



**Testimony of Joel Berg, Executive Director
New York City Coalition Against Hunger
before the New York City Council
Committee on Community Development
Tuesday, June 23, 2009, on**

**“Access to Fresh Food in NYC Neighborhoods and Associated Health,
Economic, and Community Impacts”**

Introduction

Good morning. I am Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger (NYCCAH), which represents the more than 1,200 food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City and the 1.3 million low-income New Yorkers forced to obtain food from these charities. This testimony is submitted on their behalf.

First, I want to thank Chairman Vann and all the committee members for having this vital hearing. It is crucial to look beyond the hype to see if the City’s anti-poverty policies are actually working.

Food Deserts in Low-Income Areas

Even if low-income New Yorkers could afford nutritious food, it is often simply unavailable in their neighborhoods. Low-income neighborhoods where it is difficult to find fresh and healthy food are increasingly referred to as “food deserts.” In Los Angeles County, in 2002, an average supermarket served 18,649 people, while the average supermarket in a low-income neighborhood served 27,986 people. The higher the concentration of poverty within a neighborhood, the fewer supermarkets there were. In ZIP codes where fewer than 10 percent of households lived below the federal poverty line, there were approximately 2.26 times as many supermarkets per household as there were in ZIP codes where the number of households living below the federal poverty line exceeded 40 percent. In addition, the higher the concentration of white people in a neighborhood, the greater number of supermarkets.

It is important to note that this is a national problem, and is both urban and rural. In neighborhoods without supermarkets, it is corner stores, bodegas, and convenience stores that fill in the gaps. Kentucky's *Louisville Courier-Journal* noted: "In most of western Louisville and parts of downtown, it's easier to buy a Twinkie than fresh broccoli. A lack of full-service supermarkets, low car ownership and an abundance of fast-food and higher-priced convenience stores are limiting access to fresh fruits and vegetables and nurturing poor eating habits."

In a study of rural Orangeburg County, South Carolina, researchers identified 77 stores in the county, of which only 16 percent were supermarkets and 10 percent were grocery stores. The remaining 74 percent were convenience stores. Low-fat/nonfat milk, apples, high-fiber bread, eggs, and smoked turkey were available in 75 percent to 100 percent of supermarkets and grocery stores versus four percent to 29 percent of convenience stores. Just 28 percent of all stores sold any of the fruits or vegetables included in the survey. Convenience stores also tended to charge more for items than did supermarkets.

The lack of supermarkets makes a concrete difference. Areas without a full range of markets are "obesogenic" (obesity producing). Four different studies have demonstrated a positive association between access to food stores and improved dietary choices. A study in four states found that areas with high numbers of supermarkets had lower rates of obesity while areas with higher numbers of convenience stores had higher levels of obesity. Nationwide, for every additional supermarket in a census tract, fruit and vegetable consumption increases by as much as 32 percent.

For people who rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program), the healthiest food choices can be even more difficult to access. Out of the 162,015 retail outlets in America authorized to accept SNAP benefits in 2007, only 2,010 were farmers' markets or produce stands. While it's certainly helpful that there are now more than 4,385 farmers' markets in the country—an 18 percent increase since 2004—only 10 percent of them accept food stamp benefits.

The New York City Coalition Against Hunger used computer-mapping technology to demonstrate that, like the rest of the nation, low-income neighborhoods in our city lack access to supermarkets, farmers' markets, and other sources of fresh produce and nutritious food. Focusing on the high-poverty neighborhoods of the South Bronx, Central Harlem, and Brownsville, Brooklyn, we found that fresh produce and other nutritious foods are often more difficult to access than more fattening junk foods and restaurant foods. As one example, Community Board District One in the South Bronx has about 90,000 residents, 45 percent of whom are below the poverty line. The district runs about 1.3 miles North-South and 1.5 miles East-West, very long distances if you travel by foot or by public transportation, as most people in the neighborhood do. In 2007, there was not a single supermarket of 2,500 square feet (a common minimal square footage to consider a store a "supermarket") or more in the entire district. Yet convenience stores, bodegas, fast food restaurants, and low-cost sit-down restaurants with

limited (mostly unhealthy) menus were plentiful. In just one part of the district, in ZIP code 10451, there were three McDonald's outlets.

Also in the Bronx, a community food assessment of the Melrose neighborhood conducted by the food rescue organization City Harvest found that even the supermarkets in the neighborhood didn't have a full array of nutritious food. Only one supermarket carried all twelve of the basic produce items listed in the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan. Another carried eleven out of twelve, and two local fruit markets each carried eight out of twelve. In addition, the neighborhood residents said they thought the produce sold was of a poor quality.

