

**At the Table with the Acting Food Policy Council**  
**2007 Farm Bill Legislation to Support a Healthy Food System**  
**for Seattle and King County**

**July 23, 2007**

Congress will reauthorize the Farm Bill in 2007. Moving our food from seed to table involves a complex system of policies, programs and practices. This system is heavily influenced by the federal Farm Bill. This omnibus legislation affects agriculture, trade policy, access to food and nutrition, environmental stewardship, and conservation of natural resources. Although this is *federal* legislation, it has significant impacts on the health of our local communities.

Impacts from the Farm Bill affecting food and farming in Seattle and King County include:

- Subsidies for commodity crops (including wheat, corn, and soybeans) support large farms and unsustainable agricultural practices such as mono-cropping, but ignore small, multi-crop farmers that grow nutritious fruits and vegetables (known as specialty crops in US Department of Agriculture language). Amazingly, Washington is the third largest producer of fruits and vegetables, yet King County farmers do not benefit from Farm Bill subsidies.
- Scant support for small scale agriculture that reduces our dependence on petrochemical-intensive agriculture. Petrochemical-intensive agriculture contributes to air and water pollution and poses risks to farm worker and consumer health.
- A dominant food production and distribution system dependent on fossil fuels.
- Lack of access to healthy food in low income areas coupled with an excess of inexpensive, non-nutritious food. In this regard, federal Farm Bill policy may actually be worsening our national obesity epidemic.
- Increasing rates of chronic diseases related to poor diet such as obesity, asthma, cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

This document, prepared by the Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council, provides a broad agenda for elements in the 2007 Farm Bill that will be most beneficial to and are most needed by Seattle and King County.

## Farm Bill Policies for a Healthy Food System

**Access to local, sustainable fresh fruits and vegetables** - Eating sufficient amounts and varieties of fruits and vegetables reduces the risk of numerous chronic diseases, and is part of the nutritional guidelines provided by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Americans generally, and especially those with very limited incomes, do not eat enough fruits and vegetables.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action:** Add \$10 million annually within the Community Food Project grant program. This would be used as seed money for development efforts designed to improve or expand retail food outlets in underserved areas; supply \$5 million annually to support the use of the Food Stamp – Electronic Benefit Transfer system at farmers markets; and add \$3 million annually within Community Food Projects for linking emergency food providers and other local food system sectors to integrate the handling of local food between these sectors.

**Agricultural competition and market concentration** - The overwhelming consensus among farmers is that most of their problems — high interest rates, lack of credit, attracting young farmers, overproduction, soil and water conservation, and the high cost of our farm program — could be solved if farmers got a fair price for their products.

Mergers and buyouts have concentrated power in a handful of corporations, creating an environment ripe for price manipulation and discrimination. Horizontal market consolidation eliminates competition, while vertical integration allows manufacturers increasing control in all stages of production through commodity ownership and one-sided contracts.

The results are short-term, non-negotiable production contracts, leaving farmers trapped in long-term debts, and reduced choices and higher costs for consumers and farmers.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action:** Enforce anti-trust laws in agriculture and the food industry. U.S. anti-trust laws were created to prevent economic concentration in agriculture, but enforcement today is focused narrowly on price fixing.
- **Suggested Farm Bill action:** Implement mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) for beef, pork, lamb, produce and peanuts. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 mandated COOL labeling but, to date, only seafood labeling has been implemented. Labels would allow consumers to give preference to local and domestically grown food.
- **Suggested Farm Bill action:** Fully fund Rural Cooperative Development Grant program. These competitive grants provide for new direct marketing programs for agricultural producers in remote and economically depressed parts of our state, allowing family businesses to survive where otherwise they could not.

**Climate and conservation** - In the Pacific Northwest, people feel a strong connection to the land, water and our natural resources. Sustainable methods of food production reduce the impact on our soil and water associated with the dominant industrial food system.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action:** Support full funding for the Conservation Security Program. Without changes in agricultural practices, the health of the infrastructure of our agricultural

system—our nation’s land and watersheds, rivers and lakes—will continue to decline. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 70% of our water pollution is caused by current industrial farming practices. The Conservation Security Program can help remedy this problem while supporting farmers in preserving our land and natural resources.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Support full funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.** This program supports environmental stewardship through investment in our country’s agricultural infrastructure including air and water quality improvement.

**Distribution and processing** - Over the last decade, local farmers have increased their capacity to provide local foods to King County families, primarily through farmers markets. However, barriers to selling locally grown food remain.

