production and retail food infrastructure; and 4) Increasing consumer awareness and knowledge about healthy eating; and improving consumer access to safe and nutritious food.

The Commissioner took a few minutes to speak of the increased collaboration that has been realized between the state, private industry, and non-profit organizations through the efforts of the Council and its members. Notably, under Governor Paterson's direction, inter-agency collaboration has been highly productive and rewarding.

Commissioner Hooker then provided a few highlights of the Council's recent actions and effectiveness including:

- Allowing WIC Fruit & Vegetable Checks to be used at Farmers' Markets

From this multi-agency, multi-stakeholder effort initiated by the Council in June of 2009, New York State now has approximately 120 farmers enrolled in the program; vending at nearly 200 markets across the state. This early success has created a 5-10% increase in the number of points of access for purchasing healthier food options for WIC participants.



- Providing comments on significant Federal legislation and regulations

NYS CFP issued 'Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act Priorities' in July 2009 to Governor Paterson and New York delegates. NYS CFP delivered recommendations to USDA on the 'Geographic Preference Option for Procurement of Unprocessed Agricultural Products in Child Nutrition Programs' in June, 2010. NYS CFP believes that the recommendations, if enacted will contribute to a healthier and more prosperous future for our children, our farmers, our environment, and our communities.

- Participating in the development of Healthy Food/Healthy Community Initiative

The Council has provided guidance and support to both Governor Paterson's Healthy Food/Healthy Communities Initiative and to Senator Gillibrand's companion proposal. The Governor's Initiative – that will invest a minimum of \$20 million in the form of grants and loans for the development of healthy, neighborhood food stores throughout the state - is in the final stages of agreement. We hope to share more on that good news soon!

- Assistant to the Council on Food Policy

The Council on Food Policy has been awarded with a constant flow of graduate student interns from the Albany School of Public Health. We are grateful to Council member, Mary Warr Cowans (DOH/Division of Nutrition) for this partnership. Currently, Jacqueline Follain is proving to be a top-notch 'Assistant to the Council on Food Policy'.

Kathryn Tanner, Legislative Assistant to Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand spoke on behalf of the Senator. Ms. Tanner extended the Senator's praise of Commissioner Hooker's leadership as Chairman of the NYS Council on Food Policy and commended all of the Council members for their dedicated work to the mission.



Ms. Tanner said “a child that does not receive proper nutrition will not be able to achieve his or her potential.” Citing recent statistics from USDA and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Ms. Tanner illustrated the dawning of an obesity crisis in America. Further, the coexistence of obesity and malnutrition was discussed. Factors cited that contribute to this condition include the over-burdened pocketbooks and busy lives of most Americans.

Senator Gillibrand recognizes the urgent need for better agriculture and nutrition policy in the U.S. and in New York State. Currently, the Senator is fighting to pass the strongest Child Nutrition Reauthorization package in Washington – asking for \$4 billion a year to increase access to and quality of meal programs. The Senator is also taking a leading role in the First Lady’s “Let’s Move” campaign.

Ms. Tanner closed by thanking the NYS Council on Food Policy and the community members in attendance and added that the Senator’s office is dedicated to continuing to work with the NYS CFP on these important issues.

NYS CFP KEY ISSUE AREA WORK GROUP DISCUSSIONS (1-4)

1: Maximizing Participation in Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs - Jack Kennedy

Mr. Kennedy began the discussion by stating that even though we are facing resource deficiencies at the local, state, and federal level, the Food Stamp Program has a record high enrollment of 2.7 million New Yorkers now receiving benefits. This translates into \$4.5 billion in federal food assistance coming into New York. This new purchasing power creates a significant economic stimulus and we witness a great ripple effect thereafter.

It was also noted that in the interest of maximizing participation in food and nutrition assistance programs, it is becoming increasingly easier to apply for assistance. Many new access points are now available and it is hoped that by 2011 any individual will be able to apply for assistance online over the internet from anywhere in the state.

