

Community Food Security Coalition

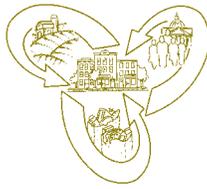


# FEDERAL POLICY ADVOCACY HANDBOOK

Barrett Ebright, Congressional Hunger Fellow  
In collaboration with Sarah Borron, CFSC Policy Associate

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2007 Edition edited by Steph Larsen, CFSC Policy Organizer



## COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY COALITION Federal Policy Advocacy Handbook

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CFSC staff members: Raquel Bournhonesque, Heather Fenney, Marion Kalb, Andy Fisher,  
Thomas Forster, Jeanette Abi-Nader, Kai Siedenburg, Mark Winne, Maya Hagege

Kathy Ozer, National Family Farm Coalition  
Bonnie Hallam, The Food Trust  
Anim Steel, The Food Project  
Pam Roy, Farm to Table  
Margaret Krome, National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture  
Martin Bailkey, CFSC Urban Agriculture Committee  
Kristin Anderson, Congressional Hunger Center

Community Food Security Coalition

[www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)

P.O. Box 209 Venice, CA 90294

Tel: 310-822-5410

Fax: 310-822-1440

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Throughout this handbook, some abbreviations are used to ease in the flow and readability of the document. These abbreviations are listed below. A glossary is also provided to include definitions of federal policy language appears throughout the text.

**Guide to Abbreviations:**

CFSC = Community Food Security Coalition

USDA= United States Department of Agriculture

WIC FMNP= Women, Infants and Children Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

SR FMNP= Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

CFP= Community Food Projects Grants Program

## LETTER FROM THE Community Food Security Coalition Executive Director

Dear Reader:

When you hear the word “policy,” what comes to mind? Shady back-room deals? Nerdy wonks speaking in tongues, spewing acronyms and jargon? Do your eyes glaze over? Wonder what it has to do with your community? How can you, as an individual or representative of a small non-profit group, make a difference in such a vast political sea? Public policy is nothing but decision-making by governments, and in this country, governments respond to mobilized and organized citizens. Citizen pressure can and has been the driving force behind virtually every piece of progressive legislation or social program in recent memory: civil rights legislation, equal rights for women, environmental laws, and nutrition programs. Even within our community food security movement, public pressure on legislators was key to passing the law that led to the creation of the Community Food Projects Program. The result? Over \$30 million will be distributed to community groups between 1996 by the time the legislation expires in 2007. That’s a pretty darn good return on investment for the time it takes us to collectively make some phone calls, visit some Senators, and send in some faxes. Not that working on policy is easy or success is always guaranteed. In fact, it can be downright frustrating. But, policy advocacy is simply too important to not spend at least some of your time on it. Here are four good reasons for doing so:

- ✓ It’s your money. You pay taxes and you get to have a voice in how those taxes are spent. It’s really that simple.
- ✓ The potential impact of policy is too important not to. Policy is perhaps the best tool we have at our disposal for increasing the scope and reach of our efforts to transform the food system. Government resources and regulations can have a far greater impact in a shorter time frame than almost anything else we can do.
- ✓ It’s an investment in your future. Corporations dedicate resources to research and development. Farmers plant trees in the hopes of harvesting a fruit crop in the future. Both of these groups do so because they know that a little money and effort now will reap potentially large rewards in the future. Policy advocacy may take a while to bear fruit, but when it does, it can be a mighty crop.
- ✓ If you don’t, someone else will. Often that someone else is your political enemy, trying to roll back the gains you have already won. Without a vigilant advocacy community, such basics we have come to rely on like school lunches, clean water and air laws, and civil rights laws would have been eradicated or severely curtailed. Policy is not just about passing laws or working in Washington, DC. Policy happens at all levels of government, from your neighborhood council to the World Trade Organization. It can take multiple forms, such as working with schools to purchase food from local farmers, or convincing your city government to support farmers’ markets by closing off streets. At its best, policy advocacy is about empowering individuals to act collectively to have a greater voice in their government. In our movement, it’s about government programs and regulations that support family farmers, end hunger, and foster healthy individuals, communities and landscapes. It’s about taking back the food system from those who have made it unfair, unsustainable and unhealthy.

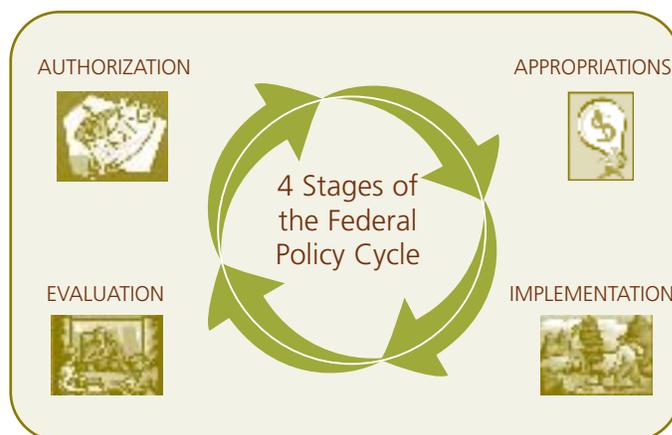
This handbook is a vital tool in that effort. It will provide you with the knowledge of the policy process so that you can become a more effective advocate for your interests. CFSC wants to hear your voice in its policy discussions! We hope that this handbook will provide you with the necessary tools to become an active player in both the advocacy process and in shaping the community food security movement’s policy agenda. The 2007 Farm Bill is here, and other policy decisions demand our attention as well. Your participation at all levels of the federal policy process is key to the movement’s success.

Andy Fisher  
Executive Director  
Community Food Security Coalition

## SECTION 1: Basics of the Federal Policy Cycle

### Introduction

As groups and individuals working at the local level, many of you may have experience with locally implemented federal programs or have used federal funding for community level projects. This section will outline the basics of how federal programs are started, funded, and implemented. As the diagrams show, there are four major steps in the federal policy process with which it is important to be familiar: authorization, appropriation, implementation, and evaluation. There is, of course, much more that goes on behind the scenes—the federal policy process is never quite as neat, orderly, or timely as the diagrams suggest. For example, it may take many years to get a piece of legislation authorized, and more still before a new program is funded and implemented. Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that federal policy is not created without input from many different sources, including you! A policy idea that becomes legislation can be generated from grassroots activists, local or national advocacy groups, the Administration, or a Congressional legislator and their staff who identified a problem and a federal policy idea as a possible solution.



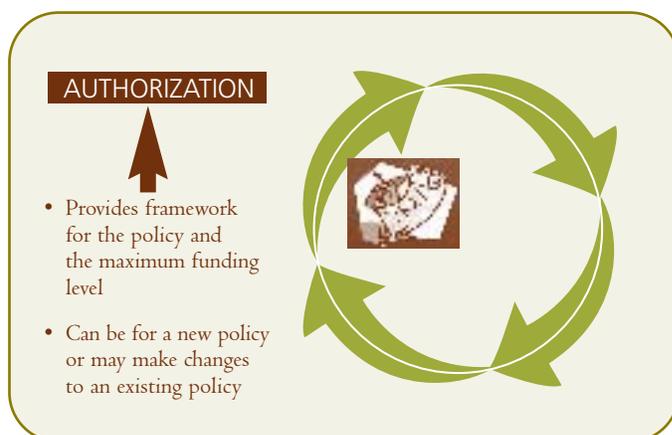
### Authorization

Authorization is a formal way of saying that a policy idea is turned into law by putting it into a bill at the request of a Congressional legislator. Sometimes the authorization is for a new policy program, but in other cases the legislation makes changes to an already existing federal program. The legislation may create a permanent program or one that expires after a certain length of time and needs to be renewed. If the bill expires, it must be reauthorized on either an annual or multi-year basis, thereby providing a time for changes to the program to be made.