Obesity Kills

Poor, middle class, or wealthy, obesity has a detrimental impact upon human health, increasing the risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and many other serious ailments. But, as with much else, the impact upon low-income people is the most devastating. The link between obesity and diabetes is particularly strong, as the neighborhoods with the highest rates of diabetes are the neighborhoods with the highest rates of obesity and, not coincidentally, the highest rates of poverty and food insecurity. Nutrition-related diabetes has now reached epidemic proportions in the United States.

In New York City, deaths from diabetes skyrocketed by 71 percent between 1990 and 2003. African-American diabetics died at three times the rate of white New Yorkers with the disease, and Hispanic New Yorkers shouldered the greatest increase in death from diabetes since 1990—a rise of 169 percent. Residents of neighborhoods where diabetes was most prevalent—among them East Harlem, the South Bronx, and Brooklyn's Williamsburg and Bushwick (all of which are very low-income neighborhoods)—died of diabetes at seven times the rate of those in the least-affected parts of the city. They also were hospitalized 10 times more than those on the Upper East Side (a wealthy neighborhood). “It can be a risk factor if people are more likely to be overweight or obese and less physically active because they live in a particular neighborhood where they don't have access to resources such as parks and nutritious food,” said Dr. Shadi Chamany, the head of diabetes prevention and control for the city government.

Nationwide, because obesity plays a role in so many serious diseases, it increases health care costs by 36 percent and medication costs by 77 percent. Obesity now costs the country more in health care expenses than smoking.

Even though the stakes are so high, key actors in the system, including the medical profession, remain dangerously ignorant of how obesity, hunger, nutrition, and health interact. Dr. Nevan Scrimshaw, head of the Department of Nutrition and Food Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said in 1967 that: “Clinical nutrition is not even taught at most medical schools and is not adequately done in any of them.” This remains true today. When I spoke once to a group of second-year students at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine in New York, few of them had received extensive

training in nutrition. In contrast, agriculture students receive extensive training on how water and soil nutrients affect plants.

Out of the hundreds of courses at the Harvard Medical School in 2007, only four dealt with nutrition; out of those, three concerned nutrition in Latin America and one was about pediatric nutrition in the United States. Not one was about the nutrition of adult Americans. Yet the school has three courses on plastic surgery and four on sports medicine. It has 21 courses on oncology (cancer) and 27 courses on cardiology and vascular disease. It is curious that medical schools spend so much time on problems like heart disease and cancer, which are frequently caused by poor nutrition, but so little time on nutrition itself. If the medical profession doesn't focus more on nutrition, it is no wonder that the greater society doesn't. We need to change that.

Certainly one huge step toward addressing this spreading obesity epidemic would be to make sure that poor Americans around the country have better access to more affordable, nutritious foods. Far from a reason why we should dismiss hunger, obesity among low-income Americans should only motivate us further to identify and put a stop to it.

Family Farmers: An Endangered Species

It is worth considering one of the most pronounced trends in modern America that has inspired community food production organizing—the accelerating consolidation and corporate control of the entities that grow, process, transport, and sell our foods. Given the trouble our world has gotten into because oil (which, arguably, is not absolutely vital for human survival) is controlled by just a few colossal companies, imagine what calamities await us when the same is true for food. We're fast heading in that direction.

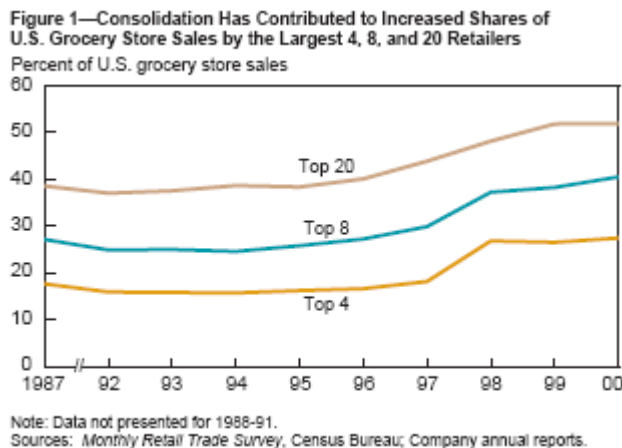
In 1990, 72 percent of all US beef was packed by the top four firms; by 2003, 84 percent of beef was packed by the same four companies. Between 1982 and 2004, the amount of flour milled by the top four companies rose from 40 percent to 63 percent. The percentage of pork packed by the top four firms nearly doubled between 1987 and 2003, raising their control to 63 percent of the market.