- Farmers lack access to processing and storage facilities and transportation necessary to move food efficiently to local markets.
- Small-scale poultry and meat producers lack locally-sited slaughter facilities to enable them to process livestock for local markets.
- Growers lack access to commercial kitchens and other processing facilities to produce value-added products on a small scale.
- Liability issues related to food safety prevent Washington farmers from providing food to institutions such as hospitals and schools.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Support the authorization of \$5 million annually for Community Food Project funding for food policy councils and food system networks.**

**Farm to Cafeteria** - If funded this program will 1) provide new markets for Washington farmers, 2) improve our children’s health, and 3) enhance our overall national security by creating more secure, locally based food systems. One way to promote the Farm to Cafeteria mandate is through the USDA’s Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. This program offers schools a wider variety of fresh produce than would be available normally through other USDA purchases, but does not allow geographic (i.e. local) preferences in purchasing. Allowing the DOD Program to give preference to local products will increase markets for local farms and improve our national security.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Fund Farm to Cafeteria programs through the 2007 Farm Bill.**
- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Remove the prohibition on geographic preferences so that the Department of Defense may purchase food from local farmers.**

**Farmers Markets** - The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) provide \$20-\$40 per year to low income families and seniors for the purchase of produce. In 2006, approximately 56,000 people in Washington State were served by these two programs. The demand for these programs represents just over 1/3 of the low income eligible families and seniors in the state. However, there is not enough money to provide benefits to everyone who wants them. The WIC benefit has not been increased since the program was established 18 years ago.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Expand funding beyond \$19 million for WIC FMNP and beyond \$15 million for Senior FMNP.**

**Food Stamps** - Approximately 112,400 King County residents use this program (known as the Basic Food program in Washington State). However, in Seattle and King County barely half of eligible people receive food assistance through this program, in part due to low benefit levels and regulatory barriers.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Increase the minimum benefit level to \$25 per household, remove the 5-year residency cap for legal non-citizens, and develop incentives to encourage food stamp recipients to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables.**

**Social justice among farmers:** Farmers growing for local markets face various barriers in getting their product to market including lack of processing plants, warehouses, brokers, and affordable transportation options. USDA services are often less easily accessed by minority and low-income farmers. In King County, Hmong farmers are the largest ethnic group of immigrant farmers and represent a growing portion of the total farming economy, yet they often lack language skills, education, and business training necessary to be successful in agriculture today.

Attention must be paid to the men, women and children—domestic and immigrant workers alike—who labor in fields and orchards across the country. If it were not for their labor our tables would not be laden with the luxuries we have come to regard as essentials.

- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Authorize \$45 million in mandatory annual funding for regional planning and technical assistance pilot projects. These projects would target the transportation and processing infrastructure to enable minority and low-income family farmers to distribute food in underserved markets, including local institutions.**
- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Require air monitoring in agricultural fields and processing facilities where pesticides are applied to measure exposure levels and ensure they do not exceed public health standards.**
- **Suggested Farm Bill action: Set standards and limits on use of labor contractors, which hire out temporary workers and do not provide benefits. States license labor contractors, but officials agree the contract system makes it much harder to enforce labor laws, such as minimum wage, mandatory overtime and breaks.**

## **About the Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council**

Many communities have addressed the complex and diverse needs of citizens, farmers and the environment by utilizing a coordinating body such as a food policy council to help improve the local and regional food system. **A food policy council brings together experts in agricultural policy and farming, public health, research, business, government, and anti-hunger programs to coordinate efforts to improve the community's food system.**

Food policy councils can help advocate for agricultural policies that benefit our food environment and the health of our communities, helping to navigate complex legislation for community oriented solutions.

### **To help create a more fair, healthy and just food system in Seattle and King County, The Acting Food Policy Council is poised to:**

- **Identify and help coordinate possible avenues for increasing access to fresh, healthful, affordable, and sustainably produced foods for all Seattle/King County residents through farmers markets, meal feeding programs, school meals, and neighborhood retail outlets.**
- **Work closely with King County Farm to School Connections Team to coordinate and assist school districts with advancing local farm to school efforts.**
- **Assist in the coordination of creating new processing and distribution networks to improve local food access.**
- **Partner locally to increase food stamp participation and aid in promoting municipal policies that ensure access to food stores with healthy, fresh, affordable and sustainably produced fruits and vegetables in low-income neighborhoods.**
- **Facilitate cooperation between groups working on environmental and food system issues with local government to align policy and messaging for environmental stewardship and our food system.**
- **Partner with farmers, farm advocacy groups, and government agencies to help to connect local, underserved farmers with new and existing urban markets.**

Our vision is that all residents have access to nutritious, fresh food that is produced and distributed in a just manner; and that farming, food processing and distribution flourish as part of the local economy and contribute to a healthy environment. To learn more about us, or how to help us support a Farm Bill agenda that meets the needs of Seattle and King County, please visit our website:

<http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/foodpolicycouncil.htm>