



May 24, 2007

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson  
U.S. House of Representatives  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

RE: 2007 FARM BILL

Dear Chairman Peterson:

As the Senate and House Agriculture Committees work on the 2007 Farm Bill, you and your colleagues have an opportunity to advance public health while promoting an economically and environmentally sustainable food and farming system. The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) urges you to give high priority to policies that **strengthen nutrition education, reduce hunger/food insecurity, support healthy food choices, and maintain the integrity of the food system while protecting our environment.** In other words, we believe:

**One of the key purposes of our food and farm policies should be to advance the health and well being of all people in the United States.**

The Farm Bill has a large role to play in promoting the structural foundations for a food system that can lead to improved public health outcomes. For example, long-standing federal investments in food security and nutrition programs have yielded gains in the nutritional health of Americans. We encourage Congress to continue and strengthen these important programs in the 2007 Farm Bill. We also encourage Congress to shift resources and change policies in the Farm Bill so that all regions of the country can benefit from programs that support health promoting food, agriculture and nutrition goals.

SNE makes these recommendations in the context of ever increasing lifestyle-related diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, cancer and hypertension which cost the United States economy over \$117 billion annually, causing an ever increasing burden on tax payers and private industry. Health promoting food and nutrition education are critical to lowering risks for these diseases and saving our economy these escalating costs.

These issues and the priorities of the Farm Bill are of great concern to SNE as an international organization of nutrition education professionals who conduct research in education, behavior, and communication; develop and disseminate innovative nutrition education strategies; and communicate information on food, nutrition, and health issues to students, professionals, policy makers, and the public.

SNE urges you to adopt the following policies in the 2007 Farm Bill.

***Title I. Commodity Programs***

Our agricultural production is out of balance with recommendations of the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Current agricultural policies favor an overproduction of a select and narrow set of commodities that predominantly support large scale livestock operations and do not support fruit and vegetable production. **Specifically, SNE recommends that the Farm Bill policies be redirected to support greater diversity and increase production and market development for “specialty crops” – the fruits and vegetables that are promoted in the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.**

***Title II. Conservation***

Sustainable production systems are the core of sustainable food systems. To encourage agricultural practices which ensure the long-term health of the soil, while providing a foundation for human health, **SNE recommends strengthening conservation programs, and developing and supporting policies that protect the environment.**

***Title III. Trade***

US trade policy and food aid programs have a significant impact on the health and sustainability of the global food system. **SNE supports the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Nutrition Program but with an emphasis on developing local food systems.**

***Title IV. Nutrition Programs***

Hunger and food insecurity continue at unacceptable levels for a country with our wealth. A recent USDA report<sup>1</sup> revealed that in 2005 more than 35 million people (including 12.4 million children) live in food insecure households. Food assistance expenditures totaled almost \$51 billion in fiscal 2005, which was the third consecutive year in which food assistance expenditures exceeded the previous historical record and a 10% increase from the previous fiscal year. Clearly, the need for a strong, well-funded food assistance policy is increasing.

Unfortunately the price of nutrient-rich foods works against poor people’s interest in improving health and preventing diet-related chronic diseases. Calorie-rich foods – high in refined grains, and added sugars, and/or fats represent some of the lowest-cost options and provide dietary energy at minimal cost. Poverty and food insecurity are associated with lower quality diets with inadequate amounts of fruits and vegetables, and overall lower total food expenditures.

In addition, many residents in low-income communities have limited access to nutritious, affordable food. These ‘food deserts’ can increasingly be found in both rural and urban environments alike.

Not only do low income people eat poorly, only 25% of US adults consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day and only 2% of school age children meet

dietary recommendations according to USDA research. Diet remains a strong factor in diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, and other leading causes of death in the United States.

Access to fresh fruits and vegetables grown on local farms is of interest to consumers from diverse cultural and socio-economic groups. According to a survey conducted by the Hartman Group, “local” is now a more important consideration than “organic” when making food choices.

Federal food and agriculture policy currently does a good job at assuring an abundant food supply with calories, but it can and must do much better at assuring a food supply which supports public health, ameliorates food insecurity, and builds community-based food systems.