With smaller competitors shoved out of the way, massive processors and distributors snare an ever-increasing share of the food economy's dollars, and are free to pay small farmers less and less for their product. In 2007, out of a \$4.00 gallon of milk, dairy farmers received \$1.60; out of a pound of bread that retailed from \$2.49, farmers got 10 cents; out of two pounds of lettuce that retailed for \$1.79 cents, farmers received 28 cents; and out of one pound of sirloin steak that sold for \$7.99, farmers got 94 cents. The future of family farming in America is grim. According to the USDA, American farmers are more than four times as likely to be above the age of 65 as below the age of 34. About 27 percent of farm operators report their age as 65 years and older, compared to only seven percent of self-employed workers in other industries. Average farms were about three times as large in 2002 as in 1835. Small farms tend to make so little income today that households operating small farms typically receive substantial off-farm

income. For households operating limited-resource or retirement farms, more than half of their off-farm income comes from unearned sources—such as Social Security, pensions, dividends, interest, and rent—reflecting the advanced age of those operators. Small farmers are continuously exposed to greater financial risk than people in virtually any other industry: if there is too much or too little heat, too much or too little rain, frost, hail, or an infestation of insects, they can lose all of their crops. If food prices – which fluctuate more wildly than prices for most other things – plummet, farmers can lose their entire income for the year, and go further into debt. It is obvious why so many farmers need a second (and often third) source of income to survive.

Also, in a trend that should alarm everyone, the nation’s farmland is rapidly being devoured, transforming into condominium developments, golf courses, and shopping malls. Independent grocery stores are also disappearing. As Chart 1 shows, in just the 13-year period between 1987 and 2000, there was a tremendous consolidation in the grocery industry. Today most supermarkets are owned by a handful of chains, which are more likely to close stores in low-income communities and neighborhoods. While consumer prices sometimes drop in the fevered competition that leads up to consolidation, after other competition is driven out of business, prices often again increase.

Chart 1



Source: USDA Economic Research Service, *Food Review*, Summer/Fall 2002

The fortunes of farmers and consumers are wholly dependent upon each other. Farmers need strong consumers in order to remain economically healthy. Consumers need strong farmers to remain physically healthy, which of course, affects their economic health as well. The problem is that these connections are increasingly frayed.

People who work on these intersecting issues like to use the term “food systems,” a wonkish phrase that basically encompasses the entire interlocking web of food production, processing, distribution, and consumption—from farm to fork. Today’s food systems are dysfunctional, particularly in urban neighborhoods and rural towns with high poverty rates. Too many neighborhoods bear high costs of buying food, but don’t benefit from the income and economic growth associated with producing, processing, and selling

food. Neighborhood residents have to rely too much on their local bodegas (small corner grocery stores that carry a very limited selection of foods) or convenience stores, where it's usually easier to buy cigarettes, beer, and potato chips than whole-grain bread or fresh produce.

Grassroots Food Activists Fight Back: The Growth of the Community Food Security Movement

Community food security work, at its best, can bring new supermarkets into inner city neighborhoods; develop and mentor new farmers; promote nutrition education; establish new farmers' markets in low-income neighborhoods; launch urban farms; and start food-related small businesses. Generally (but not always) such projects use sustainable and organic growing methods.

Exciting and innovative food security projects abound. I even visited one, in the basement of a building on the urban campus at Brooklyn College, in which a professor is experimenting with ways to help low-income people farm their own edible fish.

One of the hallmarks of the community food security movement is creating ways through which small agricultural producers can market directly to consumers, cutting out profit-sapping intermediaries. One popular way of doing this is creating Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms that enable consumers to provide up-front cash to purchase shares of that year's output from the farm. The shareholders then receive a portion of what the farm produces each week over the growing season. This reduces the risk for the farmer and provides fresh, delicious (and sometimes competitively priced) food for the shareholders.

Other popular methods of direct marketing are increasing nationwide: farmers' markets, online sales of farm products, and farm stands. Much work has also gone into helping farmers directly sell their products to school systems and other large institutions, earning money that can potentially dwarf their combined income from all other sources.

