

# A Performance Review of the First Six Years of the NYS Food Policy Council

by **Hunger Action Network of NYS**  
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## Introduction

A food policy council is an organization of stakeholders from different sectors and backgrounds who collaborate to assess and improve their regional, state or local food system. Their goals include reducing hunger, promoting healthy foods, and strengthening the farming and food communities.

New York State's first Food Policy Council was created more than twenty years ago by Governor Mario Cuomo but it ended when he left office. In 2004, Hunger Action Network of NYS joined with community food advocates, farmers, dietitians, and other food stakeholders in an effort to re-establish a state food policy council. This was accomplished in 2007 by Governor Spitzer issuing an Executive Order.

Hunger Action Network decided to examine the progress of the Council in its first six years in achieving its stated goals, and to make recommendations for action moving forward.

The Council has identified its top priorities as: maximizing participation in food and nutrition assistance programs, strengthening the connection between local food products and consumers, supporting efficient and profitable agricultural food production and food retail infrastructure and increasing consumer awareness and knowledge about healthy eating, and improving access to safe and nutritious foods.

Hunger Action Network developed a survey questionnaire for Council members and others interested in food policy in New York State. It interviewed a number of people who were instrumental in re-establishing the Council, as well as national experts on Food Policy Councils. It has reviewed the various reports and documents issued by the Council, and reviewed the written testimony submitted at its various hearings.

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## What is a Food Policy Council

A food policy council (FPC) is an organization of stakeholders from different sectors and backgrounds who collaborate to assess and improve their regional, state or local food system. Food Policy Councils help convene multiple stakeholders in a food system, providing a forum for a comprehensive examination of a food system. Councils enable different parts of the food system and government to learn more about what each does and consider how their actions impact other parts of the food system. Councils create an environment in which people are able to ask questions usually not asked, such as "How much food eaten is raised locally?" or "Does the state make efforts to purchase local food?"

FPCs provide a mechanism to develop specific priority objectives for a food sector, e.g. reducing the incidence of hunger, expanding rural economic development, and improving the administration of state programs. The Councils provide a forum to discuss emerging issues such as local foods, direct marketing, small farms and other "new agriculture" developments, which fall outside traditional "farm" programs.

The first food policy council was formed 30 years ago in Knoxville and today there are over 100 councils across the country. Food policy councils typically form at the request of state or local government officials interested in addressing food system issues. The councils also typically form as a result of grassroots organizing and collaboration to raise awareness about food system issues.

The primary goals of Food Policy Councils include:

- connecting economic development, food security efforts, preservation and enhancement of agriculture, and environmental concerns;
- supporting the development and expansion of locally produced foods;
- reviewing proposed legislations and regulations that affect the food system;
- making recommendations to government bodies; and,
- gathering, synthesizing, and sharing information on community food systems

Activities and official jurisdiction among the councils differ. Some councils, particularly those formed at the request of government officials, are expected to provide concrete policy recommendations for government action. Other councils may focus on local organizing and outreach to raise awareness about health or environmental issues associated with the food system and to encourage communities to take action or learn about resources available to them.

## History of the NYS Food Policy Council

Governor Spitzer issued an Executive Order in 2008 re-establishing a NYS Food Policy Council. A Food Policy Council had existed during the last term of Governor Mario Cuomo but the Executive Order creating it was not renewed by Governor Pataki. The State Legislature, under the leadership of Assemblymember Felix Ortiz, Chair of the Assembly Task Force on Food, Farm and Nutrition Policy, along with Senator Catherine Young, had introduced legislation to re-establish the Council a few years prior.

### 1984

In 1984, Governor Mario Cuomo established the New York State Council on Food and Nutrition Policy due to indications that a substantial number of New York Residents were neither adequately fed nor nourished despite the state and federal initiatives to improve people's access to a healthy diet and a public understanding of good nutrition. The main purpose of this council was to address and assess this problem as well as to propose ways to correct it in the form of a five year plan.

Council members were chosen by seven state agency heads appointed by the governor and chaired by the commissioner of health. A formal advisory council to the Council was created. There were additional subcommittees established to the advisory council to solicit input from other stakeholders. The council was directed to develop a Five Year Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy to improve the nutritional status of low-income New Yorkers. The plan was based on review of existing food and nutrition programs and their impact and a study of New York's food producing and distribution capabilities. A series of public hearings were held to solicit information from interested groups. Three years later the Council created the "Five Year Food and Nutrition Plan 1988-92" in which 20 recommendations with comprehensive action plans were suggested for food and nutrition policy in New York State.

The Four main goals of the plan consisted of the following:

- Promote good health and prevent food and diet-related diseases;
- Alleviate and ultimately prevent hunger through increased access to food and resources;
- Support food production in NYS while preserving environmental resources and jobs; and
- Promote the development and economic viability of the state's food processing, marketing, and distribution industries.

The Five Year Plan was directed by reviewing data and information relating to the food and nutrition issues in the state, by reviewing state programs and identifying existing inadequacies, possible modifications of programs, new initiatives and possible measures to increase coordination among federal, state and local programs. In addition an advisory committee which represented providers and consumers was appointed and directed to develop the five year plan in conjunction with the council agencies.

The Council on Food and Nutrition Policy concluded in 1984 that:

- Nutrition Programs are failing, often to a very significant degree, to reach or meet all the needs of their target population;
- New York State should press federal officials for more money and more state control of the initiatives; and
- Further erosion of New York's agricultural industry would not be in the states interest and if it is to achieve its goal of nutritional adequacies for all its citizens.

The recommendations stated in the plan were created to not only provide adequate nutrition that is both accessible and affordable but to strive to achieve efficient growth in the agricultural production job generation, food security and expanded markets for goods. These recommendations were proposed to correct inadequacies found and to promote new initiatives and to improve effectiveness of programs.

Two key recommendations outlined in the Five Year Plan were:

1. In order to systematically coordinate food and nutrition programs, the Department of Health should convene an interagency task force of state directors of food and nutrition programs to reduce program duplication, develop uniform application procedures, encourage the sharing of food preparation facilities and track pertinent legislative initiatives at the state and federal level.
2. State Government should provide increased incentives for farmland preservation and agricultural production, and to improve the state's food marketing potential.

Although the former Council became inactive a few years after developing its 5 Year Plan, largely due to the death of its chairperson, Department of Health Commissioner David Axelrod, some progress was made in achieving some of its goals and recommendations. Successful initiatives included: increased State funding for food assistance (HPNAP); expansion of school breakfast programs; development of the Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs; and, creation of the Farm-to-School program and Childhood Obesity Prevention Program.

(Note: the doubling of HPNAP and funding for summer meals were initiatives of the Assembly Task Force on Food Farm and Nutrition Policy, as were the School Breakfast, Farm-to-School and Child Obesity laws. These are examples of how recommendations developed by the Council were picked up later by lawmakers. Legislative staff say they still reference the Council's 5 Year Plan when members asked them to look at how to resolve particular problems related to food. The present Council unfortunately appears not to pay attention to the prior 5 year plan.)