**SNE recommends the following priorities for Title IV in the 2007 Farm Bill:**

**Nutrition Education**

- **Design the Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) to reach large numbers of low-income individuals. To reach more families and older adults, FSNE interventions should be targeted to food stamp participants and potentially eligible individuals with incomes at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.**
- **Allow FSNE programs to design, implement, and evaluate nutrition education approaches based on the social ecological model, including direct education , group activities, media and communications, and promotion of environmental and systems change.**
- **Support FSNE programs to improve health, prevent obesity and food insecurity, and support behavior change consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans, including a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk products.**
- **Support nutrition education in schools with an emphasis on healthful food systems in conjunction with farm to school programs providing locally grown food for children.**
- **Expand and strengthen the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Programs for WIC and Seniors, including the nutrition education components.**

**Food Stamp Program**

- **Give states incentives for decreasing rates of food insecurity through food assistance programs.**
- **Implement pilot programs to determine ways to provide incentives for food stamp recipients to purchase fruits and vegetables.**
- **Increase total food stamp benefits to participants to enable healthful food choices.**
- **Remove barriers that are faced by working poor and older adults, in some states, when they apply for food assistance by offering more convenient office**

**hours, shortening and simplifying the application process, and expanding the use of phone and on-line applications.**

- **Put greater emphasis on outreach and marketing for food assistance programs to reach eligible individuals and families. Incorporate best practices determined from pilot research.**
- **Expand the use of wireless technology so that participants in the Food Stamp Program and other food assistance programs can use Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) technology to purchase healthy foods at farmers' markets, farm stands, and community supported farms.**

#### **Other Food Programs**

- **Increase funding for Community Food Projects to create new and expanded food systems programs to help communities develop retail food markets, urban agriculture projects, and marketing networks to address the needs of underserved neighborhoods.**
- **Expand the very successful school Fruit and Vegetable Program to all states.**
- **Support farm to school programs with local and regional food procurement through the school commodity food program and the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Program.**
- **Fund incentives for schools and child/adult daycare institutions to purchase regionally produced foods that are consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.**
- **Assure that foods in the Commodity Food Programs align with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.**
  - **Increase support for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) for both food purchases and for storage and distribution expenses.**
  - **Increase support for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program where it is currently operating so that more individuals can be served by this successful program.**

#### ***Title VII. Research and Related Matters***

Research and education in the areas of sustainable agriculture, local/regional food systems and nutrition are critical for promoting a sustainable and healthful food system and for national food security. This title supports research and education conducted by USDA, including nutrition research and education programs through the land-grant university system.

#### **SNE recommends the following priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill:**

- **Support research and education related to community food security, sustainable agricultural practices, and elimination of food safety threats.**
- **Increase support for the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to support community-based solutions to food insecurity and obesity.**

- **Expand resources in extension to emphasize integrated and comprehensive food systems approaches to nutrition and food security.**
- **Invest \$1 billion in new federal funding for food, nutrition, agricultural and environmental research and extension. Preserve and adequately fund USDA's Human Nutrition Research Centers so that they may continue their unique and unparalleled research tracking changes in the food supply and dietary habits, seeking to learn optimal levels of nutrient intake, studying relationships between diet genetics and lifestyles; and advancing people's understanding of the role of nutrition in maintaining health.**

***Title X. Miscellaneous***

Demand for organic food continues to increase. Costs associated with certification discourage small scale producers. Recent proposals and regulations that loosen requirements for use of the "certified organic" label confuse consumers and reduce the value-added significance of this program. In the 2007 Farm Bill and FY 2008 Budget, we urge you to invest resources to make the U.S. food and agriculture system better able to advance public health, protect the environment and strengthen community-based food systems.

This title also authorizes the use of Section 32 by USDA to purchase non-price supported commodities, such as meats, poultry, fruits, vegetables, and fish, which are diverted to school lunch and other domestic food programs. The USDA Secretary has considerable discretion in the use of this funding vehicle, including encouraging exports of farm products and domestic consumption by low-income populations.

**SNE recommends the following priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill:**

- **Strengthen on a continual basis the Certified Organic standards to assure on-going integrity of the Organic seal and maintenance of consumer trust.**
- **Expand the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program to encourage more farmers to transition to organic production.**
- **Enforce current Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) legislation.**
- **Support the increased use of Section 32 funds to purchase fruits and vegetables for USDA's domestic nutrition programs.**

Thank you for your consideration of our **priorities** as you work on the 2007 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,



Robin Orr  
President, Society for Nutrition Education

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