A Caution on the Scope and Scale of Community Food Projects

But before I detail in the section below the success of some community food security projects, I want to be very clear about the limits of such small-scale projects. While many "foodies" hold the idealistic that all food should be nutritious, organically-grown, and delicious – too often those beliefs are taken to an extreme that demonstrates a pronounced class bias. Some of these advocates—as well as their brethren in the related "slow foods" crusade – even imply that one must: purchase food that is both local and organic; grow your own food in gardens; reject any food that is processed; refuse to shop at chain supermarkets; spurn food from major manufacturers; scorn all fast food; and cook all your meals from scratch, preferably very slowly. These assertions often ignore the reality that people in poverty rarely have the time and money to do all those things. Perhaps the most egregious example of this attitude is the assertion that increasing food prices are a good thing because they deter people from buying junk food.

It's worth examining all those assumptions. While the official USDA distinction between foods that are organic and non-organic is a bit fuzzy, most people take it as an article of faith that organic food is automatically healthier for humans than its non-organic counterparts. Yet, while some studies show that organic food *may* be marginally healthier, the Mayo Clinic declared: "No conclusive evidence shows that organic food is more nutritious than is conventionally grown food.... Some people buy organic food to limit their exposure to [pesticide] residues. Most experts agree, however, that the amount of pesticides found on fruits and vegetables poses a very small health risk."

Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of good environmental reasons to buy organic food, and, if the crops are actually grown by small farmers who pay their workers a living wage, there are also excellent social justice reasons to do so. I buy organic food whenever I can (much of it from a glorious farmers' market down the street from where I live), but I can *afford* to do so. The point is that many families *can't* afford to shop that way because organic produce is almost always more expensive than the non-organic kind. People who give the impression that it's better to have no fruit or vegetables at all than it is to have non-organic produce are doing low-income families a grave disservice. After all, there are mountains of scientific evidence that people who eat large amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables (whether organic or non-organic) are likely to significantly reduce their risks of diabetes, obesity, heart disease, cancer, and stroke. In contrast, most scientific studies indicate, that if people eat non-organic produce throughout their lives, the trace pesticides on their fruit *may* very slightly increase their chance of getting cancer down the line, especially if produce is not washed before eating. Less than perfect produce is *far* healthier than no produce at all.

There is also an obsession among food activists for food that is locally grown. Certainly, it is better to purchase food grown as close to home as possible. Such food tends to be fresher and of course, less fuel is used to transport it. But writer Sarah Murray has made the point that some food grown farther away could potentially be *more* environmentally friendly than food grown far closer—if the food at the further distance was grown in a way that was less environmentally harmful than was the local food. Additionally, local food is just as likely to be harvested by exploited immigrant farm workers as food grown somewhere else. Simply being local doesn't mean a farm is a social justice utopia. (After all, the worst-polluting, labor-abusing behemoth farm operations are "local" *somewhere*).

Plus, we must remember that the international food distribution system, for all its vast faults, does have certain benefits, including consumer health benefits. When people in frigid Northern cities in the dead of winter can buy fresh fruit from Florida or Chile, it is good for both their bodies and their spirits. Also, given how many Americans are immigrants, the international food system does play a helpful role by allowing people to eat foods from their homelands. (In contrast, if you live in New York City and are a West Indian immigrant, if you followed the strict dictates of buy-local advocates, you'd never be able to have plantains or coconuts again, which would be a pretty big denial of

your heritage). Some of the most extreme food advocates forget that good nutrition and sustainable living should be about independent choices and overall balance.

While increasing the consumption of organic and locally grown foods are important goals, too many community food security advocates act like they are the *only* goals. Sometimes they even scoff at the notion that lower food prices could ever be a good thing, because they believe that would automatically mean that the environment was harmed and small farmers were shafted. Even if all those things were the case, we can't ignore the fact that lower food prices *are* better for low- and middle-income Americans, and that the most nutritious food is often the most expensive food. As Raj Patel wrote in his book *Stuffed and Starved*, "To be able to go on a culinary odyssey in the first place, and to be truly at liberty to savor food...the majority of people need that passport to all other freedoms—money."

When I worked at the USDA, I briefly led the federal government's efforts to expand community gardens. The New York City Coalition Against Hunger has provided AmeriCorps national service participants and community volunteers to aid community gardens. I clearly agree that it would be helpful for more poor communities to be able to grow more of their own food. Food-producing community gardens improve diets by increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, reduce crime by turning empty lots into safe spaces, teach people about nutrition in a hands-on manner, and generally improve the community spirit in neighborhoods in which they are located.