Focus Group: Council members gathered together stakeholders to discuss maximizing access to food and nutrition programs. This focus group, of at least 10 different state agencies, advocacy groups, and non-profits dealing with nutrition assistance, aging and health, held a series of phone conference calls to discuss applying for a federal Medicare grant. The grant would assist with agency data sharing with the goal of enrolling more low-income elderly into the food stamp program. While the focus group ultimately decided not to apply for this grant for a multitude of reasons, an active group of stakeholders are still considering ways in which we can use the data for outreach to the senior population and cross referencing clients. Spin-off conversations are ongoing.

Hunger-Free Communities Grants: USDA Food and Nutrition Services announced that they will invest in research, planning, and various hunger relief activities through \$5 million in funding for the new Hunger-Free Communities grants. Through the grants, FNS seeks strategies that support the creation of Hunger-Free Communities by funding activities including food distribution, community outreach, resource development and other methods to make food more accessible to those most in need. Applicants are required to partner with Food Policy Councils or their functional equivalent at the local level. For more information: http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/outreach/hfc_grants.htm

In conclusion, Mr. Kennedy stated that the state is continuing to work on obtaining federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to help offset the increased demand at food banks, but the prospect is very uncertain.

2: Strengthening the Connection between Local Food Products and Consumers - Frances O’Donnell

Ms. O’Donnell began by stating that the New York State Education Department has distributed just under \$6 million in grants to schools for new kitchen equipment through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). New equipment such as refrigerators, stoves and food preparation instruments, help food service personnel store and prepare more fresh wholesome foods for our children’s school meals. Without new or improved equipment many schools resort to purchasing convenience foods or processed foods that are often high in sodium and trans-fats.

This is the third year of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). This program is available to schools with high rates of students eligible for free and reduced priced meal. During the school year 2010/11, \$4.5 million will be distributed to 162 schools and result in 6,400 New York State children receiving an extra fresh fruit or vegetable snack every school day! Overall, this program contributes to a healthier school environment because it provides a healthy snack for all the children; it expands the variety of nutritious foods consumed by the children; and hopefully it has a positive long-term impact on snacking behavior of children. Schools are encouraged to purchase fresh, nutritious, local products whenever possible.

Ann McMahon, Coordinator for the NYS CFP, spoke about the Council's recent comments to Food and Nutrition Services, USDA regarding: Geographic Preference Option for the Procurement of Unprocessed Agricultural Products in Child Nutrition Programs (July 2010). With the passage of the Farm Bill, schools are able to specify state specific products when purchasing food using these federal guidelines. FNS was seeking comments on clarification of terminology used in the guidelines. Among other things, the NYS CFP recommended that de minimis handling be defined to include cutting, combining, freezing, bagging and packaging of agricultural food products. NYS CFP believes that if implemented as recommended, the 'geographic preference option' will increase local purchasing power, support economic opportunities for local farmers, and help schools and other institutions increase wholesome food choices on their menus for children.

3: Supporting Efficient and Profitable Agricultural Food Production and Food Retail Industries - Jerry Cosgrove

New York State is home to a significant dairy industry; however most of our dairy farmers are struggling to stay in business. Mr. Cosgrove noted that this issue must be addressed at the federal level. He expressed gratitude to and confidence in Senator Gillibrand as a member of the Agriculture Committee and the other NYS delegates who continue to fight for a fairer deal for our farmers.

Citing the extraordinary state budget circumstances, Mr. Cosgrove expressed disappointment, but understanding that the very important state Agriculture Economic Development Fund has yet to get off the starting blocks.

An update of the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market Rebuild efforts followed. This is a critical food distribution facility that attempts to meet the bulk of the produce needs for the New York City metropolitan area and beyond, yet the infrastructure is functionally obsolete. This facility is of tremendous importance to upstate farmers. Discussions seeking a long-term solution are ongoing between key state agencies, NYC Economic Development and other critical stakeholders.

Food Safety Focus Group: Members of the NYS CFP and other interested parties consulted with food safety and inspection authorities regarding the implications and implementation of the proposed federal Food Safety Modernization Act (S.510). Mr. Cosgrove explained that "a fundamental tension exists among the extremely varied food systems and distribution systems... There are vertically integrated producers that have centralized distribution and packing facilities on one end of the spectrum and direct-marketers and farm stands on the other."