#### Legislation Introduced to Reestablish the NYS Food Policy Council

In 2004, Hunger Action Network and other anti-hunger organizations, professional nutritionists, the NYS Farm Bureau and other stakeholders began to organize in an attempt to have the state reinstitute a New York State food policy council. As a result, the Assembly Task Force on FFNP drafted legislation to create a second council.

In May 2005, the Task Force, along with the Committees on Agriculture, Health and Social Services, convened a legislative hearing on food and nutrition policy in NYS to help lay the groundwork to re-establish the food policy council.

Later that year, Assembly member Felix Ortiz, Chair of the Task Force, along with Senator Catherine Young of the Senate Agriculture Committee, introduced legislation to create a Food Policy Council.

The Assembly's memo in support of the Council stated:

Dozens of programs, located in numerous agencies at the federal, State and local level, attempt to reduce hunger, strengthen local agriculture, and reduce nutrition and health problems. Sometimes these programs are guided by comprehensive food policy planning but more often they are not.

For example, nutrition programs and policies are not usually designed in conjunction with agricultural policies which can result in government nutrition programs not taking into consideration the use of locally produced foods. Even programs that target the same problems, hunger and food insecurity, are developed independently, with different rules and eligibility requirements and little communication between them.

Although existing food policies and programs are well-intentioned, many long-term problems such as hunger, poor nutrition, and loss of farms and food processors continue to plague New York State. Experts in nutrition, food security, agriculture, food-based economic development and other similar areas believe that there is a need for a more comprehensive, less disjointed approach to responding to these problems. Unfortunately, the tendency of government is to narrowly focus activities within agencies. One response is to establish broad-based food policy councils at the state or local levels to bring together the various agencies, service providers, businesses, advocates, and experts.

The Council would consist of the Commissioners or Directors of Health, Agriculture & Markets, Temporary Disability Assistance, Education, Aging, General Services, Economic Development, Consumer Protection Board, Environmental Conservation, and any other executive departments the Governor deems appropriate and the following members with experience and expertise in food policy: four members appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the legislative leaders, one each by the Temporary President of the Senate, the Speaker of the Assembly; the Minority Leader of the Senate, and the Minority Leader of the Assembly; one member representing farmers; three members representing the food industry, including producers, distributors, processors or retailers who are residents of and work in the State Of New York; three members representing food and nutrition assistance programs; one member representing anti-hunger advocates; one member who is a nutritionist; one member representing consumers; and, one member from an academic institution with expertise in food policy.

The Governor would designate the Commissioner of Health, Ag & Markets, or the Director of Temporary & Disability Assistance as the chair of the Council.

Section 276 would establish an Advisory Board to the Council of at least 15 members representing the issue areas of agriculture, anti-hunger, nutrition, food businesses, environment and labor. The Governor would appoint at least 4 members to the Board, the Temporary President of the Senate and the Speaker of the Assembly two each, and the Minority Leaders of the Senate and the Assembly one each.

Section 277 establishes the powers and duties of the Council and Advisory Board. The Council and Board would: assess the food policy needs of the State; disseminate that analysis to State government and the public; and, assist the Governor, State agencies, and the Legislature in developing and implementing policies and programs to address the food policy needs of the State.

The Council and Board would report to the Governor and Legislature every December on:

- The prevalence of hunger and food insecurity; the nutritional well-being of various population groups including, but not limited to, women and men, and different age, racial and ethnic groups; the status of agriculture and the food industry; the effectiveness, management and coordination of food, agriculture and nutrition programs; and recommendations of state policies, programs and actions to meet the following goals:

- a. The significant reduction, as defined by specific numerical goals and timetables, and ultimate prevention of hunger and food insecurity by assuring that all citizens of the state have access to high quality, safe, affordable, culturally-appropriate and nutritious food, from local food producers whenever possible, through adequate purchasing power, including benefits provided by food assistance programs, and the necessary facilities to prepare food;
- b. The adoption, by all New Yorkers, of a diet that promotes good health and prevents food and diet-related diseases throughout their life spans, and includes, whenever possible, locally-produced foods;
- c. Increased consumer and business demand for New York farm and food products;
- d. A flourishing and profitable food-production system in the state, which maximizes production of nutritious foods; preserves and protects open space and the environment; and provides sufficient income for farm families and workers;
- e. economic viability for the state's food processing, marketing, and distribution industries that support the state's farms and food businesses; and
- f. increased effectiveness of and coordination among federal, state and local food, farm and nutrition programs.

The legislation to create the council picked up considerable support in 2006. However, Assembly member Roanne Destito, the Chair of the Assembly Government Operations Committee, said that while she supported the bill, she wanted to wait until a new Governor was elected (presumably Eliot Spitzer, then Attorney General) to allow him to make the decision as to whether or not to establish a Council.

#### Food Policy Council Re-Established by Executive Order

Advocates of a NYS Food Policy Council preferred that it be established by legislation rather than Executive Order, since the former is permanent while the latter depends on each Governor renewing it. In addition, the Education Department is under the Board of Regents rather than the Governor, so they are not covered by an Executive Order (e.g., school meals programs).

Governor Spitzer was a strong supporter of food policy and agriculture issues, including having recently purchased an organic farm in Columbia County that his family had rented for many years. With the first few months of his tenure mired in gridlock and debate over the state budget, creating a Food Policy Council by Executive Order gave him a needed victory on one of his priorities.

The 2007 Executive Order (EO) was based on the pending legislation. However, EO are relatively short and a number of key points from the legislation were left out as a result, including the creation of an advisory council. The Governor's office said that the Chair of the Council could establish an Advisory Council if they wished.

The Executive Order was also less detailed than the legislation in terms of the goals and work product of the Council, especially with respect to hunger and data collection.

Executive Order No. 13 states that the Council shall do the following:

- Develop and recommend a food policy for the State which recognizes that it is in the best interests of the State to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of affordable, fresh nutritious food to its residents;
- Develop and recommend State policies to expand agricultural production, including locally-grown and organically grown food;
- Develop and recommend a strategic plan for implementation of the State food policy, including benchmarks and criteria for measuring progress in achieving State food policy objectives; and
- Offer comments on State regulations, legislations and budget proposals in the area of food policy, to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive inter-agency approach to food policy issues.

Unfortunately, Governor Spitzer unexpectedly resigned the following year, though the EO for the Council was renewed by Governor Paterson. Hunger Action Network and others continued to push to permanently establish the Council by legislation. In 2009-2010 the Council agreed and pushed to introduce its own version of the bill. Unfortunately, at the last moment the Governor's office decided not to introduce the bill because it conflicted with their larger goal of trying to reduce the number of such advisory boards and councils.

One concern is that many of the non-agency appointees to the Council have had contracts or institutional relationships with the various state agencies (who recommended them for the position) rather than being independent food policy advocates, experts, consumers or stakeholders. The establishment of an advisory council would have helped expand the range of voices and perspectives at the table. The Council has recently announced that it will establish a subcommittee to solicit input from local food policy council groups and advocates.

