

A publication of
the Sacramento
City/County Hunger
Commission, a program
of the Community
Services Planning
Council

The Birth of a California Community Food Security Network

by Thomas Nelson - Community Food Security Coalition

On June 3 and 4, more than 200 California members of the community food security movement came together for a statewide “organizing for action” Summit. Based on the personal and organizational commitments made by the end of Day 2, the event will lead to coordinated statewide campaigns, increased neighborhood and regional organizing and improved movement communication and decision-making infrastructure. A draft vision to guide our collective work was proposed: everyone having access and the knowledge to eat healthy food.

A California CFS Network Born

Bob Gottlieb’s observation toward the end of the summit that a California CFS Network was just born met strong agreement from participants. There was also firm agreement that the network should serve the purpose of forging common campaigns.

Decisions about structure, goals, issues and policy positions were delegated to a set of committees, including policy development, issue campaigns, and outreach and education—all governed by a statewide steering committee

Campaigns

Much discussion focused around opportunities and strategies for issue campaigns that forge common ground and seek justice in the food system. While there was a call for a focused campaign in 2003, there was also a strong request to develop a clear long-term mission, vision and goals. Participants wanted a state level policy platform that includes immediate recommendations for

action together with a long-term direction and big picture context.

Many comments reflected the desire for campaign organizing to take a grassroots approach, working inclusively and strategically with food insecure communities across the state. Many people noted that “we’re all working on different pieces of the same puzzle and need to support each other in making it fit together.”

Numerous legislative campaign opportunities were presented, many of which focus on strengthening connections between healthy food, local agriculture, and schools. These ranged from implementation of Senate Bill 19 passed last year to increase nutrition standards in the schools to weighing in strongly in the federal reau-

“we’re all working on different pieces of the same puzzle and need to support each other in making it fit together.”

thorization of the Child Nutrition Act.

Commitments

More than twenty-four individuals pledged specific actions they will take on behalf of their organizations to build the CFS movement in California over the next six months. Many others promised to check-in with their groups before making commitments.

CFSC committed to:

- Facilitate overall coordination, communication, and networking of a California CFS network
- Initially staff the steering and policy development committees.

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FOOD

FOR THOUGHT

Issue 14, Summer, 2002

Peggy Roark Editor

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Judith Wilson.....	Wilson Communications & Public Relations
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- Legislative

Update

Not unexpectedly, the new State fiscal year began on July 1 without a budget. Disagreement on covering the huge budget deficit along with partisan politics have made this a long summer. The Senate passed a budget proposal in late June and then adjourned. However, the Assembly has still not approved a budget in any form, and seems to have made little headway, especially on the issue of raising taxes. Since the budget needs a two-thirds majority vote, partisan politics will greatly determine the outcome. The passage of the budget will likely depend on which Legislators decide to cross party lines with their vote and when.

Nutrition programs play only a minor role in all this. But to hunger advocates and those we represent, these issues are critically important. The budget currently includes:

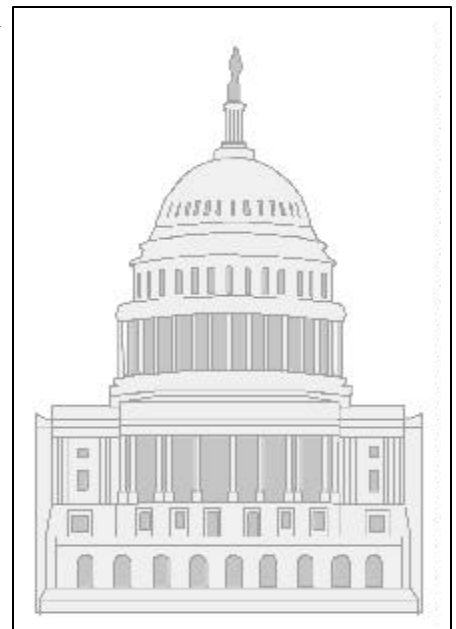
- Ending monthly reporting for food stamps, which will help streamline the process and encourage participation
- Continuing State food stamp benefits for legal immigrants
- School breakfast start-up funds

Other proposals, including allowing food stamp recipients to own a reliable car, will not be a part of this year's budget. This issue has been at the top of advocates' list for a number of years.

Right now, hungry families in California face an tough dilemma - either give up the car they need to get to work, or remain ineligible for food stamps. Currently, owning a car worth more than \$4,650 likely means that you will not be eligible for food stamps.