The process of authorization starts when a member of Congress introduces a bill. Bills are often co-sponsored by other members of Congress. It is then sent for consideration to the Congressional committee that has jurisdiction over the issue in the legislation. The committee goes through a process called “mark-up,” where changes can be made to the bill and the committee votes on whether or not to send the bill before the whole Senate or House of Representatives for a vote. Sometimes bills are introduced as a part of a group of bills to be considered together for inclusion in a larger bill, such as the Farm Bill or the Energy Bill, rather than one bill at a time. These groups of bills are called “omnibus bills.” If the bill gets voted

### Past Federal Policy Successes For the Community Food Security Movement

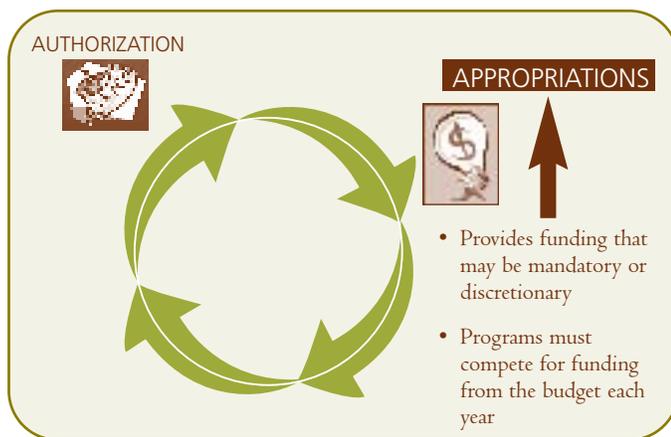
- ✓ Congress created the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) in 1992.
- ✓ The Community Food Projects (CFP) grant program was authorized by Congress in the 1996 Farm Bill, and funding was increased from \$2.5 million to \$5 million in the 2002 Farm Bill.
- ✓ In 1999, United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Community Food Security Initiative spurred inter-agency action to integrate community food security into many of its programs.
- ✓ In 2000, Congress created the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (SR FMNP), providing vouchers to seniors to use at local farmers’ markets. SR FNMP increase market opportunities for farmers and access to healthy foods for seniors.
- ✓ The Farm to Cafeteria program, authorized in the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, is the latest federal program that CFSC, its members, and partner organizations are working hard for.



out of committee, it goes to the floor for a vote. Both the House of Representatives and Senate must pass the bill, and then it goes through a process called “conference,” where members of the House of Representatives and Senate negotiate portions of the two different bills until they are identical. Then both the House and Senate vote on the identical bills again. The President must sign the bill for it to become law, but in some cases, the president vetoes a bill. The House and Senate can override the veto with a two-thirds majority vote, and the bill still becomes a law. If Congress passes the bill, a new law is created, but it must go through a separate process to be funded and implemented.

## Appropriations

Once a bill becomes a law, the next step is for Congress to decide which programs will be funded and how much money each will receive. There are a tremendous number of authorized programs that need to be funded each year. A new program must compete with other existing programs for available funding from the budget, often leaving many new programs unfunded or under-funded.



## Types of Funding

The funding in the federal government is typically divided into two types—discretionary and mandatory.

- ✓ **Mandatory Funding:** When a law is passed, some programs are designed as mandatory, meaning they automatically get funded at a certain amount each year. This happens when members of Congress decide that a program so important, it should receive money every year instead of having to compete for it. Entitlement programs, such as Food Stamps and Medicare, receive as much money as it takes to provide benefits for eligible people who apply. The amount of money an entitlement program receives thus varies from year to year depending on need, but it is always guaranteed what it needs. Some mandatory programs are not entitlement

programs, but instead they automatically receive a set amount of money every year. The Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program is currently a mandatory program, and from 2002 to 2007 received \$5 million annually. Congress does on occasion not fully fund a mandatory program, as has been the case with the Conservation Security Program, a program passed in the last Farm Bill to reward farmers for sustainable practices. Mandatory programs can be cut during tight fiscal times, or because the members of Congress currently in power don't want to fund them. Remember that advocacy organizations are a good resource for questions about the funding status of specific programs.

- ✓ **Discretionary Funding:** Programs that are funded through discretionary spending rely on the House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations Committees to renew funding for them each year. Congress could never fund every discretionary program that is authorized, and therefore must decide which programs to fund and how much money each will receive. It is common for a program to be authorized for a certain level of funding but receive much less. Within an appropriations bill, members of Congress often make requests to set aside discretionary money to fund special projects in the states or districts they represent. In other words, money is “earmarked” for a specific local or state project. You may also hear this type of funding referred to as “pork.” In recent years, earmarks have been the cause of much controversy and have been seen as a sign of the corruption plaguing Congress. Attempts have been made to reduce the number of earmarks attached to bills, and some members of Congress refuse to use them altogether.

## The Budget

Every February, the Administration puts out its recommendations to Congress regarding the budget for the next fiscal year. Typically from March until May the Appropriations Committees, whose job it is to determine funding levels for government programs, meet and hold hearings at which federal agencies present reports and defend the requests made in the President's budget. Congress meanwhile passes its own budget, which sets limits for how much funding there is to divide. While the Congressional budget sets guidelines for spending, the appropriations process does not always follow these guidelines.

From June until September, the full appropriations committees meet and the appropriations bills are written and sent to the floor in both the House and Senate for a vote. Ideally, Congress passes 13 appropriations bills for the next fiscal year by October 1st, however it is rare that all are passed



in this timeline. In 2006, for example, the appropriations process for fiscal year 2007 (FY '07) was not completed before the midterm elections, and Congress passed a continuing resolution to keep funding levels temporarily the same as FY '06. In 2005, the total federal budget was \$2.4 trillion, spending 43% of the budget on discretionary programs such as education, housing, international assistance, and defense. All federal discretionary spending occurs through 13 annual appropriation bills. The

other 57% of the budget was spent on mandatory programs including the largest three entitlement programs: Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare.

### Implementation

After Congress passes a law that includes an authorization for a program and funding is appropriated for the program, a federal agency such as USDA writes the specific rules of how the program will be implemented, or carried out. The federal agency may decide to gather public feedback on the rules, usually through a thirty or sixty day public comment period. Proposed rules are published in the Federal Register, which is now accessible on-line (see resource list). Federal agency staff carry out the program, often in partnership with state and local agencies. The effects of legislation are felt throughout communities, where individuals and local organizations often participate in the program.

### Evaluation

While federal agencies don't always evaluate programs under their jurisdiction, evaluation is nonetheless a vital aspect of the federal policy cycle. Formal evaluation of implemented programs can happen at many different levels. Sometimes there is a mandate by Congress, written in the authorizing legislation, for evaluation of the program. This mandate may or may not include funding to accomplish it. Sometimes the federal agency sets aside money within the program to conduct formal evaluation, and other times evaluation is contracted out to a third party. Regardless of how it is done, evaluation produces a formal

### Two Major Food System Bills

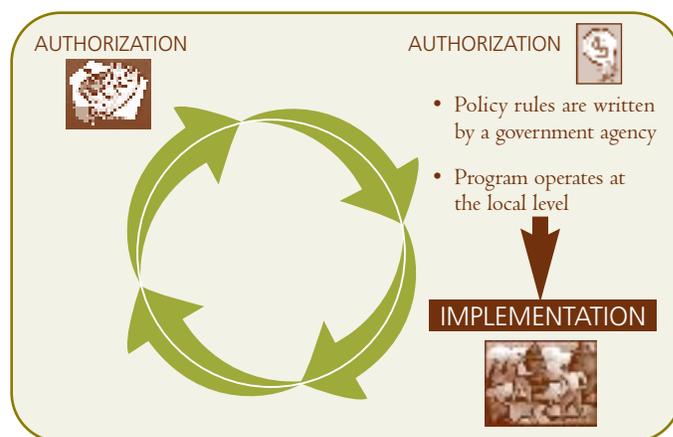
Many of USDA's programs must be renewed every five years to keep them going. The Farm Bill covers many of the agriculture and nutrition programs, and the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act covers child nutrition programs specifically. These bills are broad packages of many proposals for new programs and changes to existing ones. Dealing with these large "reauthorizations" allows Congress to concentrate on a major issue and look at it in the big picture, rather than disparate single bills on the same issue considered at different times. Both bills are separately reauthorized about every five years.