The New York State Council on Food Policy's main issue areas have been identified as the following:

1. Maximize Participation in, and support for, food and nutrition assistance programs;
2. Strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers;
3. Support safe, efficient and profitable agricultural food production and retail food infrastructure; and
4. Foster a culture of healthy and local eating for all New York State Residents.

#### 2008 Listening Tour and Public Recommendations for Action

In 2008, the Council convened a series of hearings across New York State to obtain input from the community and stakeholders as to how to accomplish its four identified goals. Many dozen groups and individuals testified.

Below is the summary compiled by the Council of the top recommendations. Most are still applicable today.

1. Maximizing Participation in food and nutrition assistance programs:
  - a. Increase funding of food assistance programs/ efforts for purchasing healthy local foods.
    - a. Double food stamp benefits at farmers markets
    - b. Eliminate finger imaging for food stamp application  
Allow phone interviews for food stamp application
    - c. Simplify/ streamline application forms
  - b. Increase food assistance outreach and efforts/ make it more effective

- c. Farm to Food Bank Initiatives
- d. Increase funding due to inflation for all government funded emergency food programs/ provide funding for more local produce within these programs.

2. Strengthen Connection between local food products and consumers:

- a. Increase funding for community gardens, urban gardening and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) to put local money back into the economy.
- b. More permanent farmers markets in neighborhoods with times accommodating work schedules and transportation.
- c. Healthy foods in schools:
- d. Increase funding for school meal program
- e. Create incentives for healthy foods available at schools
- f. Increase local foods in state facilities such as schools, nursing homes, and hospitals.
- g. Promote/fund farm to school efforts to increase nutrition and educate kids about food systems and support the local economy.

3. Support efficient and profitable agricultural food production and food retail infrastructure:

- a. Increase/provide grant funding for increased cold storage facilities, grower cooperatives, processing facilities, food-related micro-enterprises and incubator kitchens.
- b. Address disadvantages of farming and doing business in NYS- High taxes/rent, high energy cost, healthcare costs, competitors out of state, and lack of motivated/ skilled labor force.
- c. Need tax incentives for farmers
- d. Need farm infrastructure funding for increased demands on farmers
- e. Address decline in neighborhood grocery stores creating food deserts
- f. Provide incentives for Bodegas to carry local nutritious foods and for farmers to sell to them.
- g. Funding for refrigeration in Bodegas
- h. Economic development opportunities for food retailers
- i. Support Healthy Bodegas, Green Carts, and Wholesale Farmers Markets
- j. Support development of regional food shed network (growing, processing, and marketing).

4. Increase consumer awareness and knowledge about healthy eating and improve access to safe and nutritious foods:

- a. Training/support farmers to meet demands of local markets; dedicate resources into professional development; promote “Ag in the Classroom”; increase BOCES agriculture classes.
- b. Educate society about effects of childhood hunger.



- c. Capitalize on Farm to School/ Eat Smart NY programs to educate children and community.
- d. Evaluate nutritional value of school foods; regulate guidelines establishing nutrition and dietary standards for food and beverages sold, served and offered.
- e. Eliminate competitive foods in schools.
- f. Support campaigns that heighten awareness about and interest in local foods and healthy food chain.

Recurring Themes Seen Throughout the Recap:

1. Infrastructure, facility and farm limitations have effects on NYS food production and retail sales.
2. Capitalize on/invest in community based efforts that link nutrition, health, economic and environmental benefits together; and public education.
3. Evaluate procedures that can limit access to healthy foods and efficient and profitable food products.

Since the listening tour, the Council has continued to have official public meetings a few times a year in different parts of the state. The meetings primarily consist of presentations by various agencies and groups, particularly in the region where the meeting is being held, about work they are doing with respect to food policy. There is also an opportunity at the end for the public to make comments. There is virtually no decision making or planning done at these meetings, nor much discussion about how the council will meet its objectives.

### Accomplishments of the NYS Food Policy Council

Hunger Action Network sent a survey to each of the appointed members of the NYS Food Policy Council asking for their input as to the work, direction, challenges, etc of the Council. The NYS Council on Food Policy did not participate individually but instead sent a group collaboration of the Council's accomplishments thus far. In addition, the Council's collaboration response to the survey only focused on their accomplishments and did not answer the other detailed questions in the survey. Hunger Action Network did also meet with the Agriculture and Market staff assigned to the Council, as well as a representative of the Commissioner.

Hunger Action Network has attended every public meeting of the council since its inception. Council members normally provide an update on activities they are engaged in that reflect the mission of the council. These reports provide little evidence that the Council as a body has played a significant role in developing or implementing such activities. Still, it would be a positive step if the mission of the Council had resulted in the various agencies adopting new priorities and initiatives. Promoting cross-agency collaboration is still one of the most critical functions of the Council.

Council staff and members have pointed out that much of the work of the Council has taken place in meetings of the four workgroups that were created to correspond to the Council's four top issue areas.

1. Maximize Participation in, and support for, food and nutrition assistance programs;
2. Strengthen the connection between local food products and consumers;
3. Support safe, efficient and profitable agricultural food production and retail food infrastructure; and
4. Foster a culture of healthy and local eating for all New York State Residents.

These meetings unfortunately are not open to the public and no public minutes or summary of their work is provided. Hunger Action Network has been told that non-Council members have been able to participate in the work of such groups, though the information that we were provided shows that to be extremely limited. More information on the work of these subgroups would be helpful in evaluating the performance of the Council.

One of the ways the public and lawmakers can monitor the work and progress of its council is in its annual report, which by Executive Order must be submitted to the Governor in December of each year. The Council has failed to meet its requirement to issue an annual report to the Governor in recent years. And in the preceding years each report became less detailed and comprehensive than the prior one.

#### **What the NYS Food Policy Council Detailed as its Accomplishments**

(The information below was provided to HANNYS by the Food Policy Council. We have reprinted below, though some material has been shortened.)

##### *1. The Food Procurement Guidelines*

*(Note: this is the area cited by the Council as its major accomplishment. These guidelines were developed with broad based input from members of the Council and others. However, the guidelines have not been formally adopted by the Cuomo administration as of yet. They do not include support for local foods.)*

Food procurement policies can be created to make healthier food more readily available, affordable, and appealing. These policies can also work to change individual factors such as knowledge of how to choose healthy options, social factors, and environmental factors by establishing access to healthy options. Food procurement polices use already existing food dollars to create a more nutritious food environment and to force demand toward an increased availability and demand for more healthy products.

The Food Procurement Guidelines workgroup consisted of members of the New York State Council on Food Policy in which it was further amplified with the aid of the staff from the NYS Department of Health and the New York Academy of Medicine. The first step of this workgroup in developing the New York State Council on Food Policy Food Procurement Guidelines was executing an environmental scan of New York State agencies. Most of these agencies were utilizing Dietary Guidelines for Americans but did not have guidelines around specific nutrients.

