

Dear Governor Spitzer:

We are writing to ask for your support for legislation to establish a NYS Council on Food Policy. As groups working with and concerned about, food, nutrition, hunger and agricultural policy in New York, we represent a wide range of organizations with many years and levels of experience in linking those issues. As Attorney General, you have shown your ability and willingness to work with diverse communities to create change; as Governor, you will be in an even stronger position to advance the health and well-being of New Yorkers by doing just that.

Obesity, hunger and food insecurity, the declining number of farms, the prevalence of unhealthy food choices and the lack of quality, affordable foods are complex issues of public concern linked to our food system. As a result, achieving meaningful solutions will require coordinated effort among the agriculture industry, health professionals, nutritionists, anti-hunger advocates, social services, local food and environmental groups and government.

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. The programs would benefit from increased coordination pursuant to comprehensive food policy planning. Nutrition programs usually are not designed in conjunction with agriculture policies. The way our nutrition assistance and school meals programs are designed, for example, makes it difficult to use locally produced foods. Smaller farms often lack the ability and the financial resources to distribute directly to local schools and larger supermarkets.

A growing number of states and cities have established food policy councils. NYC recently established one. Food Policy Councils (FPC) convene individuals, community organizational leaders and government agencies which do not typically work directly with each other. The FPCs therefore foster a comprehensive approach to analyzing food system issues, addressing the inner-workings of the different parts of the food system and the need for coordination and integration of actions if policy goals are to be achieved. For example, if a key objective is to increase markets for locally produced food, a Council can play a role by considering how decisions at all levels of a food system - not just farmers or governmental officials, but also food buyers, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers - factor into public policy decisions.

Councils enable different parts of the food system and government to learn more about each others' roles and consider how their actions have an impact on other parts of the food system. FPCs provide:

- 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?"
- 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.
- 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.

Such a council was established by Executive Order during the Cuomo administration. It became inactive after the death of Health Commissioner David Axelrod, and then the Executive Order was repealed by Governor Pataki; we believe, therefore, that a statute would be the better approach this time. Legislation to create the council was introduced last year by Assembly Felix Ortiz and Senate Agriculture Chair Cathy Young (A10461 / S7618).

Under this proposed bill, the Council would consist of: the Commissioners or Directors of: Health, Agriculture & Markets, Temporary & Disability Assistance, Education, Aging, Children & Family Services, General Services, Economic Development, Labor, Transportation, Environmental Conservation, State Emergency Management, and others the Governor deems appropriate. The Governor would also establish at least three committees of the council on: hunger and food insecurity; nutrition and health; and, agriculture and food industry.

An Advisory Board to the Council of at least 15 members representing the issue areas of agriculture, anti-hunger, nutrition, food businesses, and labor, would also be created. The Governor would appoint at least 9 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.

In his Executive Order establishing the Council on Food and Nutrition Policy in the late 1980s, Governor Mario stated that “the basic goal of a food and nutrition policy is not only to provide adequate nutrition in an accessible and affordable manner, but also strive to achieve efficient growth in agricultural production, job generation, food security and expanded markets for goods.” The Commission had four goals:

1. To encourage diets that promotes good health (including ensuring the availability of a food supply that is of high quality, safe, affordable and nutritious)
2. To alleviate and ultimately prevent hunger in every household by assuring that all citizens have access to food through adequate purchasing power
3. To support an adequate food producing system in NYS, one which attains the state’s potential as a producer of nutritious foods and preserves the environmental resource base and labor supply that supports it.
4. To promote the development and economic viability of the state’s food processing, marketing and distribution industries.

Some key anti-hunger goals for a food policy council in NY could include:

- Strengthening the Federal nutrition assistance safety net by supporting the full and efficient use of the Food Stamp; WIC; School Lunch; School Breakfast; Summer Food Service; and Child and Adult Care Feeding Programs.
- Increasing economic and job security by helping low-income people obtain living wage jobs and attain self-sufficiency.
- Increasing the amount – and improving the nutritional quality – of supplemental food provided by nonprofit groups by aiding food recovery, gleaning, and food donation programs, while helping front-line agencies to coordinate and harmonize their services.
- Improving community food production and marketing by aiding projects that grow, process, and distribute food locally and regionally, including (but not limited to) farmers’ markets, farm-top-institution projects, community supported agriculture and school-community garden

programs. Bolstering the ability of such projects and entities to utilize food stamp and WIC benefits should also be part of the goal.

