



A Northeast Farm Bill Agenda

Background: The Northeast has an unprecedented opportunity to shape the 2007 Farm Bill to be more responsive to our region. Groups from across the Northeast have been working together to agree on and advance ten “must have” policy priorities. These are parts 8, 9 and 10 of a 10-part series in which we look at each priority in more detail. The full Agenda is available at www.northeastagworks.org.

Priority 8: Assure food security for all Northeast citizens.

Priority 9: Promote access to fresh, local and culturally appropriate foods.

Priority 10: Encourage and promote programs that reflect national health goals and nutrition guidelines.

How does the Northeast fare in terms of food security, food access and nutrition?

Approximately 12% of N.E. population lives in poverty (equally distributed between rural and urban communities) while over 9% of N.E. households are food insecure. All 12 N.E. states have seen a rise in Food Stamp Program participation rates over the past decade, yet five of them rank in the lowest 11 states nationwide in terms of rate of Food Stamp participation. Too many eligible people in our region— especially working poor and elderly persons—are missing out on benefits. Similarly, many Northeast communities—urban *and* rural—do not have access to healthful and culturally appropriate foods because they lack supermarkets and other retail food outlets as well as farmers markets. This limits their ability to improve their diets and overall health. On average, the percent of overweight people in the N.E. is higher than the national average.

Why is it important to increase Northeast food security, access and good nutrition?

Increasing access to locally and regionally produced foods serves the dual purpose of building healthier diets for Northeast citizens and markets for its producers. Local and regional food systems can provide more diverse, healthful food choices for consumers while building connections between urban, suburban and rural communities in the N.E. Regional and community food security also helps reduce dependence on oil and long-distance transport of food products. Our diverse producers can respond to the growing demand for ethnic variety and differentiated products. With the close proximity of its farms to markets, the Northeast has distinct advantages to meet more of its needs for healthy, fresh and regionally-sourced foods.

How can the 2007 Farm Bill help more people in the Northeast access fresh, healthy, regional and culturally appropriate foods and achieve nutrition goals?

While nearly half of the \$90 billion spent annually on the Farm Bill goes towards food stamps and nutrition programs including school lunches, many people — including children and seniors — still fall through the holes of the federal nutrition safety net. Reaching a greater percentage of those in need means increasing the amount of funds for federal food assistance programs, and flexibility as to how they are used. The Northeast has shown leadership and creativity in response to the USDA Community Food Projects grant program, farm-to-school initiatives and implementation of the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and Senior and WIC FMNP. The 2007 Farm Bill offers an opportunity to build upon these efforts. The Farm Bill also should strengthen The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Nutrition Education programs. It should encourage farmers’ markets, farm stands and other direct marketing links with consumers. It should foster urban food growing, school gardens and local procurement efforts.

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