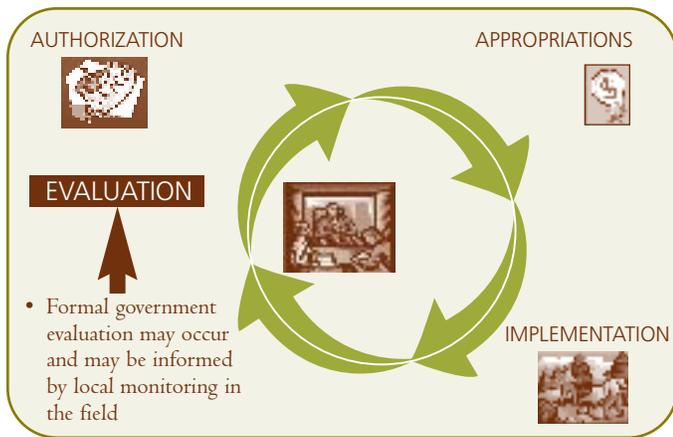
#### Some Programs Currently in the Farm Bill

- ✓ Food Stamps
- ✓ Sustainable Agriculture Research Education (SARE)
- ✓ Conservation Security Program
- ✓ Federal Farm Programs
- ✓ WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs
- ✓ Community Food Project Competitive Grant Program

#### Some Programs Currently in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act:

- ✓ Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- ✓ National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs
- ✓ Summer Food Service Program
- ✓ WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program
- ✓ Farm to Cafeteria





assessment of the program, and local groups and individuals, like you, can provide valuable information from your direct experience with it.

Monitoring the effects of a federal program at the local level can also be helpful to national advocacy groups that may be

tracking the effects of federal legislation. Sometimes an agency may make changes to the program based on the results of evaluation, but other times changes to a program must be made by going back through the authorization process. For example, in order to make it easier for food policy councils to receive Community Food Project Grant money, policy language had to be changed during the 2002 Farm Bill reauthorization process.

This section is meant to be a brief and basic overview of the federal policy cycle, but there are certainly many other resources that can provide far more in-depth detail and analysis of the federal policy process. See the resource list at the end of this document for further reading on the federal policy process and the federal budget. The section below illustrates the link between CFSC's current federal policy work on Farm to Cafeteria, each step of the policy cycle, and the role that you and other active citizens have played along the way.

## A CASE STUDY OF

### The Federal Policy Process: Farm to Cafeteria Legislation



#### Authorization

Many of the ideas that informed the creation of the Farm to Cafeteria legislation came from the experiences and insights of individuals who were already starting Farm to Cafeteria programs all over the country. People involved with varied types of Farm to Cafeteria programs provided the Community Food Security Coalition with valuable information on the challenges they faced and the types of policy that could best assist further development of Farm to Cafeteria programs. Starting in early 2003, CFSC staff met with staff of members of Congress to pitch the main ideas of what CFSC members wanted for Farm to Cafeteria—funds for start-up grants to be used by Farm to Cafeteria projects, modeled on the Community Food Projects Competitive Grant process.

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) was the first Congressional member to agree to support this idea, and in the spring of 2003 he introduced Farm to Cafeteria as part a bill describing his major priorities for the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization. Later that fall, he re-introduced the Farm to Cafeteria legislation as its own bill, “The Farm to Cafeteria Projects Act,” along with co-sponsor Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA). Representatives Fred Upton (R-MI) and Ron Kind (D-WI) introduced identical legislation in the House in the summer of 2003. The Senate and House bills were known as S.1755 and H.R. 2626, respectively. The prefix H.R. stands for House Resolution and prefix S. stands for Senate. The numbers following the prefix represent the number assigned to the bill. Several months were spent gaining co-sponsors, as Congress



kept extending the deadline for the Child Nutrition Reauthorization. S. 1775 gained co-sponsorship from 111 of the 100 Senators, and H.R. 2626 gained co-sponsorship from over 40 of the 435 Representatives.

Throughout this process, local organizations and concerned citizens like you were instrumental in gaining support for the Farm to Cafeteria legislation. People and groups called and met with their legislators asking them to co-sponsor the original Farm to Cafeteria bills and to support inclusion of the bill in the final Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act. Grassroots organizations acted collectively as well as singly, with over 270 organizations signing on to a letter that was delivered to every member of Congress, asking them to co-sponsor the bills. Former CFSC Policy Associate Sarah Borron recalls the many activities grassroots activists took during that time. She

reports, “I can honestly say that we would never have gotten so many co-sponsors without them.”

As the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization drew nearer, congressional committee staff made changes to the pieces of legislation and decided what would be included in the bill that went before the committees. Because of a call for “no new programs,” getting Farm to Cafeteria included was particularly challenging. After much debate, hard pushing from Congressional champions, and additional grassroots pressure, the Farm to Cafeteria language was included in the final bill in the spring of 2004. The language was changed somewhat to reflect its merger with a related program on school gardens, so the final legislative language contained Section 122, named “Access to Local Foods and School Gardens,” in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act. This legislation creates a competitive seed grant program for schools, one-time grants of up to \$100,000 over three years to create new Farm to Cafeteria programs. The program must be funded annually through discretionary funding in the appropriations process.



### Appropriations

Because of the way the bill was written, Farm to Cafeteria must be funded with discretionary money.

Recall that discretionary programs must compete for funding, so advocates began another phase of fighting for money this program. The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act was passed in the middle of an appropriations cycle, too late to bring together the full resources needed to try to get funding for the newly authorized program. The next appropriations cycle, which started in January 2005 for fiscal year 2006, was when the real push for funding began. This push continued in 2006 for FY '07 because no money for Farm to Cafeteria was allocated in the FY '06 appropriations. Since Congress does not have to fund discretionary programs, CFSC staff worked with the

original champions in the House and Senate to try to get money appropriated.

Every member of Congress has the opportunity to make appropriations requests, so CFSC worked with its members to get funding for Farm to Cafeteria in as many legislators' requests as possible. Another strategy was to get members of the Senate to sign a letter asking their colleagues who serve on appropriations committees to fund Farm to Cafeteria at \$5 million, and in 2006 21 Senators signed such a letter. Local groups and individuals have provided a lot of support through this process through calls and meeting with their legislators. Over 350 national, state, and local organizations signed a letter in support of Farm to Cafeteria funding in 2006. Every member of Congress received a copy of that letter.

In addition, advocates from various states around the country came to Washington, D.C. to share their stories and experiences of starting Farm to Cafeteria programs in meetings and briefings with Senate and House congressional staff. Their stories showed how important a one-time start-up grant can be in starting and sustaining new Farm to Cafeteria programs.