- Boosting education and awareness by increasing efforts to inform the public about nutrition, food safety, and community food security. Educating the public by using the "bully pulpit" of high-profile government offices to increase public awareness of the causes of food insecurity and highlight innovative community solutions to hunger.

Agriculture sector policy goals should also include: providing increased incentives for farmland preservation and agricultural production, and improving the state's food marketing potential. On a longer-term basis, these policies would also help improve security, save energy, increase food safety, and lower costs by reducing dependence on imported food.

Family farmers and poor New Yorkers would benefit from a stronger, sustainable food policy system. All consumers would benefit from affordable, locally grown, nutritious food. And the pending impact of climate change and "Peak Oil" makes it even more imperative that we strengthen our food supply. We urge you, as our next Governor to support a NYS Council on Food Policy.

We hope that you will embrace the concept of the Food Policy Council in your upcoming State of the State message and work with legislative leaders to enact the legislation enabling it. We encountered widespread support for the proposal last year in the legislature. The only hesitancy expressed was the individual legislators wanted to wait to see what the new Governor wanted to do.

Congratulations on your victory; we look forward to your support and to your leaving a healthier food system, and a healthier New York population, as part of your legacy.

Sincerely,

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Additional endorsers

Abundant Life Tabernacle, Bronx
Added Value, NYC
American Cancer Society, Brooklyn
American Farmland Trust
Bensonhurst Council of Jewish Organizations
Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church Food Program, Jamaica

BMS Family Health Center, Brooklyn
Center Against Domestic Violence, Brooklyn
Church Alive Development Corp., Bronx
Church of St. Joseph at Arimathea, White Plains
Church of the Holy Redeemer, Brooklyn
Church of the Pentecost, Bronx
Cornacopia Society, Jamaica
Deeper Life Charities, Inc., Bronx
East Rochester Community Resources Center,
FamilyCook Productions, NYC
Family Resource Center of Peekskill
First United Methodist Church of Jamaica
FoodChange, NYC
Food for All, Buffalo
Food Link, Rochester
Food Pantries for the Capital District
Food Pantry of Sts John, Paul and Clement, Mount Vernon
Food Systems Solutions, LLC
Garden of Prayer Soup Kitchen & Food Pantry, Bronx
Heavenly Vision C.C., Bronx
Holy Family Church, Syracuse
Honest Weight Food Coop, Albany
Hope For The Future Ministries, Farmingdale
Hunger Action Network of NYS
New York City Nutrition Education Network
Huntington Family Centers, Syracuse
Iglesia Ana de Salvacion ACM, Bronx
Imani House, Brooklyn
Jan Peek House, Peekskill
Jubilee Center, Utica
Just Food
Lexington Cooperative Market, Buffalo
Miracle Christian Center, Hempstead
Montefiore (MMC), Bronx
Mt. Vernon United Tenants
My Sisters Place/ Legal Center, Yonkers
Network of Religious Communities Food Pantries, Buffalo
New Hope Baptist Church, Newburgh
New York City Coalition Against Hunger
New York City Nutrition Education Network
NY Farms!
NY-SAGE (Coalition of Statewide Food Coops for Safe Food)
NY Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NYSAWG)
New York State Dietetic Association
New York State Farm Bureau
Northeast Organic Farm Association - NY
Nutrition Consortium of NYS
Oswego County Catholic Charities

Park Slope Food Coop, Safe Food Committee
Part of the Solution (POTS), Bronx
Perry Area Emergency
Primitive Christian Church, New York
Providence House, Brooklyn
RAIN, Bronx
Regional Farm & Food Project, Troy
Regional Food Bank of NE NY
Riverside-Salem UCC (United church of Christ)
RC Church of the Resurrection, Farmingville
Rochester Roots
Rural Opportunities Inc, Aktib
Salvation Army (Massena)
Samaritan Center, Syracuse
Sierra Club, Atlantic Chapter, Farm & Food Committee
Siloam Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn
Small Planet Institute
SP Washington Ave SDA Church, Bronx
Spoons Across America, NYC
St. Edmunds Youth Programs, Inc., Bronx
St. Francis of Assisi Church, Bronx
St. Joseph's Church, Babylon
St. Simon's Soup Kitchen, Kingston
The Community Place of Greater Rochester
The Family Counseling Center, Gloversville
The Hopeline, Bronx
Thorpe Family Residence, Bronx
Trinity Institution Homer Perkins Center, Albany
Ulster County Food Pantry Consortium
Union Presbyterian Church, New Windsor
Warwick Ecumenical Food Pantry
West Side Campaign Against Hunger, NYC
Wood Creek Herb Farm, Rome
World Hunger Year