The 'Food Safety' focus group raised concerns that include: the 'one-size fits all' registration fees for all producers; the 'one-size fits all' compliance/auditing requirements and procedures for all producers; and that FDA regulators are not as familiar with small to medium size farm operations and management models like those we have in New York.

Mr. Cosgrove cautioned that food safety and protecting consumers is a top priority of the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets. He then cited constructive amendments to the legislation have been introduced that address the registration fees, the compliance, and provide assistance, that include but are not limited to:

Senator John Tester (D-MT) Amendments: would 1) exempt food facilities with under \$500,000 gross sales from preventative control plan requirements and from traceback/recordkeeping and 2) exempt farms that primarily sell directly to farmers markets and local customers like restaurants.

Stabenow Amendment: S.2758: Growing Safe Food Act of 2009 would establish a national food safety training, education, extension, and technical assistance program for agricultural producers

In conclusion, Mr. Cosgrove said: "We are hopeful, provided some of the recently introduced amendments to the legislation, that the final bill will be thoughtful and flexible enough to create a safe food system without unduly hampering smaller direct marketers that are also an important part of our food system."

Liz Neumark then took the podium and provided a report on her ongoing investigation into ‘Farm to College’ best practices. Ms. Neumark began her research by reaching out to Cornell University (NY) and Bates College (MA). Cornell University food service generates approximately \$45 million in revenue and has formed an Advisory Committee to assist in sourcing more local products; Bates College sources approximately 30% of its produce locally.

Key findings include: ‘Local’ is typically defined as within state borders or a mile radius; schools are freezing a majority of the produce to increase availability throughout the school year; poultry was almost exclusively purchased locally as an economical decision; and small business development is occurring to complement the desire to purchase local products (such as bakeries).

Issues to follow include: Sustainability concerns accompanying local purchasing on campuses include: waste diversion, composting, recycling and food rescue; and to be practical in meeting such large demand, schools often seek to partner with food distributors, and food distributors are now seeking relationships with local farmers.

4: Increasing Consumer Awareness to and Knowledge about Healthy Eating Habits; and Increasing Consumers Access to Safe and Nutritious Foods - Mary Warr Cowans

Ms. Warr Cowans began by expressing that combating obesity, and especially addressing childhood obesity, is at the forefront of current public health priorities. In an effort to address these issues as well as other public health concerns, the work group did an “environmental scan” and assessment of what services are available locally, regionally, statewide and nationally and what information exists to help consumers make informed decisions about their health. The work group decided to put together a data base of information.

The “Food & Nutrition Connection Center” (FNCC) will be an addition to the NYS CFP website. FNCC will provide a collection of, and connections to, existing programs and services that are working to increase nutrition awareness, reduce obesity and diet related diseases, and promote healthy eating habits and healthy lifestyles. FNCC has six tabs: Food Assistance/Nutrition Education/Local Food/Food Safety/Population Specific/Data & Informational Research, and provides corresponding links to relevant connections. FNCC was pilot tested by a focus group to determine its effectiveness. Currently, we are making final updates based on focus group feedback.

In conclusion, Ms. Warr Cowans discussed both federal and state legislation. She expressed interest in ensuring that the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) receive adequate funding in the impending Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act. She also expressed hopefulness that the New York State legislators will continue support and funding for Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) that is so vital to food assistance programs in our communities such as food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens.

Florence Reed then took a moment to express the continued need for nutrition education and services for older adults. Ms. Reed cited a recent ‘Journal of American Medical Association’ report that stated: 70% of older adults in the U.S. are now classified as obese; further she pointed out that 65% of older New Yorkers are defined as obese or overweight. Ms. Reed said that it will be challenging to meet the impending dietary guidelines in meal services programs without additional funding. With the Older Americans Act now up for reauthorization, Congress and the Senate are encouraged to provide adequate funding to help providers meet these challenges.



NYS Council on Food Policy Meeting

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