

## **In the Farm Bill: Food Access for Underserved Communities**

### **Community Food Project (CFP) Competitive Grant Program**

First authorized in 1996, CFP is a competitive grant program administered by USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service. Since its inception, 240 community-based and other non-profit organizations have received grants that have enabled them to link rural and urban communities, create business opportunities for food producers, and increase access to local and healthy foods for consumers and school children.

While the Senate bill increases CFP's mandatory funding from \$5 million to \$10 million per fiscal year, the House Farm Bill does not continue mandatory funding and instead authorizes discretionary funding. As this is a critical ongoing program that supports access to food in underserved communities and USDA receives \$30 million in requests each year, it is critical that mandatory funding continue and for the House to accept at least \$10 million in mandatory funds.

### **Healthy Enterprise Development Program**

There are significant opportunities for expanding small and mid-sized enterprises that aggregate, process and distribute locally-produced foods to provide greater access to healthy and fresh products in urban and low income communities. The House and Senate bills both create a no-cost priority for Locally Produced Agricultural Products in the Rural Businesses and Industries Loan and Loan Guarantee program, which will encourage USDA to seek applications from entities that wish to develop such enterprises. Additionally, the Senate provided \$7 million in mandatory funding for a Healthy Food Enterprise Development Center to provide technical assistance and planning grants develop enterprise to improve food distribution and access in low-income communities. The House-passed version of a similar program was entitled, Healthy Food Urban Enterprise Development Program. The program provided technical assistance and planning grants to develop and assess challenges for retail opportunities in urban areas, specifically food deserts.

We ask the conferees to marry the House and Senate language for this critical, enterprise development program, re-insert "Urban" into the final passed title of the program, incorporate the Senate's more specific language for the loan and loan guarantee program, integrate the House provisions to target socially disadvantaged farmers and efforts to increase employment and environmental challenges in urban areas with regard to healthy food enterprise, and maintain the Senate's mandatory funding level.

### **Urban and Rural Food Desert Studies**

Many low-income communities—in urban centers, rural areas, and Tribal communities—have the highest rates of diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and obesity. These communities also have poor access to healthy, affordable, and fresh foods in retail grocery stores, which can limit the real healthy food choices available to our families and children.

Both the House and Senate bills call for a Food Access Study on the issue of "food deserts" in low-income communities. The Senate version is preferred because it requires a report on the study be submitted to Congress in one year and has more specific information about the issues that must be reviewed. Thus, we urge the conferees to adopt the Senate language, with a few modifications. It will require a USDA-led inter-agency review of factors contributing to lack of access to healthy foods and recommend ways to address these issues through existing government programs as well as private sector solutions.

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