### Future Implementation and Evaluation



While Farm to Cafeteria has not yet been funded, advocates will continue to fight for funding in future appropriations cycles. Should the bill be funded at some point in the future, USDA will write the rules of how Farm to Cafeteria will be implemented and administer the program. Usually, there is a public comment period after the rules are written that will provide another opportunity for participation by individuals and local groups. Once the program is up and running, the legislation mandates that USDA will be responsible for carrying out an evaluation.

### Food Policy Councils:

A state or local food policy council is one avenue for people working at the local level to influence the effectiveness of federal programs in their area. A food policy council (FPC) is a group of stakeholders who advise a city, county, or state government on policies related to agriculture, food distribution, hunger, food access, and nutrition. Such councils provide an effective forum for diverse stakeholders to work together to create positive changes in their food system. They perform a variety of tasks, from researching food production and access issues, to designing and implementing projects and policies to address those issues. Through public meetings and annual reports, they also educate local officials, businesses, and the public about the food system. The primary goal of many FPCs is to examine the local food system and provide ideas or recommendations for how it can be improved. Food policy councils can take many forms, but typically are commissioned by state or local government, with participation from diverse stakeholders in the private and public sectors engaged in food and agriculture matters. Council members may be appointed by government officials, and often include farmers, grocers and food distributors, anti-hunger advocates, community leaders, representatives of government departments, cooperative extension agents, and concerned citizens.



## How are National Public Interest Advocacy Groups Linked to Grassroots Participation in Federal Policymaking?

National public interest advocacy groups work to create public policy change on behalf of others, such as children, welfare recipients, or family farmers. Some national advocacy groups—such as CFSC—not only advocate for certain issues, but also organize groups who agree with a particular stance to be involved in campaigns to change public policy that affects them. CFSC mobilizes members of the community food security movement to develop policies that provide resources and removes barriers to local and regional food systems and food security for everyone. National advocacy groups that seek to organize individuals and local groups serve as a link between the grassroots and policy makers in Washington, D.C.

Many advocacy groups choose to keep their ear close to folks in communities and act as a spokesperson for their concerns to federal policy makers. In addition, advocacy groups closely track the policy action in D.C. and communicate back to you at the local level. Unlike national private interest groups, which usually lobby Congress on a single issue, national public interest advocacy groups often work in coalitions and advocate for a broad set of issues. For example, over time CFSC has developed relationships with anti-hunger, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture groups, resulting in dynamic and effective partnerships

for working towards federal policy change. CFSC also works on larger issues of relevance to the movement, such as family farm, anti-hunger, sustainable agriculture, and nutrition issues. Like CFSC, many advocacy groups are membership-based and rely on the input of their members to inform their focus on certain policy issues. National advocacy groups and partner organizations then design a policy strategy or a campaign that involves resources, mobilization, communication, and often action by you and many other individuals.

There are a variety of different ways national advocacy groups are involved in the federal policy cycle. In many cases, groups are working to create a new law or program. However, other times they are working to secure funding for a program, make changes to a program, get more money allocated to a program, keep funding from getting cut, stop the creation of a new law or block a change to an existing program that will have negative effects on the issues that concern their members. For example, organizations often band together to prevent funding cuts to certain programs. Other coalitions form to focus on multiple parts the policy cycle, such as authorization and appropriations of policy, and they do so every time their issues come up for those parts of the cycle. The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (NCSA), for instance, is a non-profit with many members at the grassroots and national levels. NCSA is most busy before the Farm Bill, but it is also active during

every appropriations cycle, fighting to ensure funding for sustainable agriculture programs, and later during implementation, to make sure those programs work as intended.

Strength of these coalitions comes from participation, which ebbs and flows as important programs reach certain points in the policy cycle. An advocate's role may start with the authorization step in the federal policy cycle. However, there are many more very important roles that advocates can play throughout the entire policymaking cycle. Contacting organizations that work on the issues you most care about will help to inform you on what most needs to be done, and how your individual skills and interests can help to further your issues in the most effective way.

### State and Local Policy Work

This handbook is primarily focused on the different ways that you or your local organization can affect policy at the federal level. However, involvement in local and state policy is often necessary for successful implementation of a federal program. The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is a federal program that illustrates the linkages between federal, state and local policy. The WIC FMNP legislation was authorized in 1992 and has been administered and implemented through a federal and state partnership. At the federal level, the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture is the agency that provides cash grants to state agencies to implement WIC FMNP. State departments of agriculture, health, or Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) are responsible

for distribution of vouchers to WIC clients and the authorization of outlets or individual farmers to accept vouchers. The federal government provides funding for 100% of the cost of food, but only a portion of the administrative costs. Therefore, the state agency that wishes to implement and operate the WIC FMNP must provide additional funding for the administrative costs. The funding may come from a variety of sources, including state or local governments and from private funds. ITOs must also match federal administrative costs, but have a lower match requirement.

The chart below illustrates how federal, state and local agencies, as well as private entities and groups, can support the WIC FMNP. This example can be helpful to understand when trying to effect the implementation of federal programs in your state or local community. Each individual at the local level possesses the knowledge of the local impact of federal programs and holds the power of a voting constituent. Not only can this influence be used on Election Day, but throughout the year by communicating with one's state senators and district representative about the issues that are most important to you. Issue campaigns, led by national advocacy groups, can provide an opportunity for you to use your constituent influence on federal policy in directed and effective ways. These campaigns help bring many individuals voices together at important time, for more power overall. National advocacy groups often provide updated policy information from D.C. in a concise and informed manner and can communicate to you when it is most vital to take action.



## List of Jurisdictions

### Federal

- Federal Program: WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

- Congress authorizes WIC FMNP legislation in 1992
- Food and Nutrition Service of USDA partners with states
- Federal funds provided to states for 100% cost of food
- Federal funds provided to states for a portion of administrative costs

### State

- Agencies – state health or agriculture departments, or ITOs implement WIC FMNP
- States must present administration plan to USDA
- States must provide a match
- State agencies approve participating outlets and farmers
- State agencies distribute coupons to WIC participants

### County

- May provide outreach to increase WIC coupon use and increase the number of sites for redemption of WIC coupons

### City

- City or county Food Policy Council may advocate for land use policies that encourage farmers' markets

### Non-profit Organizations

- State farmers' market associations may advocate for state matching funds to bring WIC FMNP to their state
- Food Banks may become a site for a farmers' market and accept WIC FMNP coupons
- Economic Development Organizations may support WIC FMNP
- Faith-based organizations, like churches, host farmers' markets

### Private Businesses

- Hospitals and other institutions host farmers' markets
- Chambers of Commerce may promote farmers' markets
- Farmers, as businesses people, sell their products at farmers' markets

### Other Local Partners

- Cooperative Extension Programs, local chefs, and farmers or farmers' markets associations may provide nutrition education to WIC FMNP recipients

## SECTION 2: The Basics of Effective Participation in the Federal Policy Process

Whether it's educating your member of Congress about issues of concern to you or attending a local listening session to make your voice heard on a new policy initiative, there are multiple opportunities for every individual to participate in the federal policy process. In any action you take, **remember that you have a valuable local perspective to share.** Policymakers need to hear from individuals and community groups to better understand the way federal policies affect real people and their communities. Please be confident that your concerns and knowledge of local problems helps your members of Congress stay more connected to the needs of their constituents. What are the issues that concern you most? It may be helpful to seek out a local or national public interest advocacy group that works on the issues

you care about for information about how and when to take action. When you take action, remember that reporting back to national organizations about what you've done can assist groups to better know how individuals and local groups around the country are contributing to the federal policy process.

### How Can I Find Out Who My Legislators Are?

- ✓ Check out the government section of your local phone book.
- ✓ Call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
- ✓ Search by state or zip code at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).