But we need to be mindful of how impractical community gardens are as a mass response to hunger and poor nutrition. In a 2008 essay, Michael Pollan wrote that everyone should be "growing some—even just a little—of your own food. Rip out your lawn, if you have one, and if you don't—if you live in a high-rise, or have a yard shrouded in shade—look into getting a plot in a community garden." He then said that getting your equipment and tools should not involve "too many drives to the garden center." Pollan seems to assume that everyone has a car and lives somewhere where there even *is* a garden center. Surely, those who have the ability and desire to do so should grow more of their own food. But the suggestion that *everyone* should participate in a community garden is absurd. Pollan places the burden of gardening on all individuals themselves, glossing over the reality that most poor people don't have control of land, and that remaining plots of urban garden land are often already fully used. He also overlooks the fact that poor people don't have money for garden tools, seeds, water, etc. He seems to assume that massive amounts of extra land and supplies will somehow magically appear for anyone who wants to garden.

Mark Winne is one of the founders of the Community Food Security Coalition, and one of the strongest, most consistent voices for ensuring that community food security work always meets the needs of low-income people. Because he founded so many community gardens, he knows their benefits—and their limitations—better than anyone. In his 2008 book, *Closing the Food Gap*, Winne wrote: "Having witnessed many sincere but ultimately failed attempts to transform dirt, water, and seed into food, I tend to look somewhat askance at those who suggest that more of us, if not all of us, should

‘grow their own.’ Claims of self reliance come dangerously close to self-righteous pontificating.”

In a piece on community gardens in Albany, New York, Marlene Kennedy, the Business Editor for the *Times Union*, wrote: “Rather than working hard to increase participation in food and nutrition assistance programs, why not try to reduce the need for such aid? Instead of spreading the word about food stamps and the urban poor, why not give them a way to grow their own food?” Her article quoted Matthew Schueler, education center planner for the Capital District Community Gardens, as saying: “Access to food stamps does not imply access to healthy food. What our food programs may need more than expansion is an adaptation to the reality of the movement. Our food policy is killing more people with empty calories than by withholding meals.” Doesn’t that sound almost exactly like what the far Right says about poor people?

These arguments fail to consider that food stamps promote self-sufficiency by helping people stay in the workforce and by giving them increased purchasing power to support their families. Perhaps the most preposterous argument is that people should work in a community garden *instead* of getting food stamps. Albany has a thriving community garden scene, and, as of 2008, had 19 community gardens, including a total of 379 plots. Generously assuming that each plot provided enough produce for a family of four, the gardens could (at least during the handful of months that food could be harvested in Albany’s short growing season) theoretically have helped feed up to 1,500 people. Yet at the same time, Albany had a population of 89,000, of which 30,000 (27 percent) lived in poverty. That means that no more than five percent of the poverty population, or no more than two percent of the entire population of the city, could possibly have gotten food from the gardens. Let’s say, for the sake of further argument, that each and every garden plot was phenomenally productive, creating \$100 worth of produce each over the course of a season, that would have generated \$40,000 worth of produce. Compare that to the Food Stamp Program, which spent more than \$15 million in Albany that year, more than 370 times the value of the garden food. Even if the number and productivity of gardens were dramatically increased, they still would not even scratch the surface of the nation’s true food needs. Saying that seasonal gardens should replace a year-round government safety net is ridiculous and counterproductive.

It is also wrong to imply, as some food security advocates do, that the Food Stamp Program increases obesity by giving low-income Americans extra funds to purchase what the advocates deem food of sub-standard nutritional quality. Yet a major USDA study published in 2007 found no significant difference between the body mass index of people who received food stamps and people who were equally poor who did not.

Another challenge facing the community food security movement is that its overall scale is still so tiny. Many community food security projects are small, boutique efforts through which yuppies have been able to pay sky-high prices for small amounts of pristine, organic greens—but they haven’t fed masses of people. Some in the movement even resist ramping up the size and scope of their projects, as if that would be selling out

the “small is beautiful” ethos. But unless such efforts grow dramatically, the movement won’t come even close to significantly challenging the dominant, corporate-run food system.

One of the largest and most innovative community food security groups in the nation, Growing Power in Milwaukee, created a ten-story glass building that will grow fish, fruit, herbs, and vegetables that they say will provide enough food for 10,000 people. That’s truly a remarkable accomplishment, and those 10,000 people will surely lead healthier and happier lives because of it. But Milwaukee has a population of about 600,000, so even one of the largest such projects in the nation is feeding less than two percent of the population of its own hometown. Yes, we need to expand such efforts nationwide, but until we do, we shouldn’t scoff at people who still need to get their food through the dominant food outlets—mainstream supermarkets, restaurants, and convenience stores.

