

Mapping the Movement for Healthy Food and Activity Environments in the United States

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOTS

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Foreword

The organizational snapshots captured in the following pages present innovative efforts of 11 organizations advocating for improvements, predominantly in low-income neighborhoods and with African American and Latino residents. Each of the 11 community groups take on tough policy and environmental change issues like increasing access to healthy food, addressing safety concerns, and cultivating opportunities for walking and bicycling. In both rural settings and urban neighborhoods throughout the country, these snapshots paint a picture of pervasive challenges to healthy eating and active living and explore creative solutions to improve health and quality of life.

These 11 snapshots are part of a broader effort entitled, *Mapping the Movement for Healthy Eating and Activity Environments in the United States: A Snapshot of the Field* funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In December 2006, Prevention Institute embarked on a national search for coalitions and organizations advocating for change in communities of color and in low-income neighborhoods. Our scan of the field involved interviews with numerous key informants which resulted in semi-structured interviews with representatives of 312 organizations. The scan

included groups working on nutrition and physical activity advocacy and related issues like food security, sustainable agriculture, and the built environment, as well as groups advocating to limit unhealthy exposures (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, and environmental toxins) and to expand human rights (e.g., labor and housing rights groups).

Of the more than 300 groups interviewed, the 11 organizations profiled in this document represent examples of compelling policy advocacy, programmatic, and environmental change efforts designed to positively impact people's lives and livelihoods. In these snapshots we hope that the reader will recognize interest and capacity among committed advocacy groups to apply their strategies, passion, and energy to improving opportunities for healthy eating and active living in their communities.

Our hope is that these organizational snapshots can be used to offer advocates, policy makers, funders, and community residents with examples of how the inertia of active, engaged organizations and residents can transform communities—make them healthier—through changes to policies, environments, and social norms.

OVERVIEW

Mapping the Movement for Healthy Food and Activity Environments in the United States: Organizational Snapshots

The organizational snapshots include a description of the organizational setting, overview of their policy advocacy and environmental change efforts, discussion of significant challenges to the work, and “quick facts” about each organization.

The “quick facts” box in the upper right-hand corner of the first page of each snapshot draws data from the Mapping Database and provides the organization’s location, policy jurisdiction (local, state or federal), policy orientation (engaged in policy, poised to do more policy work, education orientation); approach (environmental/ institutional or services/programs); strong equity focus; issue areas; policy domains; and website address.

- 1. Community Farm Alliance:** With a membership base of over 2,000, CFA spearheads policies to support family farming in rural Kentucky and creates access to healthy fresh fruits and vegetables among urban, West Louisville’s primarily African American residents through a blend of programs and policies.
- 2. Get Moving Kern and Greenfield Walking Group:** A parent-led walking group serves as the resident task force to the *Get Moving Kern* coalition and is reversing barriers to healthy eating and safe walking in their rural, predominantly Latino community of Kern County, California.
- 3. Chicagoland Bicycle Federation:** In Chicago and the surrounding region, this membership-driven organization works on Complete Streets policies, local bikeways, safe routes to school, and public events to rally for streets that will accommodate bicyclists safely on their way to school and across the city.
- 4. Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center:** This statewide advocacy center works at the nexus of nutrition, hunger, and poverty as it coordinates a network of nutrition activists and professionals to advocate for statewide legislation to improve school nutrition, increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, and increase the minimum wage.
- 5. Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United):** In the rural town of Woodburn, Oregon with a more than 50% Latino population, the farmworkers union has developed a strong organizing and advocacy history on labor and housing issues. Now, through its 5,700+ members, the farmworkers, spouses, and children are also addressing healthy food access and physical activity to help local residents eat better and move more.
- 6. Lifelong Communities Initiative:** This program of the Atlanta Regional Commission pays special attention to the needs of seniors as it works to improve community design and support city-wide ordinances to support better walking and transportation alternatives and healthy housing for seniors.
- 7. The Food Project of Boston:** Cultivating fruits and vegetables in an urban garden and on a suburban farm leased from the city at minimal cost, youth work with *The Food Project* and participate in community-supported agriculture that brings healthy produce to low-income residents throughout Boston.

8. ***Teton Valley Trails and Pathways:*** Looking to find a balance between responsible development, land conservation, and a physical activity friendly environment, advocates and residents of this rural, sparsely populated city work together to advance local and regional policies that will guide development for years to come.
9. ***Center for Economic Security:*** Working intensively in the low-income city of Muskegon, Michigan, this relatively new organization is galvanizing support for a local, sustainable food system and hopes to get a statewide initiative on the 2010 ballot that will declare healthy, sustainable food as a right for every Michigan resident.
10. ***Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety:*** With a primary goal of increasing pedestrian safety throughout the Atlanta region, this organization has won policy victories and manages an innovative web-based system that allows residents to report barriers to safe walking directly to the appropriate city or county agency.
11. ***New Orleans Food and Farm Network:*** Hurricane Katrina was a recent memory when food scarcity became a frightening reality for many residents who already lacked easy access to healthy foods before the disaster. A food mapping effort started out as a short-term response to residents' need to get access to soup kitchens, grocery stores, or food pantries and now has become a tool for understanding—and filling—gaps in access to healthy foods and community gardens.

COMMUNITY FARM ALLIANCE

Bridging rural farm policy with urban food access

For *Community Farm Alliance* (CFA), the health and prosperity of Kentucky's urban residents is inextricably linked to a thriving rural economy. Using a blend of economic development, youth development, and community development principals, CFA promotes sales and consumption of food grown by rural family farmers. The group hopes to increase access to healthy, affordable food throughout Kentucky, including the state's urban, African American communities. The organization's state-level policy advocacy targets institutional and financial levers to create a more favorable climate for rural farmers. At the same time, CFA is working to create incentives for neighborhood corner stores to carry produce and has helped launch a number of programs and local farmers' markets to improve urban food availability.

Created in response to the farm crisis more than 20 years ago, CFA maintains its roots in policy advocacy



FARMERS MARKETS PROVIDE LOCAL MARKETS FOR FARMERS

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Louisville, KY

POLICY JURISDICTION

Local State Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

Policy Poised Education

APPROACH

Environmental/Institutional Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition

POLICY DOMAINS

- Agriculture/Sustainable Food Systems
- Food Access/Anti-Hunger
- Healthy Food Purchasing

WEBSITE www.communityfarmalliance.org

and empowering people to engage in the legislative process. In the mid 1980s many Kentucky farmers were on the verge of losing their land. Reduced demand for tobacco, an influx of new residents, and increased real estate costs threatened to put many of the state's farmers out of business. In 1985, CFA stepped in to establish a credit hotline that allowed thousand of farmers to stay on their land and make the transition away from tobacco. Many Kentucky counties—dubbed tobacco dependent—have relied on the economy generated by the growth and sale of tobacco for decades. In 2000, CFA won a tremendous victory that had been many years in the making. CFA rallied for a number of provisions in the state's Tobacco Settlement, including the establishment of local planning



CFA HELPS KENTUCKY FARMERS FIND AND DEVELOP NEW MARKETS

boards, a state-level Agriculture Development Board, and a set of accountability measures to support family farming and diversified farming practices (*e.g.*, multiple crops, growing organic). CFA's goal is to ensure that family farmers are engaged in a democratic process to determine how land will be used and how the \$1.7 billion awarded to Kentucky will be spent over the next 25 years. CFA will continue to serve as a watchdog for policy implementation and resource allocation.