The Food Procurement Guidelines workgroup has agreed on the following:

- State Agencies that procure provide, and/or contract for foods and beverages have an obligation to provide food that is safe and nutritious.
- The most recent version of the Dietary Guideline for Americans (DGA), developed using the most up-to-date evidence-based consensus of the scientific community, should be used to provide guidance for optimal nutrition for New Yorkers.
- The typical diet of Americans is not consistent with the DGA. Currently Americans consume less than recommended intakes for whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and milk/milk products, and excessive amounts of solid fats, saturated fats, added sugars, refined grains and sodium.
- State Agencies that follow guidelines for meals, snacks, and specific foods will improve the nutritional value of the foods procured, served or contracted, improve the nutrition, promote health and help to reduce the risk for chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity and diabetes of New Yorkers.

Using these agreed terms, the Food Procurement Guidelines workgroup compiled a set of recommended nutrition standards for foods and beverages procured, purchased and/or served by NYS agencies. The adopting and implementation of these nutrition standards helps ensure that foods and beverages provided or served by agencies contribute to a diet consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010.

These Food Procurement Guidelines should be updated at least every five years when the Dietary Guidelines for Americans are updated.

## 2. *Yogurt in New York State K-12 School Meals*

The NYS CFP in a statewide effort to evaluate interest, current efforts and barriers to purchasing both yogurt and Greek-yogurt in school meals, conducted a survey targeting all K-12 New York Food Service Directors. This survey was conducted over a one week span in which 85 school districts across 38 counties were surveyed with regards to their schools involvement with yogurt in there school meals.

As a result of the data that was found, Governor Cuomo has urged the USDA to select New York State as a host for a statewide pilot program that will utilize Greek-yogurt in schools. The NYS CFP has recommended that Greek-yogurt should be recognized as having a higher nutritional value then regular yogurt. When looking at cost of yogurt products, Greek-yogurt can be justified due to its higher protein value that can be substitute as a meat replacement. As a result, the NYS CFP suggests that yogurt should be more readily available in schools and should be added to the commodity food list.

### 3. *Food and Nutrition Connection Center*

The Food and Nutrition Connection Center is an addition to the NYS CFP website created in 2010 that provides a collection of existing programs and services that are working to increase nutrition awareness, reduce obesity and diet-related disease, and promote healthy eating habits and lifestyles. This website consists of six tabs: Food Assistance, Nutrition Education, Local Food, Food Safety, Population Specific and Data and Informational Research.

The information created on this website is in need of an update on other information not listed that is readily available to the target population at hand. If the essential updates and perhaps a few expansions were to be made to this particular website, it could be deemed useful to the population of New York State.

### 4. *WIC Vegetables and Fruit Checks at Farmers Markets*

In collaboration with the New York State Department of Health, Division of Nutrition, members of the NYS CFP drew up agreements, secured funding, held trainings to enroll farmers and initiated public education campaigns in regards to using checks for produce at farmers markets. New York State was the first state in the nation to initiate this program.

### 5. *USDA Farm to School Grant*

Council member Raymond Dennison and Sarah Johnson submitted a proposal on behalf of the department for the first ever USDA Farm to School Federal Grant. It was approved for funding and in December 2012 the two year pilot program began. This program is a food safety education and fresh produce meal preparation training program.

This program was implemented in Binghamton City School District using Broome-Tioga School Districts food service program, "Rock on Café." This food service program manages 13 districts and works additionally with two other districts. Educational components of this program include:

- Student taste testing foods in schools.
- Elementary schools work with Rock on Café's cartoon characters Rex and Roxy. These characters provide healthy eating tips that are affordable and convenient while also providing nutrition outreach for community groups to ensure a positive and consistent message of importance of local, fresh products in school communities.

This program is to provide district-wide awareness. In addition these fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals will serve as prevention of chronic diet-related diseases.

### 6. *Fresh-Food-Banks*

The Food Bank Association is continuously trying to find new ways to connect people in need to the freshest most nutritious foods possible through donations and purchasing efforts. The NYS CFP contributed networking efforts to aid in the donations for this food bank association.

In both 2008 and 2009, New York State farmers donated more to food banks than any other state in the nation and approximately 3.97 and 3.3 million pounds (respectively) of farm product were donated to provide nutritious food to help those who are in need.

### *7. EBT Pilot Program*

In efforts to make fresh affordable produce available to those receiving Food Stamps/SNAP in urban and rural areas, members of the NYS CFP negotiated with Farmers Market Federation so that wireless EBT terminals were available in three non-traditional produce retailers. These retailers consisted of farm stands, mobile vegetable vending vehicles and green carts.

### *8. Buy Local Week, Madison County*

In efforts to highlight benefits of buying local for the economy, environment and agricultural community, Buy Local Week was established in Madison County. Events consisted of a Local Foods Showcase, Fresh! Gala, and Open Farm Day. Farms reported over \$500 in sales on Open Farm Day and more than 1,000 visitors reported stopping at 24 farms and three farmers markets.

### *9. Farms to School in New York State*

Select NYS CFP members were involved with National Farm to School Network and New York State farm to School Coordinating Committee. These members helped with New York States Farm to You Fest! A Celebration of Local Agriculture which takes place in the first week of every October.

In 2011, this program impacted 60,000 children and families from 40 counties and over 30 school districts in New York State.

### Partnerships

#### *SNAP Outreach and Nutrition Education Public Private Partnership*

In Fall of 2012, a SNAP Awareness campaign was found to support the Governors efforts to reduce hunger in New York through increases participation in SNAP for the under deserved as well as bringing the message of healthy eating and nutritional assistance directly to low income communities. This campaign also seeks to make people aware of the use of myBenefits.ny.gov, an easier way to apply for SNAP.

Major Components for this Campaign:

- Public private partnerships with FIA represented by Pathmark, Price Chopper and Stop and Shop to distribute SNAP and myBenefits.ny.gov promotional materials as well as conducting in store SNAP outreach and nutrition education.
- Media Campaign using a radio-spot promoting SNAP during Mid-July through Mid-August.
- Collaboration with Area Agencies on Aging and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) to improve participation rates of older New Yorkers including material distribution and a phased mailing to AARP member household.

### Comments on Federal Legislation and Regulations

The NYS CFP in addition has contributed comments on a few legislations in order to contribute to a healthier and more prosperous future for our children, our farmers, our environment, and our communities. These include the following:

- In July of 2009 the NYS CFP issued the “Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act Priorities” to the Governor and New York delegates.

-In June of 2010, the Council delivered recommendations on “Geographic Preference Option for Procurement of Unprocessed Agricultural Products I Child Nutrition Programs” to USDA, FNS.

-In April 2011, the NYS CFP Focus Group, including members and stakeholders, reviewed the USDA, FNS “Proposed Rules for Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs.” The proposed rules may have unintended effects on the health of our children, subsequent effects on school’s ability to provide meals and tangential effects on local agricultural economics and food industries.

## Evaluation of the NYS Food Policy Council

Hunger Action Network distributed a survey to non council members to obtain their input. A number of interviews were also conducted, included with staff and former staff of the legislature and Governor's office.