Gathering general information about your members of Congress may also be of aid to you in your participation in federal policymaking. Every member of Congress serves on legislative committees and subcommittees that have jurisdiction over certain issues. Finding out about the committees on which your elected officials serve may help you get a sense of the key issues that are important to your Representative or Senator. Both [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) have a webpage for your legislators where you can find out which committees they serve on and issues that are covered by those committees. Their personal web pages will also often list legislation that has been sponsored by a legislator and their voting record.

If you have interest in learning more about your Senators and Representative, many national organizations have scorecards for every Congressional member that rate them on a variety of issues. In this section are some different ways that you and local organizations can make a difference by participating in the federal policy process. There are many opportunities for involvement and this is by no means an exhaustive list. If there are other actions that you have taken that you would like CFSC to know about, please feel free to share your experience with us so that we might share it with others.



## Action Alerts

*By Sarah Borron*

When taking direct action, it can be helpful to rely on the direction of national advocacy groups through action alerts. While you can participate in the federal policy process at any time, action alerts help concentrate individual efforts to be more collectively effective. An action alert usually comes from policy staff of a national advocacy group and sometimes is sent directly to grassroots members, but other times is communicated through a regional working group of the organization. Action alerts keep local activists, like you, updated on federal policies and let you know when its time to act on a key issue. Sometimes alerts will ask that action be targeted to Congressional members of specific states or districts. For example, if the chair of the Senate appropriations committee is from West Virginia, activists in West Virginia might get a specific appeal for help in getting funding for a program. Each action you take in response to an alert is a part of a larger national advocacy group's work to communicate the interests of constituents to the policymakers, and grassroots advocates can be effective in many ways. Because of the policy cycle, there will be times of the year when you will receive many action alerts and other times not many at all. For example, in the first part of the year Congress works on determining the budget for the next year, and Congress people make specific funding requests, so many groups send out action alerts about funding during this time. Action alerts are also often on a short timeline and will ask you to take action immediately because the schedule for Congress frequently changes. In addition, it is sometimes most effective to put pressure on elected officials all at one time or just before an important vote or decision. Visit the Community Food Security Coalition website ([www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)) to view a sample action alert.

## Tips for Lobbying with Your Elected Officials

Compiled by Sarah Borron

### ✓ Calling Your Legislator

- It is always helpful to take a few minutes to prepare. Calls to Hill offices are usually brief, so you will want to have crucial facts, such as bill numbers, in front of you.
- If you are calling to do something straightforward, such as asking them to vote yes or no on an amendment or co-sponsor a bill, talk with the receptionist. State your name and where you live so they know you're a constituent, and make your request succinctly.

**Example:** *"My name is Tim Jones, and I live in Atlantic, Iowa. I'm calling to ask that Senator Harkin support \$5 million in funding for "Access to Local Foods and School Gardens" (Section 122 of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act). This bill would help schools use locally-grown food in their lunches, and I think this would benefit my kids by exposing them to fresh fruits and vegetables as well as supporting local farmers."*

- If you are calling about something more complex, or if you are calling representing a larger organization, you should ask for the staff person in charge of the issue about which you're calling. Again, state your name, where you're from, and whom you represent. Ask about your legislator's position on the issue. If it aligns with yours, thank the staff member for their support. If the position does not, take a moment to explain your position, offer to send more information, and ask that the Congressperson consider the issue further.
- You might find that the person you talk to isn't familiar with the issue you're calling about. In that case, take a moment to educate them about the issue and to explain why you are asking their boss to take a certain position. Offer to send more information, and remember to follow-up promptly. This can be a great opportunity to become someone on whom staff relies for information about your issue.
- If you're leaving a message, state your name, where you're from, phone number, and a short message about the issue you're calling about and the action you'd like your Congressperson to take.

### ✓ Writing Your Legislator

- After the anthrax scare post-9-11, security has tightened for mail coming into Congressional offices in D.C. Mail takes longer to get there and also goes through a sanitation process that can damage letters. Faxes and e-mail messages are more likely to reach your legislators promptly and in a readable state! You can, however, still send letters successfully to offices in your home district or state.
- If you fax or e-mail, address the letter to the staff person that covers the issue that is the focus of your letter. Include the issue and if appropriate the name and number of the bill in the subject line. Be sure to provide your mailing address so they will know you are a constituent. For letters addressed to your Congressperson, follow the format below:

The Honorable [full name of your Senator]  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [last name of your Senator],

The Honorable [full name of your Representative]  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. [last name of your Representative]

- For written communication, stay focused and brief. Focusing on one issue or "ask" per message is most effective, and be sure to put your "ask" in the first paragraph.

**Example:** *"Every day I see for sale signs on farms near my hometown of Bargersville, Indiana. At the same time, I struggle to get my kids to eat healthy, and I see more and more of my neighbors facing weight-related problems. To help address these issues, I urge you to support \$5 million for Access to Local Foods and School Gardens' (Section 122 of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act). This program will help schools buy locally-grown foods for school lunch- exposing children to healthy food at a young age and helping our farmers stay in business."*

- Be sure to relate the issue to your personal experience, and communicate your knowledge of the issue at the local level. Remember to emphasize the benefits of the proposal for their district or constituents. Legislators want to know what an issue means to their constituents, and you, as a constituent, are thus an expert!

**Example:** *“My daughter has become so excited about vegetables since her school started a garden project. I would love to see locally-grown food served in her school lunch, but the school cafeteria isn’t equipped to handle a lot of fresh produce that isn’t already chopped. ‘Access to Local Foods and School Gardens’ will help our school be able to offer local food—and get my daughter and her friends to eat healthier every day!”*

- Thank the legislator for any positive actions he or she has taken related to your issue

**Example:** *“I appreciate the work you have done to support full funding of the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program. Farm to Cafeteria builds on those successes by bringing fresh healthy food to young children once they reach school and continuing to support small farmers in our state.”*

Follow-up with the office to be sure they received your letter and ask if they have any questions.

## ✓ Meeting with Your Legislator

- *Before the Meeting*
  1. Call ahead to schedule your meeting. Be sure to mention that you are a constituent and why you want the meeting. You will need to speak with a scheduler if you want to meet directly with your member of Congress. If you want to meet with a federal official but cannot travel far, find out when the official will be back in your area, or schedule a meeting with a staff person in the local office.
  2. Don’t be disappointed if you get a meeting with a staff person instead of the legislator—staff people often write legislation!
  3. Plan who will come to the meeting. Keep the group small but representative, no more than three to four people.
  4. Plan what points each of you will cover in order to utilize your meeting time most effectively. As you plan your points, consider the following:
    - a. Have statistics, but make them personal. Your legislator will want to know how your issue affects his/her constituents.
    - b. Have a very specific “ask” that you want the legislator to do (i.e., co-sponsor a piece of legislation).

- c. Be prepared to thank the legislator if he/she has supported your issue in the past or supported other issues that you or your organization cares about.
5. Prepare materials to bring: a brief summary or your main points, photos of your program, media regarding your issue, background information you may not be able to cover in the meeting, and always bring your contact information.
6. Dress professionally. You want to make a good first impression.
7. Allow plenty of time to get there, and allow more time for the meeting than it should actually last. Schedules often change, requiring you to wait for a brief time when you arrive.