CFA was also successful in shepherding through "preferential purchasing" legislation which mandates that all state government institutions purchase from local growers whenever possible. When implemented, such policies can result in increased demand for locally grown fruits and vegetables as well as greater consciousness about the value of buying locally. Many state institutions can maneuver around the preferential purchasing law, but CFA hopes that by pushing for similar laws at the municipal level, they will begin shifting the norms and practices of local institutions and creating greater demand for healthy foods.

With a keen sense of the barriers to healthy food access, CFA works tirelessly to smooth the way. CFA believes that rural family farmers can meet the needs of urban residents and vice versa. When a local farmer's research revealed that residents of West Louisville, an African American part of town, lacked access to affordable healthy food, CFA immediately spotted the link between urban food injustice and the challenges of rural farming. Joe Schroeder, Urban Organizer for CFA, said when CFA educated farmers on the "huge

population of 80,000 to 100,000 people who didn't have access to the food they were growing or much healthy food, it seemed like a good, smart partnership business-wise."

Indeed, CFA has helped uncover a number of win-win scenarios for farmers and urban residents. CFA has created two farmers' markets in low-income communities in Louisville that serve about 8,000 people yearly. These markets provide fresh fruits and vegetables to residents who otherwise lack access to affordable healthy food. One market, now in its fourth year, has grown steadily with 10 farmers every Saturday from June to November. Recently CFA supported policies that will allow farmers to make value-added products, such as salsa, within their homes and permit farmers to cook at local markets. CFA is pushing for an incentive program to help offset the cost of higher priced and healthier perishable goods so that neighborhood corner store owners can carry fresh local foods.

CFA also encourages innovative projects like Grasshoppers, a farmer-owned food distributor. In 2007, local farmers purchased refrigerated trucks that will serve as mobile markets, allowing farmers to take their produce to low-income areas with limited access to grocery stores. The business also allows farmers to reduce prices for residents because as supplier and distributor, farmers cut out the "middle man." In June of 2007, CFA launched Urban Fresh, a food delivery service run by neighborhood youth. In partnership with Grasshoppers, Urban Fresh will deliver food packages to low-income senior homes, housing projects, and service a network of farmers' markets serving West Louisville and East Downtown Louisville. In addition to addressing food inequities, Urban Fresh also provides youth with business experience.

CFA has a staff of just seven people, but through the group's 2,000 community members, they reach across geographic, racial, and economic lines to influence food access through policies and programs. Schroeder speaks on the value of leadership development: "If you are a membership organization, the power is within the members, so the more you can develop the capacity of your members to be able to take on more power, the better off your organization will be." CFA has



COMMUNITY FARMERS MARKETS PROVIDE FRESH
PRODUCE FOR URBAN COMMUNITIES

amassed a track-record of state and local-level successes. As CFA looks ahead to developing a food policy council, building support for the municipal “buy local” ordinance, and creating incentives for corner stores, effective collaboration and capacity-building will remain the pillars of their advocacy efforts.

GET MOVING KERN AND GREENFIELD WALKING GROUP

Latino parents get things moving in rural Kern County

What do a walking group and an Obesity Prevention Task Force have in common? Everything for *Greenfield Walking Group*, an active group of Latino parents who identify barriers to safe physical activity and discuss community solutions as they walk through their rural neighborhood in Kern County, California.

When *Get Moving Kern*, a coalition of organizations focused on healthy eating and active living, were chosen as the community partner for The California Endowment's Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) in October 2006, they were required to set up a task force to work with the local health department that would include residents. "I didn't just want to set up a task force of organizations and then ask a few residents to come be a part of our group after an agenda had already been set. I really wanted to start with a coalition of residents. So, I



COMMUNITY RESIDENTS PREPARE TO CONDUCT A WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Bakersfield, CA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition and Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

- Bikeability/Walkability
- Food Access/Anti-Hunger
- School/Afterschool/Childcare Nutrition

WEBSITE www.getmovingkern.org

looked around at what was already happening in our community and I found a group of parents who first met at a nutrition class and had decided that a good way to keep in touch was to start walking together. "When I asked if they would be interested in making healthy changes not only for themselves, but for their entire community, they were open to it," says Jennifer Lopez, Healthy Living Outreach Facilitator for *Get Moving Kern*.

Out of that initial conversation, two walking group leaders stepped up to meet the challenge of leading a resident task force. They decided to call themselves the *Greenfield Walking Group*. They began inviting more residents to join them to discuss what kind of policies or changes to their environment would make it easier



PARENTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS OUT ON A WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT

to eat healthy and be active. The most frustrating barriers they faced were all of the obstacles they had to overcome as they just tried to walk and talk in their local park. Aggressive stray dogs harassed the group. The group had to avoid stepping on hypodermic needles. And as they walked they were frightened of being mowed down by unyielding motorists.

The group decided to conduct a walkability assessment of the park with help from California Walks and invited city staff and other organizations who could support their efforts. “Everyone had a horror story about the park. The walkability assessment gave them an opportunity to share their stories with the people who could help them develop solutions,” remarked Lopez. After the walking portion of the assessment, participants broke up into small groups and mapped out where they had encountered barriers to walking and playing in the park with their families. The maps highlighted places with rampant graffiti, where street lights and park lights had been shot out, and where a speed limit sign had been knocked down. Walkers also pinpointed locations where they had encountered a flasher; witnessed an attempted kidnapping, evidence of sexual activity, open air drug use, gang recruitment, and a drive-by shooting.

Conducting the walkability assessment in conjunction with city staff provided *Greenfield Walking Group* with the opportunity to share the steps they had already taken to improve the walking environment and

to learn how they could do more. Relationship-building was crucial. It helped the residents get to know the people they would need to call on from animal control, graffiti abatement, parks and recreation, law enforcement, and public works in order to maintain park improvements.

Greenfield Walking Group members also partnered with their local school district and identified a need for afterschool physical activity opportunities for children in kindergarten to third grade. The group sat down with school district administrators and afterschool staff and what emerged was the adoption of new policies to increase opportunities for healthy eating and active living throughout the district. Nevertheless, Lopez is keenly aware that getting policies adopted is only the first part. “We’re going to have to work hard to make sure things are implemented and sustained.”

Lopez feels that things seem to be coming together so quickly for the *Greenfield Walking Group* because the families are at the center of identifying the problems and their solutions. “It is a power shift for us as professionals in the field to consider these neighbors as the true experts of their communities, but if we can respect that, the motivation for change is powerful on all fronts,” advises Lopez.