The Link Between Food Security and Anti-Hunger Work

Despite all my reservations about how some community food security work is carried out or communicated, I *do* think that local food production and marketing should play a much greater role in our fight against hunger. Such work *is* empowering to all people—but especially low-income people—involved in it.

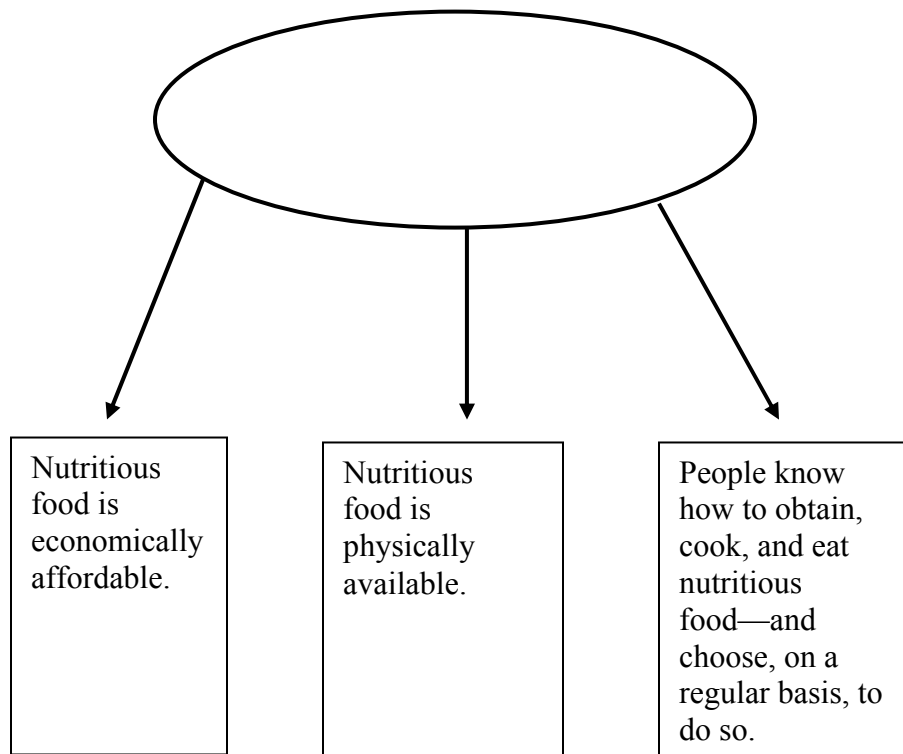
Just as I rebuke food security advocates who are disdainful of the need to make food affordable and to fight hunger, any anti-hunger advocates who too frequently look down their noses at the community food security movement just because most of the projects are still small-scale. If anti-hunger advocates agree that such projects are helpful but believe their scale is too small to make a meaningful difference, the most logical response should be to help them expand. The bottom line is that the continuing rhetorical and philosophical fights between community food security and anti-hunger advocates are both silly and counterproductive. If they can’t even agree with each other, they’ll never be able to make the changes necessary society-wide. Both sides need to embrace the reality that we are all in this together.

The Three Legs of Good Community Nutrition

As Chart 2 demonstrates, for a community to have good nutrition, three things need to happen: food must be affordable; food must be physically available; and individuals and families must have enough education to know how to eat better and regularly choose to perform the extra work necessary to do so. If you don’t have all three legs of this table, the table will collapse. Yet all too often projects only focus on one of the three. Many provide nutrition education, lecturing people that they should eat better, but neither make food more available nor more affordable and are therefore destined to fail. Sometimes, food is brought into low-income neighborhoods, but at prices too high for most people to afford. That won’t work either. The *only* way to truly succeed is to focus on all three aspects of this problem at once.

Chart 2

The Three Legs of Good Community Nutrition



Once food is affordable and available and people are properly educated on how to obtain and prepare it in a time-efficient manner with equipment they already have in their homes, I think it's perfectly fair to focus on the need for parents (including even the lowest-income parents) to take personal responsibility for feeding themselves and their children more nutritiously. If society does its job, so should parents.