The Council has failed to fully implement the four charges given to it by the Executive Order creating it:

- a) Develop and recommend a food policy for the State which recognizes that it is in the best interests of the State to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of affordable, fresh, nutritious food to its residents;
- b) Develop and recommend State policies to expand agricultural production, including locally-grown and organically-grown food;
- (c) Develop and recommend a strategic plan for implementation of the State food policy, including benchmarks and criteria for measuring progress in achieving State food policy objectives; and,
- (d) Offer comments on State regulations, legislation and budget proposals in the area of food policy, to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive inter-agency approach to food policy issues.

Without a strategic plan, there is a lack of targets and related criteria for measuring the Council's food policy objectives for the state. Respondents noted that in comparison, Vermont has produced a 10 year Strategic Food System Plan: <http://www.vsjf.org>. The Agricultural Council of Maine has undertaken the formation of a 2013-2020 Strategic Plan, with clear goals and policy priorities to guide the process.

The Council does not appear to be coordinating with the Governor on overall food policy issues. Most of the of the Governors' key initiatives related to food and agriculture issues have been announced without any direct reference or clear involvement of the Council, though individual agencies may have participated.

Certainly the State and Governors deserve credit for a number of initiatives over the last year on agriculture and food issues (elimination of finger imaging for SNAP applicants, funding of regional food hubs, some funding for low-income CSAs and matching SNAP dollars at farmers markets, initiatives to attract supermarkets to food deserts, several Executive Orders on sustainability and farming, etc.) but it is unclear what value the existence of the Council provided to these initiatives. Ultimately, much of the success of any Council is going to depend on the priority given to it by the Governor and the Chair. And when the Governor does support such initiatives, it can inspire agency officials to be more innovative in seeking ways to expand on such initiatives in their agency.

The Council does not appear to be using the powers provided to it by the Council to review budget, policy and legislation proposals developed by the Governor's office or individual state agencies. Obviously the Council can not publicly oppose initiatives (e.g., budget recommendations) of the Governor once they are formally proposed but the council does not appear to play a meaningful role in providing input to budget proposals as they are being developed (e.g., the Governor's recent effort to eliminate direct funding in the budget for emergency food programs). The Council as a body also appears to have been missing from the negotiations around several key initiatives at the Executive (Paterson EO 39 on sustainable farming; EO4 on green procurement) and legislative level (S978; A5102 / S4061) to increase the state's commitment to procure local food despite being cited as a major priority for the council.

Additional concerns that were raised.

*Lack of Leadership:*

Respondents cited a lack of leadership and a clear path of what the Council is seeking to accomplish, resulting in an agenda. The limited leadership has led to a lack of clear long-term objectives for the Council. Several respondents noted the failure of the Chair of the Council to attend the two most recent meetings, and that the formal stature of staff representing other agencies has also decreased over time. It seems as if the Council has been more reactive rather than proactive.

For instance, promoting local food procurement has been identified as perhaps the top priority of the Council. Yet the Council apparently has not played a meaningful leadership role in helping agencies implement such a priority despite several Executive Orders and existing laws allowing for this. One such opportunity was during the last year of the Paterson administration when an executive order on sustainability was extended to examine contracts for food procurement. This process concluded with any firm recommendations or changes. One of the roles of the Council should be to help individual state agencies to work together to help resolve potential barriers to achieving such goals. Nor did the Council in recent years play any role in responding to several proposed laws that would direct the state to increase its purchase of local food.

The state has taken some steps to address food procurement issues as noted in the prior section. In this year's budget, the Governor also included authority to enable agencies to enter into contracts under \$200,000 for local food procurement.

The recent food procurement guidelines developed by the State Health Department, with the Council input, failed to include local food sourcing as a criteria. This omission is apparently because health officials feel that the health impact of local foods has not been demonstrated. This was a major mistake and is exactly the type of situation that Food Policy Council should have corrected. All agencies should be instructed that supporting local food is an across-the-board priority as reflected in the Governor's Executive Orders.

While developing new policies to respond to changing circumstances is important, others note that there are many food / agriculture / nutrition objectives that have been established by Governors and the state legislature over the years that have yet to be fully implemented. The Council can help assess what existing objectives would benefit from focused leadership and coordination, and then bring together the various agencies and stakeholders to make it happen.

One example cited which would benefit from stronger leadership at the top is the Farm to School effort. Much progress had been made in recent decades – but much more is still needed. Sometimes agencies officials need to be reminded that their real task, rather than identifying barriers to changes, is to figure out and implement the solutions.

*Limited Efforts to Engage Stakeholders:*

Several survey respondents felt that the Council has made limited efforts to engage outside stakeholders and consumers on food policy issues. Stakeholders have limited time to engage with policymakers in any capacity. The Council should take opportunities to learn about the activities of stakeholders and find ways in which to strengthen their capacity.



The Council does say that is invited some outside stakeholders into their subgroup process. More information and transparency is needed.

The Council's recent decision to involve local food policy council and groups is a positive step in this area.

One recommendation to enhance participation in the Council would be for the Governor to himself involve the Council in his deliberations referring to food policy.

*Need for an Advisory Board:*

Respondents believe that an advisory board of food policy advocates, farmers, food processors and other stakeholders would be useful to the Council.

In the first Food Policy Council, the majority of ideas and proposals were suggested by the Advisory Council to the Advisory Council. They reflected grassroots activism and real life business / farming challenges on the ground. The Advisory Council sorted through and evaluated these concerns and selected a few for recommendations to the State Agency directors, who made the final decision. This provided an effective means of communication among stakeholders.

In addition, an advisory council could help bring additional resources to assist the Council in its work, such as helping with research and education.

*Lack of Paid Staff:*

Various issues with the FPC that have emerged seem to lead back to a need of more paid staff. Many of the members and staff involved with the Council are juggling multiple projects and as a result the Council seems to lose priority. More paid staff may better direct and organize the Council in accomplishing more tangible and concrete goals. These paid staff members may be able to push for more involvement with the Governor and with that gain more authority and power.

This is a problem unfortunately that Food Policy Councils nationwide experience. It has not been typical for a local or state government to allocate funds to support and staff a food policy council. And the lack of access to funds, has been a major barrier to implementing the recommendations food policy councils provide (e.g., investments in small scale food processing).

One recommendation is that the Council should be staffed by someone directly in the Governor's office rather than an individual agency. It is difficult for a junior staff person from the agency chairing the Council to get other state agencies to pay attention to them.

*Lack of an Official State Food and Nutrition Plan*

Unlike its predecessor, the current council has not developed or implemented a Five Year Food and Nutrition Plan. The prior plan laid out specific objectives and policy positions for the Council work. The present council has not yet created an action plan to establish priorities, work plans, timelines, evaluation and data collection. Nor has the present council evaluated progress on the prior plans and identify areas where present action would be warranted.