Now groups throughout the county and the region are calling on the parents in the *Greenfield Walking Group* to get their input and feedback. For example, as the Kern Council of Governments works



HYPODERMIC NEEDLES WERE ONE OF MANY BARRIERS THAT DISCOURAGED PARENTS AND FAMILIES FROM USING THE PARK



TOGETHER PARENTS OF THE GREENFIELD WALKING GROUP DISCUSS PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING WALKABILITY

through its process to discuss the master plan for the San Joaquin Valley, as well as their county general plan for transportation and transit, they have held special sessions with the *Greenfield Walking Group* to get their input into the process. The group now provides technical assistance to residents and organizations throughout Kern County on how to transform their communities. California Walks shares the experience of the *Greenfield Walking Group* as the advocacy group conducts walkability assessments throughout the state.

In addition to the group's proactive and prevention-focused activities, the group also wrestles with issues like poor air quality and health insurance which affect their quality of life. "Many of the residents already have diabetes and their children struggle with

asthma," says Lopez. "No matter how committed they are, they cannot come outside to walk on bad air days (Bakersfield has some of the worst air quality in the nation) and so there are some basic unmet needs for those with diabetes and no health insurance." As a result, group members have also made their voices heard on statewide legislation that could improve air quality, make health care affordable, and require restaurants to post nutrition information on menus.

To celebrate their one-year anniversary the *Greenfield Walking Group* held a celebration in their local park and was joined by Bakersfield Mayor Harvey Hall, the Superintendent of Greenfield Schools, and the Head of the Kern County Health Department. "This highlights a real success in bringing together residents, the health department, city government, and schools to work together, not just at this event, but to make real long term change in Kern," says Lopez. An example of that change will be the creation of a walking path along the most treacherous part of the park, to make it easier for parents to walk and push strollers.

Says Lopez, "We think other community residents can benefit from knowing that we started out as a group of parents who decided to walk together and now we're making change happen in our community." To inspire other communities, they decided to develop a *fotonovela* depicting members of the *Greenfield Walking Group* and the Mayor of Bakersfield working together to improve community health. They are distributing the *fotonovela* to health departments in communities throughout the Central Valley.

CHICAGOLAND BICYCLE FEDERATION

On the road to a healthier Chicago, policy advocates promote physical activity

The *Chicagoland Bicycle Federation* (CBF) envisions a region where children and their families can safely walk and bike to school, work, and other important destinations. For Rob Sadowsky, CBF's Executive Director, promoting active transportation isn't simple: "The hardest thing for us is: how do we make a lot of impact in communities that are struggling economically? How do you go in and talk about physical activity and nutrition when people are struggling to work?" Even though none of their wins have come easily, CBF is beginning to see physical activity become a front-burner issue in the region.

Among CBF's statewide policy successes in 2007 was a piece of Complete Streets legislation, requiring that the state include bike and pedestrian pathways in the planning and construction of state roads. In partnership with The League of Illinois Bicyclists, CBF also pushed successfully for state law that will require



CBF WORKS ON POLICY IN ADDITION TO BIKE SAFETY EDUCATION

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION . . . Chicagoland Bicycle Federation

POLICY JURISDICTION

Local State Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

Policy Poised Education

APPROACH

Environmental/Institutional Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

Bikeability/Walkability

WEBSITE www.biketraffic.org

cars to have a three foot clearance when they pass bicyclists. A third policy victory for 2007 was a state mandate to set heavier penalties for drivers who crash into school crossing guards.

At the local level, CBF runs a campaign seeking selected street closures that would afford pedestrians the use of car-free streets on Sundays. Working with the Consortium to Lower Obesity among Chicago's Children, CBF advocates for the return of physical education classes and active recess to local area schools. As a lead organizer for the Northeast Illinois Safe Routes to School Task Force, CBF works to make sure that children can walk and bike safely on their way to and from school. Safe Routes to School programs are now cropping up throughout the metro region.

Building the membership base to take on state and local bike and pedestrian issues has taken a mixture of



BIKE EVENTS RAISE MONEY AND AWARENESS ABOUT ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION AND BIKE SAFETY

organizational coalition building and community-based outreach and engagement. In addition to policy advocacy, the 5,700 member organization also hosts public events and runs programs such as Go Healthy!, which encourages people in low-income communities to incorporate walking and bicycling into their daily lives. Participants are asked to complete 3-day travel diaries, indicating all of their trips and Go Healthy! Coaches help them figure out which trips they can most easily substitute with a walk or bicycle ride. CBF pays two community liaisons to engage Chicago resi-

dents to advocate for safer streets and accessible physical activity opportunities.

When asked about their keys to success, Sadowsky admits, “We’re very effective in what we do. We are not a shouting organization. We praise loudly and scold very softly.” So far, that approach seems to be working, but CBF still faces some uphill battles. Since the State Supreme Court recently declared that bikes were not intended for the road, CBF has taken up a local fight to protect the rights and safety of bicyclists. The Supreme Court’s ruling (*Boub v. Wayne*) discourages municipalities from putting up traffic signs for bicyclists on the basis that the signage would then make cities liable for injuries to bicyclists.

Though disappointed when bike-hostile decisions are handed down from the legislature or the courts, Sadowsky is not deterred. “We have a vision of 7,500 miles (the equivalent of 2.5 trips from New York to San Francisco) of trails and bike lanes in Chicago and the surrounding region. Our goal is to get 15% of the regional population to bike to work. It’s at 1% now.” With their sights set on increased ridership and better infrastructure, CBF and its vocal membership see a lot of opportunities to improve the physical environment so that children and families can be engaged in regular, safe physical activity at school and on city and state roads.

PENNSYLVANIA HUNGER ACTION CENTER

Using a wide-angle lens to eliminate hunger and improve nutrition

Over its 30-year history, a systems perspective has shaped the work of the *Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center (Hunger Action)*. Federal legislation is part of that system. “We want the Farm Bill to improve low-income access to fruits and vegetables,” says Berry Friesen, Hunger Action’s Executive Director. “At \$30 billion in annual food purchases, the Food Stamp Program is by far the largest public program and the place where changes can most significantly impact the food system. Thus, we’ve urged Congress to build a financial incentive into food stamps to reward consumers who buy fruits and vegetables with their monthly allotments.”

At the state level, *Hunger Action* asked Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell to highlight school breakfast in his annual budget proposal. Last February, the Governor responded with a plan to require school breakfasts in lower-income schools and to link increased state funding of school meals to school adoption of state



HUNGER ACTION PUSHED HEALTHIER SCHOOL FOODS ONTO THE PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNOR’S AGENDA

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Harrisburg, PA

POLICY JURISDICTION
 Local State Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION
 Policy Poised Education

APPROACH
 Environmental/Institutional Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition

POLICY DOMAINS
 Food Access/Anti-Hunger
 Healthy Food Purchasing
 School/Afterschool/Childcare Nutrition

WEBSITE www.pahunger.org

nutrition standards. Although the state legislature rejected the breakfast requirement, it adopted the second half of the Governor’s plan and now many schools are beginning to provide healthier *a la carte* menus and to change product selections in vending machines. *Hunger Action* will continue to press the legislature for a school breakfast mandate. In the meantime, the group is working school-by-school to promote breakfast as a way to reduce hunger and improve student nutrition.

