

NEW YORK STATE

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND MARKETS
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE INTERAGENCY TASKFORCE
DRAFT ACTION AGENDA

I. General Recommendations and Agency Actions

Recommendation 1: Provide for Increased Community Representation and Access to Decision Making Processes

Action Agenda

- The Department of Agriculture and Markets will add environmental justice representative(s) on the NYS Council on Food Policy to ensure that these key bodies are informed of and consider the knowledge, perspectives, concerns, and ideas of the environmental justice community throughout the process of developing state food policy recommendations and implementation plans.
- The Department will invite environmental justice community representation in the NY Farm-to-School Coordinating Committee, as improvements to the nutritional quality of school food and the availability of opportunities for school gardening are important to environmental justice communities.
- NYS Council on Food Policy outreach efforts will be held in locations and on days and times convenient to residents of low-income and minority communities (for example in 2008 the CFP scheduled a “listening session” at the Harlem State Office Building after 5 PM).
- The recently established website for the NYS Council on Food Policy (www.nyscfp.org) will be publicized through Department publications, programs, and meetings involving low-income and minority residents as it contains information relevant to environmental justice communities.
- Informational and instructional materials produced for participants in the Women Infant Children and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), the Farmers Market Wireless Electronic Benefit Transfer Supplement Nutritional Assistance Program, and other interagency nutrition and food access programs benefiting low-income and minority residents will be produced in appropriate languages (e.g. existing materials [have been and/or will be] produced in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Creole, and Russian).
- General information about the Women Infant Children and Senior Farmers Market Nutritional Program and the Farmers Market Wireless EBT/SNAP Program on the Department’s website will be enhanced with detailed information on the locations of specific farmers markets where these programs operate, as well as referrals to related food and nutrition programs of cooperating agencies such as Department of Health, Office of Temporary Disability Assistance and Department of Education in order to facilitate access to these programs.
- Information on the Community Gardens section of the Department’s website will eventually include specific opportunities for accessing properties under the jurisdiction of state and municipal

government agencies for possible community garden use, once this information has been obtained from these agencies.

Recommendation 2: Continue Collaboration with the Environmental Justice Community

Action Agenda

- The Department will maintain long-term collaboration with community gardening advocates and organizations participating in the NYS Community Gardening summit, held at SUNY New Paltz, in July 2008, and similar events. Conduct local meetings with community gardeners and organizations on a city-by-city basis to facilitate multi-organization input and cooperation and coordinated state and local action (e.g. '08 meetings in Buffalo & NYC).
- The Department will add interested environmental justice representatives to the Department's press release distribution list.
- Expand referrals to food and nutrition programs of other state agencies on the Department's website.

Recommendation 3: Create a New York State Environmental Justice Database and Map

Action Agenda

- The Department offers to assist the Environmental Justice Database group by providing information and updates on food outlets in defined environmental justice areas, including locations of retail food stores, farmers markets, roadside farm markets, on-farm food outlets, community gardens, farm-to-school sites and school gardens on Department databases or GIS files.

Recommendation 4: Offer Technical Assistance Grant Programs

Action Agenda

- With the leadership and support of the Executive Chamber, the Department has established a Community Gardening Capacity Building Grants Program to provide small grants to community gardening groups in major cities to strengthen their operations. The Department intends to work with both grantees and non-grantees to understand and interpret environmental data such as soil analyses for community gardening purposes.
- The Department's Farmers Market Grant Program's promotion grants component will be modified to include funding for technical assistance grants that assist community-based groups to identify opportunities for farmer's market development in addition to promoting existing markets. The Department will explore this option.

Recommendation 5: Develop environmental justice and sustainability provision in permitting

Action Agenda

- As a priority initiative of its Community Gardening Program, the Department is working with the Department of Health and Cornell University to identify convenient and affordable urban soil analysis services that will enable residents of low-income and minority communities to assess the

environmental safety and quality of urban soils for growing crops before they develop or expand a community garden.

- All consumer complaints regarding food outlets are investigated equally- regardless of location- and usually involve a field inspection. Information about how to make a consumer complaint regarding a retail food store or food processing facility is available on the Department's website, and is also provided to the public at meetings on Department programs held in low-income and minority areas (e.g. at farmers market development and Farmers Market Nutritional Program meetings with community organizations including Women Infant Children and Senior agencies, and also community forums on state agency services, including those sponsored by elected officials).