To achieve all those objectives, we all need to do a better job at educating the public on the central role that food should play in community development and anti-poverty efforts. The former Chair of the House Agriculture Committee, Congressman Kiki de la Garza (D-TX), used to quiz audiences with a riddle: "When does a nuclear submarine need to rise out of the water?" People would guess that it would rise when it needed air, but he explained that it could turn the water into oxygen. Others would guess that it would rise when it ran out of fuel, but he would then explain that the nuclear fuel would last for years. When no one could guess, he'd answer the riddle: "When it ran out of food."

Given that food is a basic human need, it is amazing that people almost always failed to figure out his riddle. More broadly, it is amazing how often food is overlooked in so many vital policy discussions, as well as in pop culture. For example, the earliest version of the classic computer game SimCity enabled you to design an entire city. While the game could help you decide where a city would have a football stadium or a museum, it didn't even allow you to consider where food stores or markets would be. Likewise, for most of US history, real-life professional urban and other planners usually ignored food issues in their grand schemes. A prime example of this is how food issues were almost entirely absent from the Mayor's Plan NYC 2030.

We need an entirely different mindset. Food should be a central organizing tool of neighborhood development, uniting communities through community gardens, farmers' markets, nutrition education, supermarkets, food cooperatives, and food-related small businesses. Community gardens can reclaim empty lots from drug-pushers. Food businesses can create jobs and raise community income. Farmers' markets can give neighborhoods central gathering spaces and nurture a feeling of the "public commons" that is so often lost in today's society.

Community Supported Agriculture Projects in Low-Income Neighborhoods

In the past, too many CSA projects either included low-income shareholders as an afterthought or ignored them entirely. But the Coalition has worked for the past three years with Just Food, the Hunger Action Network of NYS (HANNYS), the New York City Council on the Environment, and the United Way of New York City on the Craig Murphey Anti-Hunger Partnership, a CSA Project that has placed the needs of low-income neighborhoods at its centerpiece. Together, we have helped to start three CSAs in underserved communities in West Harlem, Long Island City and Flatbush.

Each CSA has two components, an Emergency Food Program (EFP) Institutional CSA (Local Produce Link) involving multiple EFPs (soup kitchens and food pantries) and a Family CSA involving roughly 50-60 full shareholder households per CSA.

Each week for the 20 week growing season, recipients of both program enjoyed a variety of delicious and nutritious, fresh herbs and vegetables from two small, organic farms upstate.

The Family style CSA, a proven mixed-income model, allows for many payment options to maximize the participation of low-income people. The CSAs provided stipends, accepted food stamp/SNAP benefits and created a Revolving Loan Fund. Additionally those who receive government assistance are allowed to set up a bi-weekly payment plan, and can pay with food stamps if they choose. In the first two years of the project, those paying with food stamp/SNAP benefits were given a 10% discount. Of the 78 families in the West Harlem CSA 21% were in the lowest payment tier, 29% were in the middle tier and 50% were in the high tier. Of the 88 families in the Long Island City CSA 45% were in the low tier, 10% were mid income, and about 45% were high income. Half share holders took home about 7.5 lbs of food per week. 11,368

pounds of produce was delivered to the LIC and 9,017 pounds of fresh produce was delivered to the West Harlem Family style CSA. All vegetables leftover from the family style distribution were donated to area food pantries and soup kitchens. Each EFP in the West Harlem CSA received about 16,626 pounds of fresh vegetables. The EFPs connected with the Long Island City CSA received 17,250 pounds of produce.

In the third year, in order to further increase the participation of low-income families, the Coalition raised extra money to further reduce the payments for low-income families using food stamp/SNAP benefits and for families willing to volunteer extra hours. Those steps further improved the income diversity of this vital project, which is providing a model of how to simultaneously aid small farmers, fight hunger, and fight obesity.

A New Food Security Public Policy Agenda

In food security issues as with hunger issues, in order for fundamental change to occur, government must be a key player. In the late 1990s, when Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman launched the USDA Community Food Security Initiative, and placed me in charge of it, most community food security adherents were highly skeptical, worrying that we were simply trying to co-op the movement for nefarious ends. By the time the Bush administration took office and summarily ended the effort (which we had only just begun a few years earlier), I hope we had won over most of the doubters with our work, which gave out million of dollars in Community Food Project grants each year to aid food security efforts, named Coordinators of Community Food Security in all fifty states, boosted community gardens, and ramped-up technical assistance efforts to such projects. The bottom line is that, if true progress is to occur, government must take the lead.