Language in the budget to move from quarterly reporting for food stamps to monthly reporting will greatly ease the paperwork burden for both administrators and clients. Unfortunately, the Governor has proposed a requirement that would require households to report during the quarter if their income goes above 130 percent of poverty. This extra burden takes away from the goal of streamlining the process, and will increase program complexity and confusion, which is exactly what we do not want to see happen.

In the next few weeks, the budget process will finally be sorted out. The budget will include some funding for food stamps and other nutrition programs, but not enough. Anti-hunger advocates will have their work cut out for them next year.



Nutrition Education: A VISTA's Personal Perspective

by Jessica Welborn

I love food but I am not a nutritionist by any stretch of the imagination. A nutritionist might even say I have a bad diet. So when I found myself in the role of nutrition educator, it definitely gave me a lot to think about. What is the role of nutrition education in food security? Does it allow us to preserve foods from diverse cultures? Does every low-income community need nutrition education? Is there really a right or wrong way to eat? Does nutrition education have a place in the bigger picture and if so how can it best be tapped into as a resource to overcoming the barriers that keep people hungry?

Although we may not think about it much, food is essential to sustaining our bodies and maintaining our health. Food, whether it be an advertisement, a restaurant, a convenience store, a farm, or a home cooked meal, is everywhere you look. There are so many conflicting messages out there about how you should eat, what you should eat, and how you should look that it can easily take the fun and enjoyment out of eating. If you are not careful, a nutrition class can add to the already existing burdens that come with food and diet. Rather than telling people how they should eat, it is so much more about developing a personal connection with food in a variety of different ways. It should be about celebrating people and diversity as well as food. Food taps into your senses and you have to be able to feel, touch and taste it. Even something as simple as chop-



ping vegetables or taste testing different kinds of apples brings you closer to that food without necessarily focusing on nutrition.

The roots of food insecurity run very deep. They are intricately linked with complex and institutionalized issues of homelessness and poverty. Tackling the roots of food insecurity does not lie in trucking a food pyramid around and telling people what they should and shouldn't eat according to these strict guidelines. In many cases people are going to eat what they can afford and are not in the position to think about what is healthy vs. unhealthy. It is important to empower people to take control of their food supply whether it be through gardening, cooking, sharing information or just talking about food. Rather than focusing solely on nutrition, ask people about the kinds of food they like to eat. Stimulate imagination and creativity by preparing recipes that participants have chosen or created in class. Food is definitely a catalyst for developing connections between people and building a sense of community within a particular community. There is no place for nutrition education without a consistent community.

*Note: Jessica Welborn, a Hunger Commission Americorps*VISTA, wrote this essay after about five months of facilitating nutrition education workshops. We welcome reactions from readers and their thoughts on the value and role of nutrition education in low-income communities.*

CFS Network Born

Continued from page 1

- Develop and distribute a broad-based policy platform based on work done to date and committee work to come.

Next Steps

- Convene committees, beginning with the statewide steering committee.
- Develop a state policy platform.
- Create an outreach plan to expand and diversify the constituencies participating in the statewide network

- Support the creation of community and regional food system networks
- Prioritize and strategize around issues in the policy platform and plan to launch a statewide campaign in 2003.
- Fundraise to support all of the above.

For more information or to get involved, contact CFSC's California organizer, Thomas Nelson, at tnelson@foodsecurity.org.

Note: The Hunger Commission was represented at the Summit by both staff and Commissioners, and was part of a panel on community food assessments.

Welcome to New Hunger Commission Staff

Shana McDavis-Conway and Emily Pilch, both former VISTAs in Sacramento, have joined the Hunger Commission staff. Shana is focusing primarily on outreach for the Summer Food Program and expanding enrichment activities at some of the sites. She will soon begin to concentrate on outreach to increase senior participation in the Food Stamp program. Emily will work half time for the Commission on a variety of activities, ranging from the Community Food Newsletter to nutrition education workshops to Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). They are both avid community gardeners.

Welcome to a New Group, the Sacramento Area Community Garden Coalition (SACGC)

SACGC is a grassroots group made up of community gardeners, school garden participants, Master Gardeners, and other individuals united by a common goal: to bring more community gardens to the Sacramento area. Its first large meeting was held in July, attracting almost 30 participants. Hunger Commissioner Bill Maynard is its founder. He can be contacted at (916) 508-6025, maddog@ulink.net

Earned Income Tax Credit in 2002

The Department of Human Assistance (DHA) and its partners assisted over 2600 people file for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) this year, for a total EITC amount of \$4,616, 276.



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