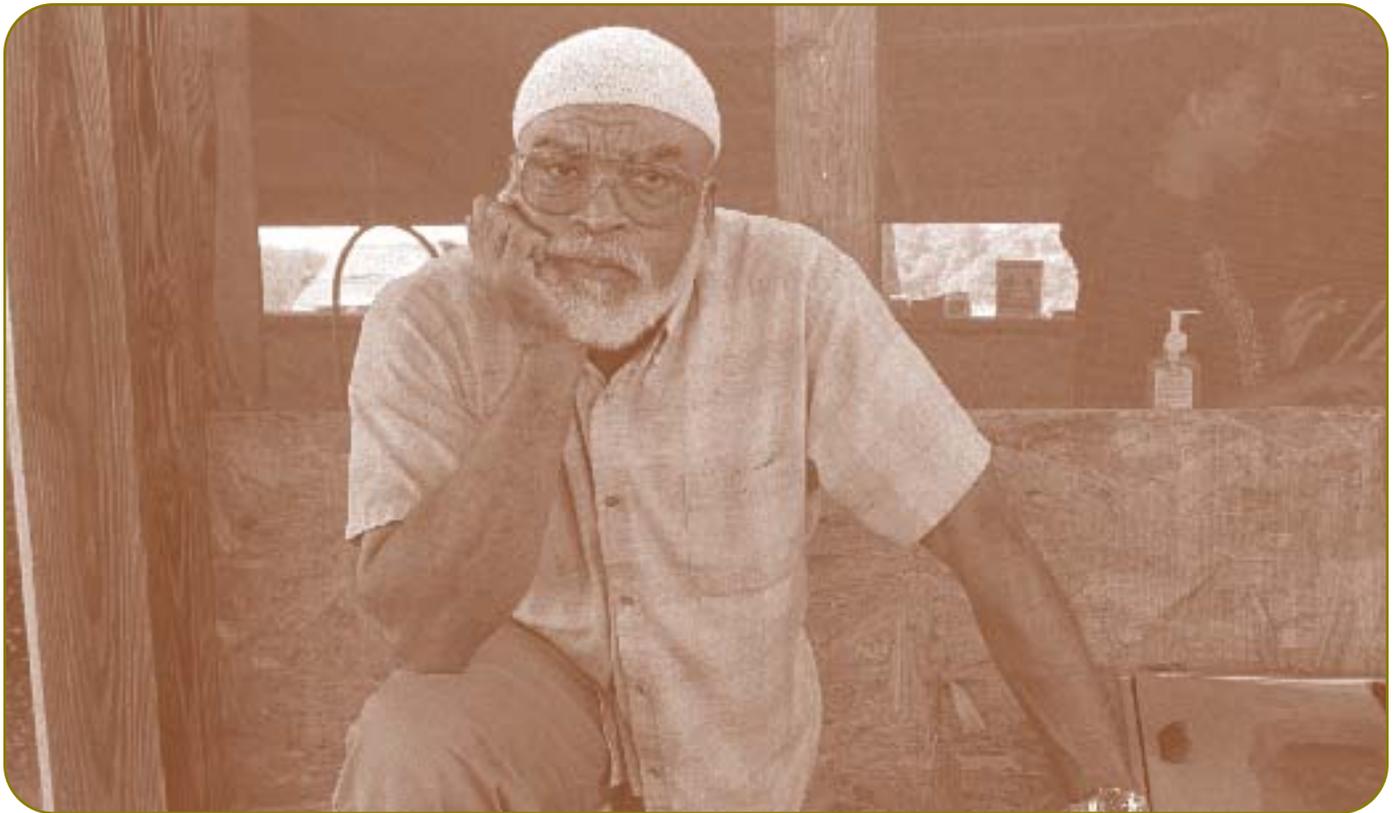
- *During the Meeting*

1. Introduce yourself and your organization. Remind whomever you meet with that you are a constituent.
2. Be succinct, and be clear about your ask.
3. Remember that you are an expert on how an issue or program affects your community! Be confident.
4. The person you meet with could know a lot or a little, so be prepared to educate. Answer the staff person or legislator’s questions as thoroughly as you can, but don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know” and offer to follow-up with the answer after the meeting.
5. Take notes of follow-up items and reactions the staff person or legislator has. If you’re meeting with a staff person who can’t commit to your ask, set a deadline as to when you will receive an answer (i.e., “Can I call you next week to find out if Sen. Jones will co-sponsor the bill?”).
6. Obtain a card from whomever you meet with so that you may contact that person again directly.

- *After the Meeting*

1. Debrief. Talk over your impressions, and decide who will make follow-up contact.
2. Write a thank-you note. Include in your thank-you note an overview of main points of the meeting, and answer any questions you were unable to answer in the meeting.

**Note:** Though hand-written notes are appropriate for most situations, snail mail that comes to legislators in D.C. is often delayed and sometimes damaged due to security measures. Send an e-mail or fax instead. If you meet in an office outside of D.C., writing a hand-written note to the local office is fine, however.



3. If your meeting is part of a national advocacy group's campaign, contact the organizer to let him/her know how your meeting went.

### ✓ Writing Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor

Op-eds and letters to the editor can be effective tools for communicating a message about a specific issue to your district or states Representatives or Senators. Congressional members pay attention to what local and state papers are publishing to stay informed of the issues their constituents care about.

- *Op-Eds*

1. Preparation: Find out the op-ed submission requirements for your local or state paper.
2. Writing the op-ed - Keep the letter to about 700 words and tie your issue to a personal story or make a local connection. Connecting your message to a current event can also be effective.
3. Publication: Always follow-up after a submission and if your op-ed doesn't get published, don't give up. It may also be helpful if you can get a respected public figure or local organization to co-sign or co-write to your piece.

4. After Publication: Clip the article and send it to your legislators' home offices with a note. This may provide a good opportunity to ask for a meeting with a legislator or invite them to visit your local program.

- *Letters to the Editor*

1. Writing tips: Usually letters to the editor are expected to be 250 words or less and therefore require that you stick to one argument. It is common that letters state the argument in the first paragraph, supporting evidence in the second, and a restatement of the main message in the last paragraph. Again, making a connection to a personal story, local issue, or other news stories can strengthen a letter.
2. Get your legislator's attention: If your opinion is supported by a local coalition or organization that has many members, state this information to show there are numbers behind your message. Also, if the letter asks that a Congressional member take a certain action, state their name. Be sure to clip and send when published.
3. Publication: It is often easier to get letters to the editor published in a local paper, rather than a city or state publication.

## Advocacy and Lobbying for Non-Profits

By Sarah Borron

While any individual can lobby on their own behalf, non-profit 501(C)(3) organizations have special rules about when they can and cannot lobby. Lobbying covers very specific activities. Asking a Congressperson or Administrative official to take action regarding a piece of legislation is considered lobbying. **Non-profit status does not prevent a member of the organization from lobbying**, but the IRS mandates that lobbying cannot be a “substantial” part of a non-profit’s activities. If a non-profit elects to seek 501(h) status, the regulations more clearly state 20% of the first \$500,000 of the organization’s budget may be used for lobbying. Most non-profits do not come close to this number, but you should track how much time you spend lobbying. Federal funding can never be used for lobbying. **Remember, not all advocacy is lobbying! Activities such as commenting on federal rules and educating policymakers about important issues do not count as lobbying!** For more information, check out the Alliance for Justice at [www.allianceforjustice.org](http://www.allianceforjustice.org).

### Tracking Your Policy Advocacy Work

No matter what you do, it is important to keep track of it! Create a file with any correspondence you receive from legislative offices and op-eds that are published. If you visit with Congressional staff, keep the staff person’s name and contact information along with a few brief notes about the meeting. Tracking only takes a few minutes, and it helps make your advocacy work build on itself, rather than be an isolated series of events. You can look back to find what your Congressperson’s position has been on an issue or to find a staff person’s name when you need to call the office again. You can then remind him or her that he or she spoke with you before about related issues. All of these activities help you build relationships with your Congressperson and be a more effective advocate. If you contacted your member of Congress because of an action alert or request from an organization, it is always a good idea to let the organization know who you called and what the response was.