Hunger Action’s advocacy efforts also target economic issues like the minimum wage. “It is the most significant cause for rising food insecurity in Pennsylvania,” says Friesen. “We use every opportunity to draw attention to the widening gap between worker productivi-



REFRAMING ANTI-HUNGER EFFORTS ENCOURAGES
ADVOCATES OF OTHER ISSUES TO WORK WITH
HUNGER ACTION

ty and wages and we played an active role in mobilizing support for the 2006 adjustment in our minimum wage.”

As a result of *Hunger Action*’s work to convince the state’s Department of Public Welfare to liberalize asset rules and minimize the hassle consumers must go through when applying for food stamps, it has become easier for low-wage workers to participate in the federal Food Stamp Program. The group has also been working with state agencies to streamline and simplify access to federally-funded nutrition programs.

Since 2005, *Hunger Action* has hosted the Pennsylvania’s Nutrition Education Network, a 600-member association of nutritionists and educators committed to bringing the latest in nutrition knowledge to low-income consumers. One of the big hurdles *Hunger Action* works to overcome is the misunderstanding that often hinders anti-hunger efforts. To do this, *Hunger Action* has found that sometimes their issues need reframing. For example, rather than billing school breakfast as a poverty issue, school breakfast pulls in more supporters when people see student nutrition as a public health issue with links to academic achievement.

Through its strong statewide network and its wide-angle lens, *Hunger Action* has affected changes in the food system, making it more responsive to the needs of low-income individuals. Fighting hunger often involves distributing food boxes to the needy; but it also means shaping a broader environment in which low-income households are able to access healthy food at schools and in the community. Policy advocacy has been a central part of reshaping opportunities for Pennsylvanians who struggle with hunger and economic insecurity to eat healthy food.

PIÑEROS Y CAMPESINOS UNIDOS DEL NOROESTE

Farmworkers' Union improves healthy food access and physical activity opportunities

Ramon Ramirez of PCUN, *Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United) has been organizing farmworkers in Oregon since PCUN started with less than 100 members in 1985. Now, with over 5,300 members, more than 95% of whom are Mexican and Central American, PCUN has built a movement of farmworkers empowered to influence working and housing conditions as well as the ways food is grown and distributed. Above and beyond core efforts to improve labor conditions, PCUN works to improve many aspects of farmworker health, including pesticide exposure and access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities.

“We’re seeing a lot of farmworkers getting diabetes,” says Ramirez as he enumerates half a dozen of his staff with diabetes who are also obese. “Our children are susceptible and many of the people with diabetes are indigenous people from Oaxaca and Michoa-



LAST YEAR, PCUN SOLD 6 TONS OF ORGANIC PRODUCE TO MOM AND POP SHOPS IN LATINO COMMUNITIES

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Woodburn, OR

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition and Other

POLICY DOMAINS

- Affordable Housing
- Agriculture/Sustainable Food Systems
- Economic Development
- Pollution/Toxin Reduction
- Food Safety
- Immigration Reform

WEBSITE www.pcun.org

can, so we take the responsibility to explore options for improving health of our people very seriously.” Through *Radio Movimiento: La Voz del Pueblo*, PCUN’s recently licensed FM radio station, PCUN reaches millions of people around the country touching on health issues from pesticide exposure to sustainable farming and has recently begun to cover healthy eating and diabetes prevention.

Many of PCUN’s policy successes have simultaneously addressed farmworker health and food access. PCUN has worked intensively to curb pesticide spraying, develop policies to ensure that workers know what chemicals they are using, and convince growers to go



THE LABOR UNION HAS NEVER BACKED DOWN FROM ISSUES THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACT IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

from conventional to organic farming when feasible and safer. PCUN has also developed a union label process which certifies corn and strawberries as union-grown products that are cultivated with little or no pesticides. Through relationships with local churches, markets, and Willamette University, farmworkers have helped distribute and market union label produce because it is grown under humane working conditions. Not only does union certification represent a seal of approval for workers rights, but it has also increased local access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Just last year, PCUN sold 6 tons of organic produce grown by small and organic farmers to mom and pop shops in Latino communities that would not otherwise have carried such produce. “It just would not have happened without PCUN’s push for these local markets to carry the union label vegetables,” according to Ramirez. Soon, PCUN’s market will expand to Lewis and Clark University.

Based in Woodburn, Oregon, a town of about 20,000 that is more than 50% Latino, PCUN has built a labor-community union which extends beyond its immigrant workforce into the lives of families. PCUN supports youth organizing for better educational opportunities, women working toward economic development, and improved housing conditions for immigrants. Through their *CAPACES* program, PCUN builds capacity among workers to hone their leadership, organizing, and political skills to help grow and sustain the movement. As part of their coordination efforts, PCUN convenes union members, youth leaders, and women organizers at monthly meetings to

discuss joint concerns. Ramirez admits that health issues like diabetes have been “front and center for the past six months.”

Even though PCUN is first and foremost a labor-union, it has never backed down from issues that negatively impact immigrants and their families. Ramirez believes that food access, physical activity, working conditions, housing, voting rights, educational opportunities, and economic independence are all interconnected. As an example, without improved housing, PCUN would have never been able to offer activity classes to local residents. Ramirez sadly recounts hosting an international fact-finding delegation. After having visited labor camps in Uganda, Namibia, and The Philippines, the delegates revealed that the Mexican farmworkers in Oregon lived in the worst housing conditions of all. This revelation was a turning point for Ramirez. He pushed for PCUN to work with partner organizations to establish a community development corporation that would build quality, affordable housing for farmworkers. New housing projects liberate farmworkers from harsh living conditions and, now, each housing development has a community center with health, education, and safety programs supported by PCUN. Residents can now participate in yoga and dance classes in their housing complexes and although the residents are having fun, Ramirez notes, “The dancing and the yoga are not just for fun, they are for health, too.”

PCUN started the farmworkers union from scratch at a time when the labor movement was in a downward spiral. Now PCUN has grown into a vibrant and vocal vehicle for Latino farmworkers and their families in the northwest. PCUN’s consciousness about the connections between food, economics, human dignity, and the environment provide a powerful example of how truly good solutions solve multiple problems. Looking forward, Ramirez sees the work of PCUN as empowering workers and their families to speak up about basic issues such as access to fresh water and restrooms in the field, to continuing on the path of putting issues like how food is grown, where it comes from, and who has access to healthy options on the public agenda.