*Disconnect Between Governor and FPC:*

It appears that the present Governor has addressed food policy issues without the meaningful involvement of the Food Policy Council. Highly publicized initiatives by Governor Cuomo such as “Yogurt Summit” and the FreshConnects program have been instituted with industry leaders and advisors without apparent involvement or coordination by the Council. The Council has not played a leadership role in dealing with food deserts in urban areas (under Governor Paterson) or with the redevelopment of the Hunts Points Farmers Market.

*The Council has made Little Viable Progress on Food Policy in NYS*

The NYS Food Policy Council has not made a significant impact upon food policy in NYS during its existence. Many of the issues raised by the community during the Council's 2008 listening tour have not been addressed by the council. In addition, members of the food movement, legislators and the general public are unaware of the accomplishments it has achieved.

During the same time there has been an enormous growth in the food justice movement, with literally tens of thousands of New Yorkers actively engaged in both food policy and in increasing access to healthy, local foods. The Council needs to overcome this disconnect.

When the first Food Policy Council was in existence, a major challenge was how to increase small scale food processing in NYS. This remains a major issue. As does issues such as protection of farm land; adequate income for farmers and farm workers; hunger; food deserts.

## What Are Other Food Policy Councils Doing

There are numerous food policy councils and other state agencies across the United States and Canada. There has been an increase in the number of active North American food councils from 111 in 2010 to 193 in 2012. Fourteen states now have FPCs. The NYS Food Policy Council might benefit from examining how these other food policy councils operate.

The Harvard Food and Law Clinic has issued a toolkit for State Food Policy work. *Good Laws, Good Food: Putting State Food Policy to Work for Our Communities* focuses on eight areas of law and policy relevant to state food policy councils, including “Food System Infrastructure,” “Farm to Institution,” and “Food Safety & Processing.” Each section provides general background in addition to examples of states doing innovative work in that area. A couple of the state food policy solutions highlighted in the toolkit are Vermont’s financing of a mobile slaughter unit for small-scale poultry processing and Alaska’s procurement law that requires state agencies to purchase agricultural products from in-state producers as long as the in-state product costs no more than 7% more than similar out-of-state products.

Below are some examples of programs and actions that have been implemented recently by other food policy councils.

### 1. GrowTO- *Toronto Food Policy Council*

GrowTO is a program created by the Toronto Food Policy Council to address key opportunities and barriers of growing food in Toronto. This program was created to propose solutions to creating support for urban agriculture within Toronto and essentially focus attention on the available potential of urban agriculture in this city.

Benefits of urban agriculture are seen on the economic, community, health, and environmental levels. The GrowTO program has identified four immediate goals:

1. Create an Urban Agriculture program at the City of Toronto.
2. Update city policies to support and implement urban agriculture.
3. Provide incentives (financial and/or other) to groups and individuals starting or growing their urban agriculture initiatives.
4. Develop a website that links to all resources, organizations and initiatives to encourage collaboration and realize the full benefits of urban agriculture.

The GrowTO Action Report was adopted by the City Council in 2012. As a result, Black Creek Community Farm, a seven acre farm on conservation land, opened in spring of 2013. Currently, this farm is run and supported by community residents.

In addition, an Intensive Leadership Facilitation Training is to take place August 1-3 2013 to build a community of leaders and provide intensive training and dialogue for participants to facilitate anti-racist food justice in their own programs and communities. City Staff are currently working on inventory of gardens and farms and the Toronto Food Policy Council is writing a guide to growing and selling food in the city.

## 2. Healthy Neighborhood Market Network- *Los Angeles Food Policy Council*

Community Market Conversion Program and Healthy Neighborhood Markets Network work together to transform convenience store in neighborhoods with limited healthy options into healthy food community markets. Initiated by the City, it is now a project of the Los Angeles Food Policy Council.

Healthy Neighborhood Market Network aims to partner with “mom n’ pop” neighborhood stores to market and sell more fresh produce along with other healthy options. Eligible store owners enroll in a business development program that offers the following:

- **Financing and Store Renovations:** This includes new store equipment, market signage as well as other improvements to give the store a new look.
- **Business Coaching:** One on one training to strengthen the business.
- **Food Retail Technical Assistance:** professionals offer support on product sourcing, pricing, merchandising and marketing to successfully promote healthy food products.
- **Community Outreach and Marketing:** Help create partnerships with the local community.

Presently, 13 stores are under conversion. Training at these events is free to all market owners and staff. The next upcoming training is on August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013.

## 3. Michigan Good Food- *Michigan Food Policy Council*

Started in June 2010, Michigan Good Food is a collaboration effort of the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University, the Food Bank Council of Michigan and the Michigan Food Policy Council. This project funded by W.K. Kellogg Foundation, aims to have advancement in Michigan’s food and agriculture system to contribute to the economy, protect natural resources, improve residents health and to help generations of Michigan’s youth to continue to flourish.

Michigan Good Food has set 25 policy priorities they plan to meet by the year 2020, 10 years from their start date. These strategies aim to create new economic opportunities, to bring good food to where people live in order to make fresh, healthy, homegrown food more accessible, and to cultivate a culture that values good food.

In addition to setting up specific goals within a particular timeframe, Michigan Good Food also tracks its progress on their website by making their activity and progress reports available to the public. More specifically, every two years Michigan Good Food releases a “Report Card” in which they evaluate their progress towards the 25 policy priorities.

## 4. Tomato Independence Project- *Treasure Valley Food Coalition*

This is part of Treasure Valley Food Coalition’s (TVFC) mission to grow 20% of their own food in Idaho. Idaho import’s about 95% of its food. In fact, about \$ 15 million is spent each year to import tomatoes for Treasure Valley. With this being said, TVFC has decided to make it their goal to have as many people as possible grow and/or eat local, fresh tomatoes in 2013.

As part of this project, ‘TIP Kits’ are provided at four partnering local nurseries. Within these kits are seeds and instructions to start growing tomatoes on patios, porches, balconies or in backyards. In addition to saving money on imported tomatoes, this project also has potential to create more job opportunities for Idaho.

##### 5. Land Link Montana- Missoula County Community Food & Agriculture Coalition

Land Link Montana is a farm and ranch transfer program that works to connect the next generation of farmers and ranchers to land and resources in order to establish successful operations. Land Link Montana helps landowners and retiring producers find a farmer or rancher to lease or sell their land to.

As of 2012, Land Link has almost 60 farmers starting their operations in their new career.

##### 6. Double Up Food Bucks- Fair Food Network

Double Up Food Bucks program provides incentives to encourage healthier choices for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, directly benefiting low-income families and local farmers. When SNAP recipients shop at a participating site, the amount that they spend on their SNAP Bridge Card is matched up to \$20 per visit with Double Up Food Bucks, which can be used to purchase Michigan-grown fruits and vegetables.

Double Up Food Bucks began as a pilot project at five markets in Detroit in 2009. Since that time, it has expanded throughout Michigan with over 90 markets, plus two food share programs, three mobile food trucks, and a network of farm stands in Detroit participating in 2013.

As of August 1st, 2013 Double Up Food Bucks has expanded its reach from farmers' markets to grocery stores.

