

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

## **ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOTS**

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### **Principal authors:**

Linnea Ashley, MPH

Manal J. Aboelata, MPH

Juliet Sims, RD

Sarah Adler-McDonald

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Prevention Institute is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, the organization has focused on injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, health disparities, nutrition and physical activity, and youth development. This, and other Prevention Institute documents, are available at no cost on our website.

221 Oak Street  
Oakland, CA 94607  
510.444.7738  
fax 510.663.1280

[www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org)

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The Food Project of Boston

Jennifer Lopez  
Healthy Living Outreach Facilitator  
Get Moving Kern

Kathryn Lawler  
Consultant  
Lifelong Communities Initiative

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*This is one in a series of 11 organizational snapshots that 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. The profiles were written and produced by Prevention Institute. Funding and guidance were provided by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.*

# 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.

## 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](http://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.