LIFELONG COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Local government exercises commitment of walkable communities

Even though aging-in-place sounds like a sedentary activity, it's not. The concept—that communities should provide people with housing and transportation options so they can enjoy their homes and neighborhoods as they age—is the premise for the *Lifelong Communities Initiative* (LLCI). LLCI promotes housing and transportation options, encourages healthy lifestyles, and increases access to information, resources, and services for older adults in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Their efforts are designed to improve opportunities for older adults to walk to local destinations and stay active through their senior years. LLCI's success does not just impact seniors. If communities are designed to support walking for seniors, they will be more walkable for everyone, including children, families, and the disabled.

Atlanta is experiencing an unprecedented boom in its elder population. Today there are 400,000 seniors in the Atlanta metropolitan area, and by 2030 the number of people in the area over 60 years old is expected to



SENIORS SHARE THEIR OPINIONS WITH POLICY MAKERS

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Atlanta, GA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

■ Mass Transit
■ Healthcare
■ Land Use/Planning/Zoning

WEBSITE Nutrition

grow to 1.2 million—or one in five. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) launched LLCI when it found that poor community design was a major barrier to older adults maintaining an independent lifestyle. As older adults age, and driving becomes harder or more dangerous, being able to walk to do errands, meet friends, or for activity can mean the difference between staying at home, or relocating to another community.

Through LLCI, ARC spearheaded the first county ordinance in the State to create senior-friendly housing. Now, other locales are adopting similar ordinances that allow for developers to include senior-friendly housing in residential areas. ARC has also worked with transit officials to adjust local transit routes and to

consider the needs of seniors in local transportation plans. LLCI emphasizes planning at the front end to influence neighborhood plans but also works to modify existing developments to accommodate seniors.

But this is not just about seniors, it is about planning communities that support walking and transportation alternatives for people of all ages. Atlanta Regional Commission sees LLCI as a good platform to create communities that promote active people at every stage. The commission has influenced elected officials and planners to consider the health needs of the population in design and development. At a 2007 summit on alternative transportation, ARC found participants eager to discuss mixed-use development, walkability, and transit options for seniors and families. Now, community stakeholders are asking to be involved, and local elected officials are championing active communities concepts. Kathryn Lawler, former employee and current consultant for Atlanta Regional Commission, attributes growing support for LLCI to their successes. “No one knows what you are talking about until you have something you have accomplished.”



SENIOR-FRIENDLY CITY PLANNING INCLUDES PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND HOUSING THAT ENABLE OLDER PEOPLE TO REMAIN INDEPENDENT

Policy is changing practice in the Atlanta region. As cities and counties begin adapting local policies to support senior housing and transportation alternatives, they are rezoning neighborhoods, modifying the housing stock, mapping out walking paths, planning new walking trails, and tailoring bus schedules. All of these changes together represent a cultural shift among local governments in the Atlanta metro region. Local officials are beginning to really see how to provide infrastructure and amenities that meet the health needs of the population.

THE FOOD PROJECT OF BOSTON

Youth and community central to urban food system

For 16 years, *The Food Project of Boston* (TFP) has encouraged social change through sustainable agriculture. Jen James, Associate Director of *The Food Project of Boston*, heralds the diversity of its participants and a commitment to local produce as keys to the project's success. "One of our tag lines is 'land, food, and community.' When staff come to us they are usually attracted to one part of it; once they are part of *The Food Project* they begin to see the whole and see that it takes all three parts to make it work." TFP applies a multifaceted approach to sustainable agriculture. It works with both urban and suburban Boston communities, and youth participation is pivotal.

The core of the organization's work is the Summer Youth Program. One hundred high school students are employed to work on a 31-acre farm in Lincoln and 2.5 acres of food lots in inner-city Boston. Up to 20 of those youth can choose to continue their work during the Academic Year Program leading Saturday



PRODUCE IS GROWN AND SOLD BY YOUTH

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Dorchester, MA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

□ Policy ■ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition

POLICY DOMAINS

- Agriculture/Sustainable Food Systems
- Food Access/Anti-Hunger
- Land Use/Planning/Zoning
- School/Afterschool/Childcare Nutrition

WEBSITE www.thefoodproject.org

volunteers and exploring issues such as homelessness and hunger. The food they grow is donated to homeless shelters, distributed through a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Program, and sold at farmers' markets.

The produce from the Lincoln farm, as well as from urban farms in Dorchester, is distributed through a CSA program that enables an estimated 12,000 people to access healthy locally grown food weekly. Produce is also sold at TFP farmers' markets that reach about 2000 people each season. TFP farmers' markets are located in lower-income communities and allow consumers to use food stamps and Electronic Benefit Transfer cards. TFP markets are possible, in part, due to



YOUTH LEARN AND
PRACTICE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

the city of Boston's generosity. The city leases urban farm plots to TFP for minimal costs. Additionally, in 2007, TFP built 75 raised-bed gardens in areas like Dorchester and supplied them with organic compost in order to further inspire and support others in the Boston area to grow fruits and vegetables.

Though *The Food Project* is primarily program-based, it is beginning to consider policy as a potential tool. Currently, the group is advocating for support of the Farm Bill, specifically to fund the USDA Community Food Projects. These grants support organizations like *The Food Project* and enabled it to launch its Leading in Food Systems Training, a program which provides training to groups working to change food systems.



TFP CONVERT URBAN LAND INTO FARMS

The sustainable agriculture movement has grown significantly since *The Food Project* first started its work more than 15 years ago. TFP finds itself competing for resources with newer organizations which have cropped up to do similar work. At the same time, demand for food system training and summer farming is also growing. TFP sees policy as an important way to institutionalize resources and programs. As the organization has expanded to other parts of the city and considers further growth, there is still an unmet need for healthy fruits and vegetables and positive youth engagement. For TFP, staying true to its original mission is part of growing and helping partner organizations provide youth development opportunities, foster stewardship for gardens, and distribute fresh food to people who otherwise would not have access to it.

TETON VALLEY TRAILS & PATHWAYS

Physical activity and environmental stewardship galvanize rural community

Just west of the Grand Tetons, Teton Valley, Idaho is a rural community of nearly 7,000 people and a rural economy based on ranching and agriculture. It is covered in snow for a large part of the year; so in addition to snowshoeing and skiing, bicycling and walking are favorite activities among residents and visitors. Like many rural communities, Teton Valley faces increasing pressure to develop agricultural, farm, and natural lands to accommodate a growing population. In response, residents and advocates are advancing policy solutions to help preserve their natural resources while creating an environment that supports physical activity.

Teton Valley Trails and Pathways (TVTAP) represents 500 active, dues-paying residents working to shape the valley so that it will continue to support physical activity opportunities. TVTAP members are concerned that without policy controls, new development efforts could encroach on natural resources and wipe out op-



CLEAN TRAILS ENCOURAGE USE

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Driggs, ID

POLICY JURISDICTION

Local State Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

Policy Poised Education

APPROACH

Environmental/Institutional Services/Programs

ISSUE AREAS. . . Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

Bikeability/Walkability
 Land Use/Planning/Zoning

WEBSITE www.tvtap.org

portunities for residents to get physically active. The Valley is experiencing an influx of young families and visitors who create a demand for recreational facilities such as bike paths and bike lanes, so TVTAP recognizes a need to balance development concerns with environmental, economic, and social norms that have shaped the Valley for so long.