##### 7. Healthy Options- Adams County Food Policy Council

The Healthy Options is a food voucher program that was piloted in June 2011. In 2012, it aimed to enable 40 families to purchase food from the Adams County Farm Fresh Markets. Each family received \$40 in vouchers per month during the months of June-September, 2012. These vouchers could be used to purchase fruit, vegetable, eggs, meat and bread and various local markets.

During the summer of 2012, changes were made to make vouchers available to be picked up during all market times and the educational activities provided more options. This year, Healthy Options has 72 families registered. In addition to receiving the vouchers for the Adams County Farmers' Market each month, there is now an option to engage in educational workshops, such as nutrition education with a Registered Dietitian at the market, cooking classes, farm tours, or yoga classes.

##### 8. City of Cleveland's Local Purchasing Ordinance-Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition

Local Purchasing facilitated Cleveland City Council and the Mayor's Office partnering to develop the legislation, which was approved in April 2010. It provides 2% bid discounts on all applicable City contracts to businesses that are sustainable, locally-based, and/or purchase 20% of their food locally - these can be combined for a max discount of 4%. Supporting independent area producers enables them to practice or transition toward sustainable production methods and keeps more money in the regional economy. This ordinance - and all the efforts that led up to it - illustrates the City of Cleveland's interest in fostering local food production and the local economy in general.

Thus Ordinance No. 1660-A-09 now mandates the City's role in supporting the purchase of locally-produced food. This is something that could perhaps be modeled in the main cities of New York or the state as a whole.

## **Recommendations**

### *1. The Council Needs to Implement its Duties Under the Executive Order*

The Council is not fulfilling the duties given to it by the Executive Order. It has taken steps in a few areas, but falls shorting of fulfilling its mandated comprehensive work assignments. It has failed to provide the mandated annual report in recent years, and its prior reports were far too cursory, especially compared to the detail sought in the proposed legislation which the EO was based on.

- a) Develop food policy to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of affordable, fresh, nutritious food to its residents;
- b) Develop policies to expand agricultural production, including locally-grown and organically-grown food;
- (c) Develop strategic plan for implementation of the State food policy, including benchmarks and criteria for measuring progress in achieving State food policy objectives; and,
- (d) Offer comments on State regulations, legislation and budget proposals in the area of food policy.

One annual report that State might want to review is the annual report from the NYC City Council on Food Works. This follows up on a detailed report made by the council 5 years ago. The report provides an overview of city action since then on five key areas on food policy, and includes new recommendations for updated actions.

### *2. Create a Five-Year Plan on Food Policy*

The Council is required to develop a strategic plan for implementation of state food policy, with benchmarks and criteria for measuring progress.

The previous FPC created a five year plan which could be used as an initial outline. The Council could adjust the goals and recommendations to fit today's needs, reflecting the action steps that have already been accomplished.

A number of communities across the country have adopted Food Plans in recent years - Seattle, LA, New Haven, San Francisco. Common topics in the plans include: Food Democracy Regional Agriculture; Economic Strength and Job Creation; Purchasing; Food Distribution; Ending Hunger and Promoting Healthy Food; and Food Waste .

In 2009, Hunger Action Network submitted to the Council an outline of steps that should be taken to strengthen the local food economy in NYS. It is attached as Appendix A. Expanding the local food economy should be a major priority of state economic development programs. Recent Governors have announced support for the establishment of wholesale farmers markets in cities throughout the state to better connect local farmers to restaurants, supermarkets, and other food retailers, but progress has been minimal. The redevelopment of the Hunts Point market has also been slow. More investment is needed in agriculture infrastructure, including small scale processing. The Farmland Protection Program is so underfunded that it hasn't come to the aid of any new farms in five years.

There are many food policy recommendations that the Council should address. Hunger Action has numerous proposals for state level action in its recent NYC Food Policy Agenda (see [www.hungeractionnys.org](http://www.hungeractionnys.org)). Food Systems Network of NYC and the Brooklyn Food Coalition / Hunter College have also developed food policy platforms for NYC; the NYC Coalition Against Hunger has one on hunger and poverty.

Some issues suggested by respondents to the survey:

- Ensuring Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) funding remains available for Food Banks across the state. With SNAP reductions looming, HPNAP is critical to feed the hungry.
- Coordinated regional reports (REDC districts suggested) on current status of agricultural economic development;
- Coordinated regional planning for preservation of productive agricultural resources (REDC districts suggested);
- Statewide Food System Assessment and Strategic Plan Proposal should be a top priority;
- Farm to School support.

Another suggestion is that Council should be more active in developing the concept that food and food policy is an economic engine to create jobs. For instance, the Food Policy Center at Hunter College recently issued a report addressing this: **JOBS FOR A HEALTHIER DIET AND A STRONGER ECONOMY: Opportunities for Creating New Good Food Jobs in New York**. The report examines how the food sector can become a setting for innovative intersectoral solutions to several of New York City's most serious problems including high unemployment rates, rising rates of diet-related diseases, enduring inequalities in health and high levels of food insecurity among the poor.

In Hunger Action's Food Policy Agenda for NYC, it outlines a number of key objectives to obtain:

- view food policy as an economic engine;
- value and support the role of food and agriculture in our region's human, economic, and environmental health;
- support a food system that provides an adequate income to farmers and food entrepreneurs while provide all food workers with living wages and fair working conditions;
- sustain our regional agricultural resources to help ensure our future food security;
- support entities that produce, process, and distribute local and healthful food;
- achieve an end to hunger through universal access to ample, affordable, local, healthful, sustainably produced, and culturally meaningful food;
- support communities suffering high incidences of food insecurity and diet-related disease;
- provide for inclusive, democratic community participation in food system policy and program development and creative inter-departmental and inter-governmental cooperative action on food issues; and
- create a resilient regional food system that will better withstand the affects of climate change and other emergencies.

### *3. Create an Advisory Board*

The previous FPC of New York State had an advisory board – and then an advisory board to the advisors. The advisors provided much of the energy, passion and focus of the former Council, with the Agency Commissioners making the decisions and establishing priorities. It provided a formal channel for communication with a wide range of stakeholders. That Council ended up with more concrete plans. An advisory board can also help with work for the Council, such as in doing research, doing community outreach, etc.

In addition to an expanded number of stakeholders involved (more farmers, anti-hunger groups, supermarkets, food policy advocates, health professionals, nutritionists, dieticians, fisher people, small scale food processors, disadvantaged communities, beginning farmers, etc.), local representation would be helpful to bring to the table the insight and input of their communities on any policy being considered by the NYS Council on Food Policy.

### *4. Establish the Food Policy Council in Law*

The pending legislation creates a stronger Food Policy Council with clearer goals and objectives, and reporting mechanisms, than the Executive Order. Creating the Council by law would give it more permanent status. The first FPC ended when the next Governor did not reauthorize the EO creating it.

### *5. The Council should coordinate the Governor's Anti-Hunger Task force*

In Governor Cuomo's written State of the State address in January of 2013, he announced that an anti-hunger task force would be launched to increase participation in federally-funded anti-hunger programs, increase the use of New York farm products and healthy foods in anti-hunger programs, and facilitate private-sector efforts in partnership with the government to meet the their other 2013 goals.