Recommendation 6: Give priority to environmental justice communities in relevant RFP requirements, scoring systems for funding, assistance and training programs

Action Agenda

- The Department's Women Infant Children and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and Farmers Market Wireless EBT Program- which have always been targeted to providing access to nutritious, locally grown fresh produce in low-income and minority communities- will continue to receive high priority and will be expanded to the fullest extent possible. NYS has the largest Farmers Market Nutritional Program in the U.S. in terms of federal funding and farmer and consumer participation, and the Department will advocate for efforts to expand and strengthen the Women Infant Children Farmers Market Nutritional Program in Congress in the 2009 Child Nutrition Act reauthorization process.
- Working closely with Department of Health, the Department plans to make it possible for the state's network of nearly 400 Farmers Market Nutritional Program authorized farmers markets to participate, along with the Women Infant Children authorized conventional retail food stores, in the new Women Infant Children Fruit and Vegetable Program in 2009. This will make it possible for Women Infant Children participants with limited access to fresh produce in their neighborhood food stores to use their new Women Infant Children checks to buy locally grown fresh produce at the Farmers Market Nutritional Program farmers markets they already shop at, rather than using them for less nutritious, non-local canned vegetables or fruits.
- The Department will continue to work with Office of Temporary Disability Assistance in expanding the availability of Farmers Market Wireless EBT terminals and services and prioritize them to additional farmers markets in Environmental Justice areas where potential benefits for consumers and farmers are greatest. Because a small "Health Buck" or "Fresh Check" bonus incentive coupon issued at electronic benefit transfer-equipped farmers markets to promote electronic benefit transfer card use has proven to be very effective in promoting electronic benefit transfer/supplemental nutritional assistance program use for healthy fresh produce, the Department will work with the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance, as well as other sources of funding, to support these related programs pioneered by the NYC Department of Health and a private foundation.
- In addition to farmers markets, mobile route vendors such as "Veggie Vans" and individual street vendors such as NYC "Green Carts" provide environmental justice communities with greater

access to fresh produce, but these types of vendors currently lack access to NYS supported wireless electronic benefit transfer terminals because they are neither traditional food stores nor farmers markets. The Department will work with the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance to explore providing such mobile operations, which have been funded or specially licensed by NYS Department of Health or NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to improve access to fresh foods for consumers, with wireless EBT terminals.

- The Department has been proactive in development of new farmers markets in communities with limited access to fresh, locally grown foods so as to provide WIC and senior participants in these areas with convenient locations to use Farmers Market Nutritional Program checks. The Department has also always welcomed community-based requests for technical assistance in farmer's market development, and will continue to do so.
- The Department will target the infrastructure component of its Farmers Market Grants Program to encourage establishment of year-round or extended-season farmers markets, which could be housed in underutilized buildings in environmental justice communities. The Department will target the promotion grants component of the Farmers Market Grants Program to community-based groups in environmental justice areas to assist them in farmer's market development efforts (see Recommendation 4). The RFP for future rounds of Farmers Market grants will be circulated to the environmental justice community through multiple means.
- Because many community gardens are in low-income and minority neighborhoods, the Department's Community Gardens Program is already targeted to providing assistance to environmental justice communities. Due to an intentional focus on large urban areas, a majority of the forthcoming Community Gardening Capacity Building grants – the request for proposal for which was disseminated widely to active community garden groups – are expected to go to organizations in environmental justice areas. The Department's efforts to secure a convenient, affordable source for soil analysis for community garden groups will also especially benefit environmental justice communities. In addition, the Department plans to work with the Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of State to target available Environmental Protection Fund, environmental justice, and Smart Growth Program funds from these agencies to supporting community gardens as well as larger "community farm" projects in selected environmental justice areas involving food, ornamental, nursery, or other crop production that could provide agricultural education and training opportunities and also generate jobs and income for minority youth and adults while improving the environmental quality, visual landscape, and property values in economically disadvantaged environmental justice communities.
- The Department's Community Gardens program will continue to work with the NYC Department of Education Office of School Food in low-income neighborhoods in NYC to expand the joint pilot "Garden to School Cafe" program under which children at 20+ public schools grew fresh greens and herbs in school gardens for inclusion in their own school lunches, providing the basis for farm-to-school harvest days at each school. It is hoped that this continued effort informs development of a State or municipal "School Garden" mini-grants program to enable more schools to establish mini-gardens on school property or at adjacent community gardens to be used to enhance children's academic motivation and learning outcomes, and encourage them to adopt

healthy eating habits that would reinforce the use and consumption of more plant-based foods in school lunches – a result that would also benefit NY produce growers.

