

## COMMUNITY FARM ALLIANCE

# Bridging rural farm policy with urban food access

**F**or *Community Farm Alliance* (CFA), the health and prosperity of Kentucky's urban residents is inextricably linked to a thriving rural economy. Using a blend of economic development, youth development, and community development principals, CFA promotes sales and consumption of food grown by rural family farmers. The group hopes to increase access to healthy, affordable food throughout Kentucky, including the state's urban, African American communities. The organization's state-level policy advocacy targets institutional and financial levers to create a more favorable climate for rural farmers. At the same time, CFA is working to create incentives for neighborhood corner stores to carry produce and has helped launch a number of programs and local farmers' markets to improve urban food availability.

Created in response to the farm crisis more than 20 years ago, CFA maintains its roots in policy advocacy



FARMERS MARKETS PROVIDE LOCAL MARKETS FOR FARMERS

### QUICK FACTS

**LOCATION** . . . . Louisville, KY

**POLICY JURISDICTION**

Local                       State                       Federal

**POLICY ORIENTATION**

Policy                       Poised                       Education

**APPROACH**

Environmental/Institutional     Services/Programs

**EQUITY FOCUS** . . . . . Strong

**ISSUE AREAS** . . . Nutrition

**POLICY DOMAINS**

- Agriculture/Sustainable Food Systems
- Food Access/Anti-Hunger
- Healthy Food Purchasing

**WEBSITE** . . . . . [www.communityfarmalliance.org](http://www.communityfarmalliance.org)

and empowering people to engage in the legislative process. In the mid 1980s many Kentucky farmers were on the verge of losing their land. Reduced demand for tobacco, an influx of new residents, and increased real estate costs threatened to put many of the state's farmers out of business. In 1985, CFA stepped in to establish a credit hotline that allowed thousand of farmers to stay on their land and make the transition away from tobacco. Many Kentucky counties—dubbed tobacco dependent—have relied on the economy generated by the growth and sale of tobacco for decades. In 2000, CFA won a tremendous victory that had been many years in the making. CFA rallied for a number of provisions in the state's Tobacco Settlement, including the establishment of local planning



CFA HELPS KENTUCKY FARMERS FIND AND DEVELOP NEW MARKETS

boards, a state-level Agriculture Development Board, and a set of accountability measures to support family farming and diversified farming practices (*e.g.*, multiple crops, growing organic). CFA's goal is to ensure that family farmers are engaged in a democratic process to determine how land will be used and how the \$1.7 billion awarded to Kentucky will be spent over the next 25 years. CFA will continue to serve as a watchdog for policy implementation and resource allocation.

CFA was also successful in shepherding through "preferential purchasing" legislation which mandates that all state government institutions purchase from local growers whenever possible. When implemented, such policies can result in increased demand for locally grown fruits and vegetables as well as greater consciousness about the value of buying locally. Many state institutions can maneuver around the preferential purchasing law, but CFA hopes that by pushing for similar laws at the municipal level, they will begin shifting the norms and practices of local institutions and creating greater demand for healthy foods.

With a keen sense of the barriers to healthy food access, CFA works tirelessly to smooth the way. CFA believes that rural family farmers can meet the needs of urban residents and vice versa. When a local farmer's research revealed that residents of West Louisville, an African American part of town, lacked access to affordable healthy food, CFA immediately spotted the link between urban food injustice and the challenges of rural farming. Joe Schroeder, Urban Organizer for CFA, said when CFA educated farmers on the "huge

population of 80,000 to 100,000 people who didn't have access to the food they were growing or much healthy food, it seemed like a good, smart partnership business-wise."

Indeed, CFA has helped uncover a number of win-win scenarios for farmers and urban residents. CFA has created two farmers' markets in low-income communities in Louisville that serve about 8,000 people yearly. These markets provide fresh fruits and vegetables to residents who otherwise lack access to affordable healthy food. One market, now in its fourth year, has grown steadily with 10 farmers every Saturday from June to November. Recently CFA supported policies that will allow farmers to make value-added products, such as salsa, within their homes and permit farmers to cook at local markets. CFA is pushing for an incentive program to help offset the cost of higher priced and healthier perishable goods so that neighborhood corner store owners can carry fresh local foods.

CFA also encourages innovative projects like Grasshoppers, a farmer-owned food distributor. In 2007, local farmers purchased refrigerated trucks that will serve as mobile markets, allowing farmers to take their produce to low-income areas with limited access to grocery stores. The business also allows farmers to reduce prices for residents because as supplier and distributor, farmers cut out the "middle man." In June of 2007, CFA launched Urban Fresh, a food delivery service run by neighborhood youth. In partnership with Grasshoppers, Urban Fresh will deliver food packages to low-income senior homes, housing projects, and service a network of farmers' markets serving West Louisville and East Downtown Louisville. In addition to addressing food inequities, Urban Fresh also provides youth with business experience.

CFA has a staff of just seven people, but through the group's 2,000 community members, they reach across geographic, racial, and economic lines to influence food access through policies and programs. Schroeder speaks on the value of leadership development: "If you are a membership organization, the power is within the members, so the more you can develop the capacity of your members to be able to take on more power, the better off your organization will be." CFA has



COMMUNITY FARMERS MARKETS PROVIDE FRESH PRODUCE FOR URBAN COMMUNITIES

amassed a track-record of state and local-level successes. As CFA looks ahead to developing a food policy council, building support for the municipal “buy local” ordinance, and creating incentives for corner stores, effective collaboration and capacity-building will remain the pillars of their advocacy efforts.

Executive Director Sally Flocks remembers a time in Atlanta when she would wear a whistle around her neck and blow it while crossing the street. She felt desperate to get drivers to slow down, to be safer. She knew Atlanta, like many urban centers, didn’t support pedestrians, so she founded Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety (PEDS), a Georgia-based organization serving Atlanta and the surrounding region. Within a year of founding the organization, Flocks had an “aha moment.” She realized that PEDS wouldn’t be nearly as effective as it could be by reaching out one driver at a time. PEDS needed a broader approach. Now, through policy and environmental change and innovative use of web-based technology, PEDS has become a leader in creating and maintaining pedestrian-friendly environments to support recreational and incidental physical activity.

For the last 10 years, PEDS has emphasized pedestrian safety for immigrants and in-town communities because these populations are disproportionately involved in pedestrian injuries and fatalities. Low-income families and immigrants are less likely than the general population to own a car and so, are more likely to walk or bike for errands or to commute to work—incidental physical activity. PEDS sees that making the road safer for the most frequent and vulnerable pedestrians can improve pedestrian safety for everyone. As Atlanta’s population booms, PEDS has begun to expand to suburbs, where pedestrian injuries are increasing. Among people over 60—who will represent 20% of the Atlanta population in the next five years—Flocks also sees a critical opportunity to improve pedestrian infrastructure. If the region’s older adults feel safe on the streets, then children, the disabled and the general population will also benefit from safe places to walk and they will be more likely to engage in this common form of activity.

Since being named one of the ten most dangerous cities for pedestrians in the US by *Mean Streets 2004* (issued by The Surface Transportation Policy Project), Atlanta has experienced a number of positive shifts to make their streets safer. PEDS has been at the forefront of those changes. At the helm, PEDS has advanced a statewide policy to get cameras installed at signal lights