Being that Governor Cuomo has already established a Food Policy Council of New York State, this may be a great area for the Council to take the lead in.

Hunger Action Network has drafted a comprehensive agenda for such a Task Force which we can provide.

Ending hunger was an explicit goal of the pending state legislation to create a NYS Food Policy Council. For instance, the Council would be required every year to report to the Governor on:

The prevalence of hunger and food insecurity; the nutritional well-being of various population groups including, but not limited to, women and men, and different age, racial and ethnic groups; ... and recommendations of state policies, programs and actions to meet the following goals:

a. The significant reduction, as defined by specific numerical goals and timetables, and ultimate prevention of hunger and food insecurity by assuring that all citizens of the state have access to high quality, safe, affordable, culturally-appropriate and nutritious food, from local food producers whenever possible, through adequate purchasing power, including benefits provided by food assistance programs, and the necessary facilities to prepare food.



*6. The Food Policy Council needs to raise funds and resources*

As noted previously, staffing for the Council should be based in the Governor's office rather than in any individual agency in order to strengthen cross-agency collaboration and coordination.

The state needs to provide adequate funding and resources to the Council to accomplish its mission.

The Council should seek outside funding from foundations if needed, while avoiding conflict of interests.

*7. The Council should be a leader on Food Policy in NYS.*

The Food Policy Council needs to be a statewide leader on food policy issues in NYS.

The Council should seek to provide support and guidance to local governments and advocates seeking to implement food policy agendas at the local level.

A current up-to-date website for the Council would be helpful . More information is needed to reflect any current policy work, goals or work being done across the state in the realms of community food system assessments or economic development.

## **Appendix A - Expanding the Local Food Economy in New York State**

In establishing the NYS Food Policy Council in 2007, the Governor charged it with two related goals: (a) develop and recommend a food policy for the State which recognizes that it is in the best interests of the State to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of affordable, fresh, nutritious food to its residents; (b) develop and recommend State policies to expand agricultural production, including locally-grown and organically-grown food.

While the goal of increasing the amount of locally grown food was not expressly articulated in the Council's annual report to the Governor in December 2008, several of the recommendations directly related to this objective. Strengthening the local food economy has been a major goal in NYC, most recently in a report issued by the Manhattan Borough President.

There are a number of specific recommendations that the Food Policy Council should address within the next year to strengthen the local food economy

1. New York should establish a goal of increasing the percentage of food consumed by New Yorkers that is locally grown by 2% annually.

The State should conduct food shed analysis by region and statewide to determine where New Yorkers' food comes from and how it gets here, the amount of food produced in the food shed across all commodities, and the extent to which the food shed can serve the needs of local residents.

2. The state should increase the amount of locally grown food purchased by the state and with state dollars. The Office of General Services has already begun to review state contract standards for local food purchases as part of its efforts to implement the Governor's Executive Order on sustainability. The Board of Regents should adopt OGS' contract policies for schools. State agencies should be directed to engage existing staff and resources to support and build community-based farm and food networks. State agencies and state-funded institutions that purchase more than \$25,000 of food each year should be required to track and report their local food purchases on an annual basis. As part of this effort, an education campaign should be implemented to educate state food personnel and train them in new procedures for doing business. This might include technical assistance on purchasing procedures, menu planning, and food preparation based on availability.

The Food Policy Council should convene a roundtable of regional food producers, processors, and distributors and institutional food providers (e.g. the Department of Education, hospitals, universities) to identify best practices, obstacles, and replicable models to increase the procurement of locally grown food.

3. The state should expand and strengthen its Buy Local marketing efforts; Pride of NY needs to be overhauled. Most New York consumers are unaware that the vast majority of their food comes from out of state, and that it travels long distances to their plate. Few understand how food is produced, how the food delivery system works, or the fact that a concerted effort to build an NY food, farms and jobs economy can provide additional food choices while supporting economic development and more self-sufficient communities. NY should organize a public awareness campaign highlighting the benefits to NY communities of a local food economy.

4. The State's Commission on Supermarkets and the revolving loan fund was a good first step to address the problem of food deserts (i.e., lack of access to nutritious food in particular communities, especially

low-income inner city neighborhoods). Most of the state's effort addresses zoning and land availability issues that primarily impact upon New York City and downstate metro areas. Upstate has different problems that need to be addressed as well. .

5. The state should continue to increase its efforts to expand acceptance of and promotion of food stamps at farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's) through Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) collection and other means. This should include creating a state program to match the value of food stamps (SNAP) utilized at farmers markets and farm stands.

6. NY should promote local agriculture in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh foods through new farmers markets, food cooperatives, CSAs (**Community Supported Agriculture**), veggie mobiles and local food buying clubs (with universal EBT machine access), as well as community gardens in parks, schools, housing authorities and other publicly owned land.

7. NY should promote urban food production. The state should review policy obstacles that discourage urban agriculture. Comprehensive research on sustainable urban farming methods is needed to identify which techniques scale, and locations are most appropriate for urban conditions. NY should consider creating incentives for edible landscaping, green roofs, and backyard gardening.

8. NY should support the establishment and expansion of wholesale farmers markets and storage facilities in cities.

9. The State Environmental Quality Review standards should be amended to require studying the potential impact that development proposals and other discretionary actions may have on the food system.

10. Expanding the local food economy should be a major priority of state economic development programs.

11. NY should develop a job incubator program in conjunction with an urban agriculture education program to connect job training with the food industry, such as urban food production, processing, and entrepreneurial job training.

12. NY should expand state policies to encourage the consumption of healthy food in place of junk food. Government agencies should be required to replace junk food in vending machines.

13. Improve the nutritional value of food served to students. Expand the in-classroom breakfast initiative statewide. Enact the Healthy Schools Act as drafted by Governor Spitzer to set strong nutritional standards for all food served in schools; to eliminate junk food in schools; increase state school meal reimbursements; promote wellness and nutrition education; and to provide financial incentive for the purchase of locally-grown food.

14. New York State should play a national leadership role in the reauthorization of the federal child nutrition programs. Needed reforms include increased fund; universal eligibility, increased nutritional standards; and reduced administrative burdens.

15. As the local food economy expands and as climate change and energy prices forces a more decentralized agriculture system, the need for farmers in New York State will increase. The state should expand programs that recruit, train, and provide technical assistance for new local food farmers. Training, increased financial support and immigration reform is needed for farm workers as well.

16. The state should provide technical assistance to farmers to support diversity in their food production
17. The state should support development of regional aggregating, processing, storage, packaging, and distribution centers. Wholesale buyers, supermarkets, restaurants, and institutions would work through these centers with growers and producer groups to encourage production and market development. These centers could be located in rural communities near farm production as well as in metropolitan areas. Communities should also develop local centers in which smaller volumes of farm production can be aggregated with those of other local food farmers.
18. The state needs to continue and expand its effort to preserve farmland and open space.

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