Tracking also keeps record of your accomplishments, which can be important information to share with funders if you are an organization. For further information visit CFSC’s Evaluation Program page at [www.foodsecurity.org/evaluation.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/evaluation.html). It offers more in-depth resources on how to carry out tracking and evaluation of an organization’s program or project.

### Educate Your Congressional Member

One of the most effective ways for you and community organizations to educate your members of Congress is through your ability to connect national policies and issues to your local area and state. When he/she is home on Congressional break, invite your legislator or his or her staff to visit your local program to educate them about the issues the program addresses and to show its success. Involving legislators in local programs helps them to realize how issues impact their district or state and thus

understand the issues better. It may also create a springboard for replicating your successful model program in other places through federal legislation.

Lastly, the relationships you establish with your congressperson and staff can be very helpful in gaining support for your local work. You can also show yourself to be a useful resource, so that staff may end up calling you for information or input in the future. Contact information for the home office of your Representative or Senator can often be found on their websites or the government pages of your local phone book

### Attend a Local Listening Session

Sometimes a federal government agency, such as the USDA, will sponsor local listening sessions to gather feedback on an issue. These issues can include a new rule written on how a program is implemented to a proposal for legislation of the new program. Listening sessions concerning food system issues are often sponsored by USDA. In the summer of 2005, Agriculture Secretary Michael Johanns held a series of Farm Bill forums throughout the country to engage people with an interest in the 2007 Farm Bill.

Attending a local listening session or forum allows you to both learn more about federal legislative process and to voice your opinion and concerns about the way federal policies affect your communities and the issues you care about. You may find that rule changes very directly impact you if it regards a program you or your organization works with. National advocacy organizations are a valuable resource for finding out where and when these types of events will be held. If you are not already on an e-mail list, many organizations websites contain information about how to receive updates on federal legislation and how to be involved.



### Submit Comments on Rules for Implementation

After legislation is authorized and funding is appropriated, a federal agency, such as the USDA, is responsible for writing the rules that will determine the way a program will be implemented. While agencies are not required to solicit public comment, some decide to gather public comment before finalizing the rules. Public comment periods usually last thirty or sixty days. Depending on the program, there may be anywhere from a handful to thousands of public comments submitted. Because some legislation is written more loosely than others, the rules of implementation can make a big difference how the law is interpreted and actually implemented at the local level.

One of the biggest responses to a USDA comment period came in the mid-1990s, when USDA released its first set of national organic standards. Thousands of citizen organizations opposed three provisions of the rule. The USDA, overwhelmed by the response, significantly changed the rule. National advocacy organizations often track the rules process for key pieces of legislation for which implementation may be of interest to them. National advocacy groups will often announce a public comment period to their members and may provide draft comments with arguments that you can use as a guide to writing your own comments. Form letters or postcards are sometimes used, but it is more effective to adapt the arguments into your own letter. Influencing the implementation of a program can help to assure that a good policy is carried out in the way it was intended.

### Influence Formal Evaluation of a Federal Program

After federal programs are implemented at the local level, a government agency sometimes conducts a formal evaluation of the program. The outcome of the agency evaluation process can affect the way the program is administered throughout the country. Sometimes government agencies allow participation in the evaluation process. This provides an opportunity for you or your local organization to contribute your insight on the way federal programs are implemented and experienced in your community. National advocacy organizations are a good resource to find out if formal government evaluation is being conducted on a program that you have interest in. Weighing in on the formal evaluation process may be done through writing a letter or by attending a local listening session as was mentioned above. If your local organization has prepared reports on the affects of a federal program in your area, sharing it would be appropriate to share with the government agency conducting formal evaluation. Lastly, as an individual or local organization, it may be possible for you to participate in informal evaluation of a federal program by a national advocacy organization. Results from this type of evaluation are often written in reports by national advocacy organization, which are published, given to government agencies, or used to work towards change of a federal program.



### One Individuals' Impact:

In early 2005, representatives from Vermont FEED [Food Education Every Day] and The Food Trust from Philadelphia were invited to Washington, D.C. to share their respective work on Farm to Cafeteria initiatives at a Congressional briefing. Bonnie Hallam, of The Food Trust, presented about the Kindergarten Initiative, which provides three healthy snacks per week from locally grown products to kindergarten classes. After the briefing, she spoke with staff of one of Pennsylvania's Senators. She educated them about the issue, the local connections it had, and asked them to support funding for Farm to Cafeteria through signing a "Dear Colleague" letter, which asked other Senators to support funding as well. Her Senator signed the Dear Colleague letter shortly thereafter. Below, Bonnie Hallam shares her reflection of her experience presenting at the Congressional briefing.

*Presenting in Washington was an amazing experience for me in a number of ways. When you are out in the field doing what you think is really important, but very encapsulated work, you sometimes forget that you are part of a larger spider web. If you shake the web a little, the movement affects the whole system. When I came to Washington, I was profoundly reminded of that. I was also humbled and inspired. Meeting the folks from VT FEED*

*has made a huge impact on my knowledge of school food systems as well as my ability to envision the future of farm to school in the Philadelphia area . . . Without the opportunity to connect with folks like these and hear their inspiring story, I could dream about making farm to school a reality, but I did not know how to make that dream come true. Now, I feel like there is a path and I know people who can help us along that path. Finally, the experience itself, making a presentation in front of all the House and Senate staffers, was scary and exhilarating. I felt like I was part of a real democracy where the people take their concerns to the lawmakers. I was speaking about something that to me is crucial for the health of children and local farms and people in power (albeit their representatives!) were listening! That is quite an empowering experience! Staffers actually came up to me after the meeting and told me how wonderful they thought our program was and that they would like to learn more about how they could help . . . The key here, I believe, is the relationship building...people to people talking about things on a regular basis that are important to them. It was very gratifying to have Senator Santorum sign the letter because it was a symbol of the power of advocacy by ordinary people, working together, to make a difference.*

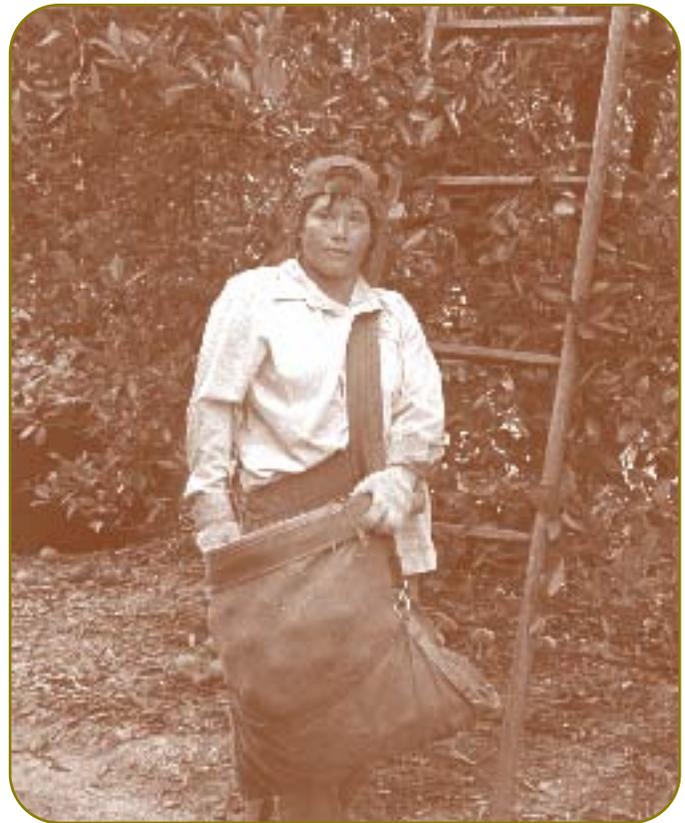
Bonnie Hallam, Senior Associate  
The Food Trust, Philadelphia, PA

## SECTION 3: Putting Your Advocacy Work in Perspective

At the end of the day, policy campaigns don't always produce the desired results. A law gets passed...or doesn't. A program gets funded...or has to wait another year. A program starts off on the right foot...or continues with rules that hamper participation. But remember, no matter what: **YOUR PARTICIPATION IN POLICY IS ALWAYS IMPORTANT!** Because federal policy-making is a long process, in which there's always a next step, any progress you make is in and of itself a success!