TVTAP first came together out of an effort to add a bike lane to a busy highway in the Valley. Reminiscing on their initial success, Executive Director Tim Adams, says, “It all started with a small group of people realizing they could really make a difference.” Now, TVTAP has expanded its work, taking on activity-friendly land use in and around the valley. The organization enlists community residents in advocacy by inviting residents to provide public comment on new development plans as they come up for review and



VOLUNTEER CREWS CREATE A TRAIL

members consistently attend City Council meetings when new land use ordinances are being discussed. TVTAP also has an active Board that helps to facilitate community dialogue and action.

Through their advocacy efforts, TVTAP members have learned to seize opportunities by infusing their voices into regional planning and development processes. They have found that bringing trails and pathways into planning discussions early on is critical. It is much easier to develop correctly the first time than to undo developments that have not considered the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians.

One of TVTAP's most significant accomplishments was spearheading the passage of multiple city ordinances to *require* that all new development projects integrate with existing pathways or trail systems. Building on that work, they are now working to make the city ordinance a countywide mandate so that new developments throughout the county will support physical activity. TVTAP members have also set their sights on a regional, multi-state pathway that circumnavigates Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Toward this end, TVTAP has forged an alliance with Friends of Pathways based in Jackson, Wyoming. If successful, the two agencies and others will have to build an effective collaboration between three states and multiple governmental jurisdictions within those states. While Adams suspects that completion of the loop is still 10 to 20 years down the road, TVTAP is

committed to creating physical changes that allow people to engage in physical activity while enjoying and protecting the natural wonders available to them.

Although land use planning is long-term work, Adams admits that TVTAP members also have a keen eye toward the political climate and the need to take advantage of political cycles. For the last couple of years, TVTAP attributes some of its successes to effective working relationships with local elected and appointed officials and now find a number of government officials receptive to change. If the future ushers in new leadership less friendly to TVTAP's mission, then Adams believes they will continue to "educate community and political leaders, promote their cause, and gather support for the mission" but in the meantime, Adams says without hesitation, "We're gonna pack as much into this time while we have support, while we have folks in government positions that support us."



INTRODUCING TRAILS TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Healthy local food as a right not a privilege

Food is the doorway to building an ecologically and economically sustainable economy—one that solves most problems, from pollution to disease to hunger, according to Chris Bedford, President of the *Center for Economic Security* (CES). “We’re part of a larger network of farmers’ markets associations and progressive people who care about food and the environment...What we’re doing in Michigan is creating local coalitions to build healthy, local food systems because the federal and state governments have shown no interest in addressing real food security and its related problems. So we have to figure out how to save ourselves. We’re about coming together to build a sustainable economy.”

“How?” is the key question. Bedford believes that both informed commerce and policy change are crucial. Founded in 2005, the organization has not registered any major policy victories just yet. Bedford is



CES IS PUSHING A 2010 INITIATIVE THAT WILL CLASSIFY HEALTHY LOCAL FOODS AS PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE

QUICK FACTS	
LOCATION	Montague, MI
POLICY JURISDICTION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> Federal
POLICY ORIENTATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy <input type="checkbox"/> Poised <input type="checkbox"/> Education
APPROACH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Environmental/Institutional <input type="checkbox"/> Services/Programs
EQUITY FOCUS	Strong
ISSUE AREAS . . .	Nutrition
POLICY DOMAINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Economic Development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Food Access/Anti-Hunger
WEBSITE	www.center4economicsecurity.org

confident that change can be made. Before starting CES, he worked in Woodbury, Iowa, where he contributed to the passage of the first tax credit in the nation that provides rebates to farmers who convert their farms from conventional to organic farming. The policy also mandates county food service departments to purchase locally grown foods when possible (see: policy profile at www.preventioninstitute.org/sa/policies/woodburyIA.php).

CES does much of its work in Muskegon, a low-income city of 80,000 with the highest diabetes rate in the state and 10 superfund sites in the county of the same name. Even with this extreme adversity, CES actively and consistently engages roughly 500 people in the Center’s work. Bedford is approached regularly



SWEETWATER LOCAL FOODS MARKET SELLS ONLY LOCAL AND ORGANICALLY GROWN PRODUCE

by people who recognize the need to change what and how they eat on an individual and systematic level.

Working entirely with volunteers, CES helped to found and operates the Sweetwater Local Foods Market, the first farmers' market in the state to sell produce that is only local and organically grown. CES organized a citizens' committee to support the creation of a Muskegon County Food Policy Council. The Center is also pushing for a 2010 ballot initiative, "Healthy local food for a healthy Michigan," which will declare that all Michigan citizens have the right to local food raised in an ecologically healthy and sustainable manner. If passed, the initiative would establish ecologically intelligent local food systems as a state priority, curtail non-source point run-off into the Great Lakes, establish healthier food requirements for school lunches, and more controversially, classify healthy local food as preventive medicine. Bedford points out that Michigan spent \$3.7 billion on diabetes in 2004, over 90% of which could have been saved if people changed their eating habits, he says. "Medicaid could fund food instead of insulin, since an altered diet could prevent the need for insulin in the first place."

Along with the big push for the ballot initiative, the Center is seizing an unexpected opportunity to change perceptions about health and healthcare in the automobile industry. The United Autoworkers Union is taking over almost half a million people's health care, and CES plans to create a pilot program involving

union members that will address health needs through nutrition and lifestyle changes. Bedford is hoping this program will show the union that money can be saved by providing access to healthy, locally grown food rather than treating disease.

CES has completed a new film, *The Organic Opportunity*, to help economic development institutions, Chambers of Commerce, and local government see food as an economic development opportunity. Bedford sees the potential for local food systems. He is inspired by the little-known history of post Cold War Russian agriculture. Russians went from needing food assistance from neighboring European nations to having one of the world's most extensive urban garden systems. Those gardens make up less than 6% of the total farm land but supply 96% of the country's fresh vegetables. Comparing US and Russian agricultural systems may seem like a stretch, but Bedford sees a key commonality between the two countries: "We share a need to reclaim food on a local level to solve problems, like local food access and food security."

As with many non-profits, funding and organizational sustainability are concerns, but CES considers the biggest challenge to be a lack of leadership on a national scale. "No one of either party is saying, 'Hey, locally grown healthy food is important to our national economic security. People have to dream changes before they can achieve them. We need national leaders who encourage local action and use the bully pulpit to encourage the possibility of locally grown food and a productive local economy. For how secure is a nation—even a super power—that can't feed itself or stay healthy?'"