- The Department is assisting the NYC Department for the Aging (DFTA) in piloting a “Senior Shopping Bus” project under which DFTA-contracted Senior Centers in low-income areas of Brooklyn will use school buses available to DFTA at no cost under NYC’s school bus contract to transport seniors to area supermarkets of their choice once or twice a month. These stores offer better prices, quality, selection, and services than are available at the small stores in their immediate community. If this project proves successful, the Department expects that DFTA will expand it other low-income areas of the city and that the buses will also be used during the summer and fall to transport seniors to farmers markets. The project also includes an electronic benefit program outreach and enrollment effort targeted to low-income seniors. The Department will explore how this program can be initiated in other NY cities, as well as low-income rural areas where access to food shopping is limited by the loss of local food stores and the high cost of transportation to shopping mall-based supermarkets.
- Some farmers markets work closely with local food pantries, soup kitchens, and food banks in low-income areas to enable them to pick up unsold produce at the end of the market day. The Department will work with the Farmers Market Federation of NY, the NYS Food Bank Association, the NY Farm Bureau, and individual food banks to encourage communication among farmers market sponsors and emergency food operators that could facilitate increasing donations that would benefit both farmers and community residents in need.
- The Department is committed to working with the NYC government to facilitate the redevelopment of the obsolete, inefficient Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market in the South Bronx, a critical public infrastructure facility built in 1967 that handles a majority of fresh produce distributed in the NYC metropolitan region and many parts of eastern NY, accounts for an estimated \$2 billion in sales of fresh produce and 5,000 blue collar jobs, and handles a very large volume and variety of NYS fresh produce. The facility’s inadequate cold storage capacity necessitates the use of hundreds of refrigerated diesel-powered containers that add significant air pollution to the Hunts Point residential neighborhood, exacerbating already severe public health problems in the area. The facility’s antiquated design and dimensions result in conflicts between truck and rail deliveries that create delays and inefficiencies in delivery and loading and result in growers and shippers choosing markets in other cities such as Philadelphia. The Department plans to work with Empire State development Corporation, Department of Transportation, New York State Energy Research Development Association, Consumer Protection Board, and the Comptroller’s Office, as well as with NYC Empire Development Corporation on this effort, which is strongly supported by the NYS Apple Association and the NYS Vegetable Growers Association.
- The Department’s Farm to School Program provides direct technical assistance to school food service directors seeking healthy locally-grown fresh and processed foods throughout NYS. Technical Assistance began in New York City as part of the Kellogg-funded School Food plus Initiative focused on three communities in NYC with the highest rates of diet-related disease and poor access to healthy food options, all within environmental justice zones. The Department is

committed to continuing to direct its limited resources to communities with the greatest need as it expands local procurement resources to other NY regions.

Recommendation 7: Prioritize Enforcement Actions and Pollution Reduction Programs and Resources in Environmental Justice Communities

Action Agenda

- If resources permit, and in collaboration with Department of Health, the Department could prioritize its educational efforts regarding food safety to small food retailers such as “bodegas” in environmental justice communities who are required to attend educational meetings conducted under the Women Infant Children retail vendor management program. Such meetings will include information on sourcing and merchandising locally grown fresh produce and participating in the Department’s “Pride of NY” Program to promote products grown or produced in NY.

Recommendation 8: Diversify and Green the Workforce

Action Agenda

- The Department is working with the NYS Food Industry Alliance to explore a connection between the Council on the Environment of NYC’s “Youth market” Program, which trains high school age youth in low-income neighborhoods such as the South Bronx in farmers market operation (including produce sales) in their own communities, and nearby independent supermarkets that might hire trained local youth to stock and sell better-quality (including locally grown) fresh produce. The Department will work with Department of Labor and the Food Industry Alliance in support of this initiative, and also work with Department of Labor and Department of Education (NYS and NYC) on developing a NYC high school training program that would prepare students for “green careers” in “healthy food retailing” as either employees or food entrepreneurs. FIA has indicated that it would contribute financially to a training program.
- The Department has assisted the Council on the Environment of NYC and Cornell Cooperative Extension/NY Programs in developing the New Farmer Development Project, under which immigrants with previous farming experience in their home countries have been enabled to become “new” farmers on rented, borrowed, or purchased land near NYC. Participants are provided with the opportunity to market their farm-grown produce to consumers at NYC farmers markets, including many in low-income neighborhoods whose residents are of the same ethnicity or nationality as the farmers. The result has been the creation of new, economically viable, minority-owned farm operations in NY, expanded production of fresh and processed farm products in NYS, and an increased number of farmers markets in low-income communities that provide needed access to affordable, locally grown, culturally appropriate fresh produce (including specialty ethnic produce varieties unavailable anywhere else). The Department will work with DOL, DEC, and DOS to explore replication of this successful program in other communities in NYS with populations that include former farmers as well as farmers markets that serve neighborhoods that lack access to fresh local foods.
- The Department has committed to outlining and assessing the feasibility of a Youth Employment in Urban Agriculture Program in partnership with community-based groups throughout NYS. The

focus of the potential program is 16-24 years olds who are enrolled in school. The priority is based on feedback from Community Gardening leadership who has participated in the shaping of the Department's program as well as specific organizations hoping to employ this at-risk population. The Department will work in partnership with sister agencies, especially DOL and DEC, to outline a "green jobs" program that would provide job training, access to GED and other educational opportunities, and ultimately job opportunities.

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