



A Healthy Farm Bill

What does farm policy have to do with obesity? Quite a bit, as it turns out.

Recently, more than 300 physicians, obesity researchers, public health professionals and others sent a letter to Congress calling for this year's Farm Bill to be a "Healthy Food Bill." Specifically, they are pointing to farm policies and an unbalanced food system as important contributors to the wave of obesity and diet-related disease (as well as other environmentally-related chronic disease) in the U.S.

Obesity already costs the U.S. more than \$117 billion annually, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service. But the epidemic in children, and what it means for their chances of having diabetes, premature heart disease and stroke as adults, promises a much worse health crisis in the making.

Crisis also creates opportunity, sometimes in unlikely places. Few American kids today consume healthy diets. They eat too few fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and too many added sugars, unhealthy fats, and refined grains. Critical pieces of the Farm Bill could open the door toward making healthier foods more accessible and more affordable for more people.

We have created schools and communities where unhealthy foods are cheaper and more accessible than healthy foods. And while unhealthy foods were getting cheaper, the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables rose nearly 40 percent from 1985 to 2000, according to the USDA. Farm policies have played an important role.

With this Farm Bill, Congress should make Americans' health a priority. The government's agricultural policies should give all Americans better access to healthy foods and improve school access to healthy foods. We need to make fresh produce and other healthy foods more affordable relative to unhealthy foods and help build the infrastructure needed to get affordable, healthier foods into lower-income communities.

Source: Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, "A Healthy Food Bill for Not So Healthy Americans"; July 18, 2007.

The Northeast Iowa Food & Farm (NIFF) Coalition and the Food & Fitness Initiative are working together to create community environments that support access to fresh, locally grown, healthy, affordable food and safe environments for physical activity and play. More information about these programs can be found at www.niffcoalition.org.