- ✓ Your voice is part of a collective action towards policy change. Every call, letter, or meeting with your elected officials; an op-ed or letter to the editor written; sign-on letters you've joined; listening session you've attended; or comments submitted on a proposed rule, are all evidence of your successful participation as an active citizen.
- ✓ You are building valuable relationships. Throughout the course of the policy cycle there are many opportunities for national advocates and grassroots organizations to develop relationships with important Congressional staff members and other organizations. These relationships are vital to the success of any federal policy campaign.
- ✓ You are educating your elected officials. Even when a policy campaign does not reach its goal, you are educating members of Congress about issues that matter to you. Your elected official will become more aware of the issues he/she's constituents care about and will know much more when these policy issues come up again.
- ✓ Your work influences federal policy that affects you, the issues, and people you work and advocate for.

In reflecting on your impact, be sure to consider the context within which you're working. Are you asking for new funding for a program at a time of budget cuts, or do members of Congress disagree with your position? Be aware of the other factors involved in the overall success or failure of an initiative. Always be sure to note steps you take towards your larger goal. Share with others, whether it be fellow grassroots advocates or national advocacy groups, what you have done. Talking about your policy activities helps keep up inspiration and hope that when things aren't going well and allows for celebration when things are. And, when the larger goal is won, the impacts are enormous!



New programs provide much needed resources and opportunities. Increased funding expands successful programs. Changed rules make a program work better. Every small accomplishment is a step towards something better.

### How Can I Get Involved in Creating a More Just and Sustainable Food System?

The Community Food Security Coalition is gearing up for the next Farm Bill in 2007. In doing so, CFSC will be developing policy priorities and there are many ways for you to be involved! There will be increasing opportunities for you to be engaged in the work to get more community food security ideas into the next Farm Bill policy discussion. Contact the CFSC to find out how you can contribute to building a more just and sustainable food system. In addition, there are several CFSC partner organizations listed below that you can contact to get involved with anti-hunger, nutrition, sustainable agriculture and conservation, and family farm and rural policy issues.

## COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY COALITION

### National Partner Organizations:

#### Sustainable Agriculture and Conservation Organizations:

Environmental Defense: [www.environmentaldefense.org](http://www.environmentaldefense.org)

American Community Gardening Association: [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org)

National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture: [www.sustainableagriculture.net](http://www.sustainableagriculture.net)

Northeast Midwest Institute: [www.nemw.org](http://www.nemw.org)

The Food Project's BLAST Initiative: [www.thefoodproject.org](http://www.thefoodproject.org)

#### Anti-Hunger Organizations:

America's Second Harvest: [www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org)

Congressional Hunger Center: [www.hungercenter.org](http://www.hungercenter.org)

Food Research and Action Center: [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)

World Hunger Year: [www.worldhungeryear.org](http://www.worldhungeryear.org)

#### Nutrition Organizations:

National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity: [www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/nana.html](http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/nana.html)

School Nutrition Association: [www.asfsa.org](http://www.asfsa.org)

Society for Nutrition Education: [www.sne.org](http://www.sne.org)

#### Family Farm/Rural Organizations:

American Farmland Trust: [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)

National Catholic Rural Life Conference: [www.ncrlc.com](http://www.ncrlc.com)

National Family Farm Coalition: [www.nffc.net](http://www.nffc.net)

Rural Coalition: [www.ruralco.org](http://www.ruralco.org)

## GLOSSARY of Bolded Words:

Sources: *C-Span Congressional Glossary and The Capital.Net*

- Bill:** A bill is a legislative proposal, which would make law if it passes both the House and Senate and if it receives Presidential approval.
- Budget:** The document sent to Congress by the president early each year estimating government revenue and expenditures for the ensuing fiscal year.
- Conference:** Conference refers to a formal meeting, or series of meetings, between House and Senate Members. The purpose of a conference is to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate versions of a bill.
- Members:** Members are the individuals serving as senators or representative in Congress.
- Co-sponsor:** A co-sponsor is a member who formally adds his/her name as a supporter to another member's bill. An initial cosponsor is one who was listed at the time of the bill's introduction, not added on later.
- Dear colleague letter:** A dear colleague refers to a mass-produced letter sent by one member to all fellow members. "Dear Colleagues" usually describe a new bill and ask for cosponsors or ask for a member's vote on an issue.
- Discretionary:** Discretionary spending refers to spending set by annual appropriation levels made by decision of Congress. This spending is optional, and in contrast to entitlement programs for which funding is mandatory.
- Earmark/Pork:** Earmark funds are those dedicated for a specific program or purpose. Revenues are earmarked by law.
- Entitlement Spending:** Entitlement spending refers to funds for programs like Medicare/Medicaid, Social Security, & veterans' benefits. Funding levels are automatically set by the number of eligible recipients, not at the discretion of Congress. Each person eligible for benefits by law receives them unless Congress changes the eligibility criteria. Entitlement payments represent the largest portion of the federal budget.
- House of Representatives:** The House of Representatives, as distinct from the Senate, although each body is a "house" of Congress. There are 435 Representatives in the House.
- Fiscal Year:** The fiscal year for the federal government begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. For example, fiscal year 2004, or "fy '04" began on Oct. 1, 2003 and ended on Sept. 30, 2004.
- Floor:** The floor refers to the chamber in the Capitol where members assemble to conduct debate and vote. Members are said to be "on the Floor" when they assemble, and "to have the Floor" when they speak.
- Law:** A law is a legislative proposal passed by both the House and the Senate and approved by the President.
- Legislation:** Legislation is the making of laws or the laws themselves.
- Mandatory:** Mandatory spending refers to funds not controlled by annual decision of Congress. These funds are automatically obligated by virtue of previously-enacted laws.
- Mark-up:** A mark-up refers to the meeting of a Committee held to review the text of a bill before reporting it out. Committee members offer and vote on proposed changes to the bill's language, known as amendments. Most mark-ups end with a vote to send the new version of the bill to the floor for final approval.
- Override:** An override is the vote taken to pass a bill again, after it has been vetoed by the President. An override takes a 2/3 vote in each chamber, or 290 in the House and 67 in the Senate, if all are present and voting. If the veto is overridden, the bill becomes law despite the objection of the President.
- Sponsor:** A sponsor is the member who introduces a bill and is its chief advocate.
- Staffer:** Staffer is the informal term used for anyone employed by an officer, member, or Committee of Congress.
- Veto:** Disapproval by the president of a bill or joint resolution.

### Sources:

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)  
 Alliance for Justice: [www.allianceforjustice.org](http://www.allianceforjustice.org)  
 Friends Committee on National Legislation: [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org)  
 The Advocacy Institute: [www.advocacy.org](http://www.advocacy.org)  
 Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest: [www.clpi.org](http://www.clpi.org)  
 Federal Register: [www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/thomas.loc.gov](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/thomas.loc.gov)  
[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)  
[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)  
[www.c-span.org](http://www.c-span.org)  
[www.thecapitol.net](http://www.thecapitol.net)