First and foremost, we reiterate our belief that the tow single most important steps necessary to improve food access for low-income New Yorkers are to:

- 1) Create and implement a serious plan to create a maintain living wage, unionized jobs in every low-income neighborhood of the City.
- 2) Simply access to federal nutrition assistance benefits, by ending the situation in which New York City is now the only place in the entire country ion which no one may receive food stamp/SNAP benefits before they are finger-printed electronically, and by proving free breakfasts to every student in each first period class.

Beyond that, we need a comprehensive new community food security public policy agenda:

- President Obama should re-launch such an initiative immediately and work with Congress to give it serious resources. The President and Congress should also work together to more fully integrate these efforts with the USDA nutrition assistance programs. One way to accomplish this would be to dramatically expand the ability for WIC and food stamp participants to use their benefits at farm stands, farmers' markets,

CASs, and street vendors that sell fruit and vegetables. They should work together to pass a Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Bill this year that fully funds efforts to meet the President's pledge to end child hunger by 2015.

- All levels of government should increase their funding for nonprofit groups running effective community food security projects.
- The President and Congress must end corporate agriculture welfare, and focus resources on aiding truly struggling small farmers, particularly those growing fresh fruits and vegetables. The federal government should also better protect drinking water by increasing aid for conservation measures on small farms.
- The President and Congress—as well as states, localities, and tribal governments—should further procurement rules to make it easier for school districts, public hospitals, prisons, and all other public institutions to purchase food directly from small farmers. Also, more of the food commodities purchased by the government for soup kitchens and food pantries should be purchased directly from small farmers.
- All levels of government should also use a combination of tax breaks, grants, land swaps and other innovative efforts to preserve farmland. Localities must preserve existing—and set-aside new—land for urban farms and gardens and farmers' markets. New York City should require all large real estate development projects to include plans for food, including rooftop gardens and greenhouses, affordable supermarkets (staffed by employees paid a living wage), and farmers' markets in public spaces. Since the big money in agriculture is made from processing, all levels of government will want to support the creation of local and regional processing facilities.

Government can also do a much better job in encouraging new supermarkets in low-income neighborhoods and in preventing existing food stores from going out of business. A study conducted by the City of New York found that: “The city is vastly underserved by local grocery stores. NYC has the potential to capture approximately \$1 billion in grocery spending lost to suburbs.”

Pennsylvania has provided a model of how the nation can bring more food stores to underserved areas. The Food Trust, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit group, as well as other organizations, collaborated with the State of Pennsylvania to form a public-private partnership to create the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, which gives supermarkets a secure source of funding, as well as technical assistance, to locate in low-income areas. The initiative was well funded—with \$120 million in combined governmental and private money in 2008—and committed resources to 50 supermarket projects in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Eddystone, Gettysburg, and other cities and towns across Pennsylvania. New York State and City have recently launched similar efforts, but it is too early to tell if they are successful.

As critical as I have been of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg on food stamps and anti-poverty issues, I must be equally effusive in my praise for him on food

quality issues. At the urging of advocates, he appointed the city's first-ever Food Policy Coordinator. The city launched a "Healthy Bodegas Initiative" to help small food stores increase the availability of fresh produce and low-fat milk. The city created a "Health Bucks" program to give low-income New Yorkers more purchasing power at farmers' markets. In 2008, Bloomberg, as well as the City Council, put their weight behind a controversial (yet courageous) proposal to create a "Green Carts" program to place fresh fruit and vegetable vendors in underserved neighborhoods. The local food industry bitterly opposed that effort, hiring lobbyists to make two central claims, which just happened to contradict each other: one, that low-income people were too ignorant to know that they needed to buy fresh produce, so the initiative would fail due to lagging sales; and two, that the competition from the Green Carts would be so great that it would put existing food stores out of business. The initiative is in its beginning stages, so it's too early to tell whether it will work or not, but it's certainly worth a try.

That being said, we should rapidly assess the success of the project and fine tune it where necessary. Just the other day, I met a Green cart vendor who was in a legal neighborhood to vend, but literally across the street from an excellent store that sold vast amount of produce that happened to be in a non-Green cart zone. The vendor told me that he had consistently been losing money because his customers had "no money." I'd be the first to say that one vendor is hardly representative, but I do think we should consider improving the Green carts program:

- 1) Amending the City law to make it clearer that vendors should be deeper into actual under-served communities.
- 2) Providing more technical assistance and food purchasing aid to vendors.
- 3) Quickly enabling all green carts to accept food stamp/SNAP benefits.
- 4) Expanding "health bucks" at green carts

Taken together, those steps could go a long way towards bring healthy, affordable food into New York's low-income neighborhoods. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.