PEDS

Safer streets support walking in the Atlanta region

Executive Director Sally Flocks remembers a time in Atlanta when she would wear a whistle around her neck and blow it while crossing the street. She felt desperate to get drivers to slow down, to be safer. She knew Atlanta, like many urban centers, didn't support pedestrians, so she founded Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety (PEDS), a Georgia-based organization serving Atlanta and the surrounding region. Within a year of founding the organization, Flocks had an "aha moment." She realized that PEDS wouldn't be nearly as effective as it could be by reaching out one driver at a time. PEDS needed a broader approach. Now, through policy and environmental change and innovative use of web-based technology, PEDS has become a leader in creating and maintaining pedestrian-friendly environments to support recreational and incidental physical activity.

For the last 10 years, PEDS has emphasized pedestrian safety for immigrants and in-town communities because these populations are disproportionately



HIGH-VISIBILITY CROSSWALK MARKERS HELP KEEP PEDESTRIANS SAFE

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Atlanta, GA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

■ Bikeability/Walkability

WEBSITE www.peds.org

involved in pedestrian injuries and fatalities. Low-income families and immigrants are less likely than the general population to own a car and so, are more likely to walk or bike for errands or to commute to work—incidental physical activity. PEDS sees that making the road safer for the most frequent and vulnerable pedestrians can improve pedestrian safety for everyone. As Atlanta's population booms, PEDS has begun to expand to suburbs, where pedestrian injuries are increasing. Among people over 60—who will represent 20% of the Atlanta population in the next five years—Flocks also sees a critical opportunity to improve pedestrian infrastructure. If the region's older adults feel safe on the streets, then children, the disabled and the general population will also benefit from safe places to walk and they will be more likely to engage in this common form of activity.



BRINGING ATTENTION TO PEDESTRIAN HAZARDS
ACROSS CULTURAL LINES

Since being named one of the ten most dangerous cities for pedestrians in the US by *Mean Streets 2004* (issued by The Surface Transportation Policy Project), Atlanta has experienced a number of positive shifts to make their streets safer. PEDS has been at the forefront of those changes. At the helm, PEDS has advanced a statewide policy to get cameras installed at signal lights to help enforce red-light violations. The organization moved forward a policy to install in-street crosswalk signs throughout Atlanta that will alert drivers to the presence of pedestrians.

In addition to changing the built environment, PEDS has also created a web-based hazard reporting system that allows pedestrians from nine jurisdictions to report dangers and request repairs. Whether it's a busted sidewalks or a broken crosswalk signal, the PEDS system encourages pedestrians from places including DeKalb, Decatur, Conyers, and the city of Atlanta to "take action" by reporting anything—from speeding cars to overgrown shrubs—that makes the walking environment unfriendly. When visitors register a complaint, their requests are automatically forwarded to the appropriate city department. The online system takes the leg-work out of trying to track down who is responsible for what, an often confusing and daunting maze of bureaucracy for the average pedestrian.

PEDS has begun shaping a walking friendly region and Flocks laments that there is still plenty of work to be done. Armed with effective partnerships and an emphasis on policy and environmental changes, though, Flocks is confident that PEDS is on the right track. Since its early days of crosswalk protests, PEDS has developed fruitful partnerships with city departments of transportation, planning, public works, and law enforcement to influence planning, enforcement, and funding decisions. With experience, PEDS has learned how to engage traffic engineers and policymakers to develop pedestrian friendly solutions to new projects and existing infrastructure. PEDS tries to get involved in projects as early as possible to make sure developers, planners, and engineers are paying attention to pedestrian issues. She insists that, "If you don't get involved early, it is much harder to shift the momentum."

Through wins like the in-street crosswalk signs designed to make pedestrians more visible, PEDS is slowly beginning to see a culture shift. Even so, one of the persistent obstacles to creating a pedestrian friendly region is the auto-centric culture that pervades traffic planning and development. To accelerate the paradigm

"When I first founded the organization in 1996, I thought it was primarily about educating drivers...By '97, I knew policy issues like road design really mattered."

Sally Flocks, president, CEO, and founder
Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety (PEDS)

shift, PEDS hopes to "get a seat" at the state and federal planning tables so that the needs of pedestrians are systematically explored. Without pedestrian advocacy groups like PEDS, pedestrian voices are drowned out by the din from lobbyists, developers, and traffic engineers who tend to think about cars before people. Flocks acknowledges that, "One pedestrian advocacy organization is too small to create the world it wants on its own," but, she says, "if we can influence others to see the world the same way, we won't be working alone."

NEW ORLEANS FOOD & FARM NETWORK

Knocking down barriers to healthy food access

Formalized in January 2005, *New Orleans Food & Farm Network* (NOFFN) was a small organization with an educational, project-based approach to their work. But that approach changed after Hurricane Katrina.

The storm brought stark inequities and racism within New Orleans into sharp relief. That disparity now informs NOFFN's commitment to food justice: the idea that everyone, regardless of race or income—and especially the most vulnerable—deserves dignified and ongoing access to healthy, safe, and culturally-appropriate food.

Marnie Genre and Max Elliot were the first NOFFN staff to return in the Hurricane's aftermath. Having been displaced, they traveled through city neighborhoods surveying the situation. "We saw a lot of opportunities and we thought, now is the time to grow into a larger organization and have a deeper impact in the community," says Genre. As many were leaving the city for good, Marnie and Max saw an opportunity to stay and rebuild the city's food system into one that met the needs of growers and residents alike.

We know that together we can rebuild our city's food system so that everyone has a place at the table.

New Orleans Food & Farm Network

In order to have that deeper impact, NOFFN knew they would need a new strategy that expanded beyond their project-based approach. "Our specific goals changed after Katrina. We were dealing with a different city, and the residents had different issues. We

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION New Orleans, LA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition

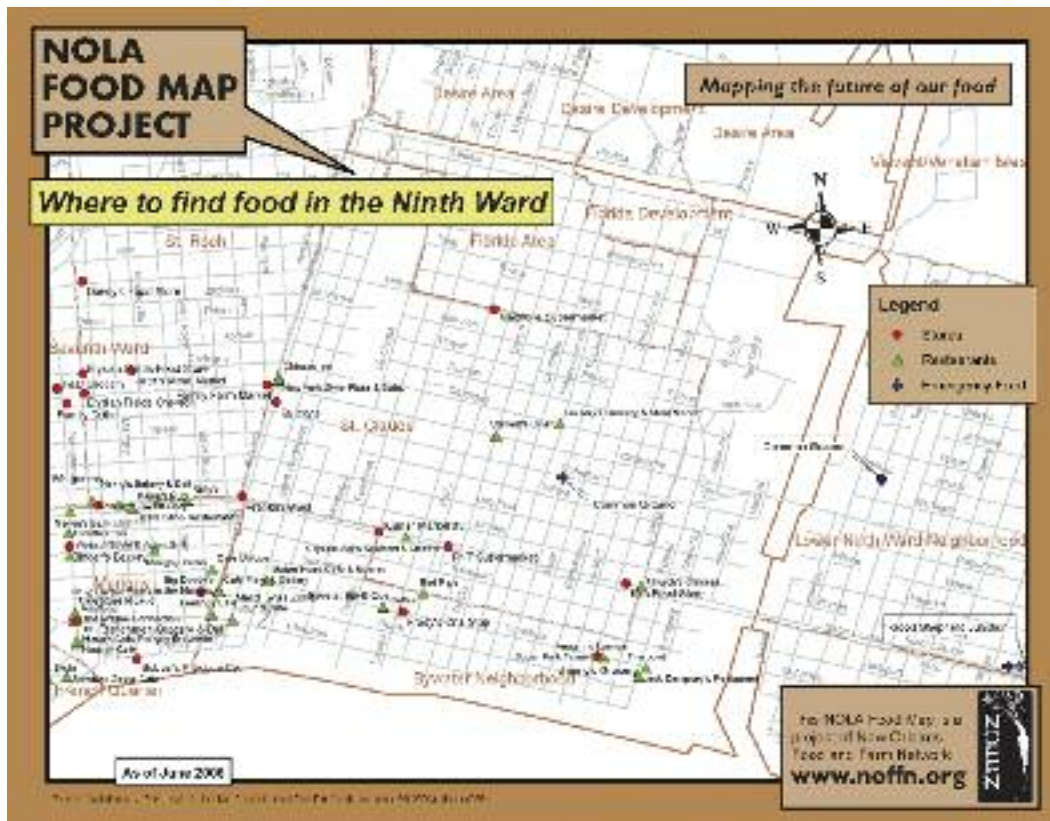
POLICY DOMAINS

■ Food Access/Anti-Hunger
■ Land Use/Planning/Zoning

WEBSITE www.noffn.org

knew that a lot of the changes would need to happen through government and policy channels—and we couldn't ignore that."

Realizing that the stakes were too high to waste time duplicating the efforts of other organizations, NOFFN started to band together with other local groups who had expertise in food security, public health, and sustainable agriculture to determine the city's unmet food security needs and the best policy approaches to address them. The result is a new collaborative: *Grow New Orleans Network*. The Network meets seasonally—four times a year—to share resources, develop collaborations, and focus attention on the need for a healthy and sustainable food system for New Orleans. In addition, NOFFN assisted in assembling a Food Policy Advisory Council to advise



AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA, MAPS LIKE THIS ONE WERE DISTRIBUTED TO RESIDENTS THROUGHOUT NEW ORLEANS TO HELP THEM LOCATE FOOD PANTRIES, FOOD STORES AND RESTAURANTS

the city council on how to improve the local food system. Marilyn Yank, NOFFN’s Executive Director, notes that, besides being a panel of experts, the Advisory Council is intended to be a voice for the community.

To guide the work of the Advisory Council, NOFFN and the Grow New Orleans Network created the New Orleans Community Food Charter. The Charter reflects NOFFN’s equity focus stating that strategies to develop a secure and healthy local food system must “remove barriers to fresh, healthy food access for all our citizens. Some of these barriers include lack of transportation, inadequate wages, and the unequal distribution of outlets which offer fresh healthy foods.” The Charter also prioritizes setting aside abandoned land within the city for farming. NOFFN has sought media coverage on the Charter to raise public awareness of its existence. “We feel that the Charter has a much stronger chance of getting formally adopted if the public is aware of its existence and importance,” says Yank.

Though they see this policy work as integral to their mission, NOFFN has not completely left behind

its roots in service delivery. Immediately following the hurricane, many food retailers around the city weren’t operating and food availability was low, but certain neighborhoods were harder hit than others. NOFFN decided to create maps of the most impacted neighborhoods that delineated food-retailer locations for residents to use. Through this work, NOFFN conceived a new Mapping project.

The Mapping project will go neighborhood-by-neighborhood, plotting community access to fresh produce and creating a plan to increase it. The process begins with a detailed map of neighborhood food assets including current food retail locations, potential growing sites, and WIC and Electronic Benefit Transfer services. Using the map as a starting point, NOFFN has started utilizing a participatory process to strategize with residents and neighborhood leaders about how to increase fresh food availability. Once each neighborhood plan is created, NOFFN will use existing community food project funding to implement them.

NOFFN is piloting the project in the Algiers neighborhood. Algiers—a neighborhood with many low-

“While we are partial to urban agriculture projects, we know that interests of the community are primary. Looking at existing strengths and resources and listening to local wisdom before and during project work is so important. That’s why we offer support on a variety of neighborhood food projects—so we fit the work to the neighborhood and not the other way around.”

Marnie Genre
New Orleans Food & Farm Network

income residents—remained largely unflooded following the hurricane. NOFFN felt it was a good place to pilot the project because residents, for the most part, weren’t preoccupied with trying to find a place to live. Furthermore, the neighborhood had a small group of active gardeners and an agricultural heritage.

NOFFN recognized that building a foundational relationship with the community and communicating that its intentions were genuine would be crucial for the success of its work. A large part of its work goes into cultivating those relationships. For example, NOFFN hosts community dinners to celebrate the neighborhood through the sharing of food—which is a real unifier in New Orleans. In addition, it brings in community members to assist in the work whenever possible, and pays them fairly for their time. The group also asks for community input and feedback at every step along the way.

Because the project is community guided, the plan really doesn’t take shape until the residents weigh in. “While we at Food and Farm are partial to urban agriculture projects, we know that interests of the community are primary. Looking at existing strengths and resources and listening to local wisdom before and during project work is so important. That’s why we offer support on a variety of neighborhood food projects—so we fit the work to the neighborhood and not the other way around,” says Genre.

Creating two arms of the organization—one that focuses on networking and policy and one that is committed to community work—has positioned NOFFN to play a key role in the rebuilding of New Orleans’ food system. But for a staff of four, “working in these two worlds is also a challenge.” Luckily, their board and staff are made up of people who are passionate about food systems and community work and who bring different skill sets that support both policy and community work to the table.

NOFFN plans to continue its support and guidance of the Food Policy Advisory Council and its active membership in the Grow New Orleans Network. The Mapping project will also continue, as NOFFN makes its way through the city’s neighborhoods.

Recently, the group received a six-month grant to explore the challenges faced by growers who are farming within the city for a profit. “We want to know what problems they face, what are their training or informational needs, what infrastructure they need.” The intent is to take the assessment and create a tool-kit for growers who would like to start farming within the city. The project also aims to increase demand for locally grown food. NOFFN is working with city chefs to connect them up with growers. “Ultimately, we would like to develop our own urban farm that could be our research and training site and where the community could see what urban farming is like,” says Genre.

New Orleans Food & Farm Network envisions a rebuilt New Orleans with a local food system that is equitable and reflects the priorities of all the city’s residents. The Community Food Charter lays out that vision, and the Mapping project, Grow New Orleans Network, and Food Policy Advisory Council all tie in to support it. Walking the line between policy and community work is a challenge, but NOFFN is strategically laying the groundwork for a better New Orleans—one that supports the health of the whole community.

