

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

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOTS

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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.

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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.

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.