

# *Mapping the Movement for Healthy Food and Activity Environments in the United States*

## **ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOTS**

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*This is one in a series of 11 organizational snapshots that represent examples of compelling policy advocacy, programmatic, and environmental change efforts designed to positively impact people’s lives and livelihoods. In these snapshots we hope that the reader will recognize interest and capacity among committed advocacy groups to apply their strategies, passion, and energy to improving opportunities for healthy eating and active living in their communities. The profiles were written and produced by Prevention Institute. Funding and guidance were provided by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.*

# Foreword

The organizational snapshots captured in the following pages present innovative efforts of 11 organizations advocating for improvements, predominantly in low-income neighborhoods and with African American and Latino residents. Each of the 11 community groups take on tough policy and environmental change issues like increasing access to healthy food, addressing safety concerns, and cultivating opportunities for walking and bicycling. In both rural settings and urban neighborhoods throughout the country, these snapshots paint a picture of pervasive challenges to healthy eating and active living and explore creative solutions to improve health and quality of life.

These 11 snapshots are part of a broader effort entitled, *Mapping the Movement for Healthy Eating and Activity Environments in the United States: A Snapshot of the Field* funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In December 2006, Prevention Institute embarked on a national search for coalitions and organizations advocating for change in communities of color and in low-income neighborhoods. Our scan of the field involved interviews with numerous key informants which resulted in semi-structured interviews with representatives of 312 organizations. The scan

included groups working on nutrition and physical activity advocacy and related issues like food security, sustainable agriculture, and the built environment, as well as groups advocating to limit unhealthy exposures (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, and environmental toxins) and to expand human rights (e.g., labor and housing rights groups).

Of the more than 300 groups interviewed, the 11 organizations profiled in this document represent examples of compelling policy advocacy, programmatic, and environmental change efforts designed to positively impact people's lives and livelihoods. In these snapshots we hope that the reader will recognize interest and capacity among committed advocacy groups to apply their strategies, passion, and energy to improving opportunities for healthy eating and active living in their communities.

Our hope is that these organizational snapshots can be used to offer advocates, policy makers, funders, and community residents with examples of how the inertia of active, engaged organizations and residents can transform communities—make them healthier—through changes to policies, environments, and social norms.

## OVERVIEW

# Mapping the Movement for Healthy Food and Activity Environments in the United States: Organizational Snapshots

The organizational snapshots include a description of the organizational setting, overview of their policy advocacy and environmental change efforts, discussion of significant challenges to the work, and “quick facts” about each organization.

The “quick facts” box in the upper right-hand corner of the first page of each snapshot draws data from the Mapping Database and provides the organization’s location, policy jurisdiction (local, state or federal), policy orientation (engaged in policy, poised to do more policy work, education orientation); approach (environmental/ institutional or services/programs); strong equity focus; issue areas; policy domains; and website address.

- 1. Community Farm Alliance:** With a membership base of over 2,000, CFA spearheads policies to support family farming in rural Kentucky and creates access to healthy fresh fruits and vegetables among urban, West Louisville’s primarily African American residents through a blend of programs and policies.
- 2. Get Moving Kern and Greenfield Walking Group:** A parent-led walking group serves as the resident task force to the *Get Moving Kern* coalition and is reversing barriers to healthy eating and safe walking in their rural, predominantly Latino community of Kern County, California.
- 3. Chicagoland Bicycle Federation:** In Chicago and the surrounding region, this membership-driven organization works on Complete Streets policies, local bikeways, safe routes to school, and public events to rally for streets that will accommodate bicyclists safely on their way to school and across the city.
- 4. Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center:** This statewide advocacy center works at the nexus of nutrition, hunger, and poverty as it coordinates a network of nutrition activists and professionals to advocate for statewide legislation to improve school nutrition, increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, and increase the minimum wage.
- 5. Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United):** In the rural town of Woodburn, Oregon with a more than 50% Latino population, the farmworkers union has developed a strong organizing and advocacy history on labor and housing issues. Now, through its 5,700+ members, the farmworkers, spouses, and children are also addressing healthy food access and physical activity to help local residents eat better and move more.
- 6. Lifelong Communities Initiative:** This program of the Atlanta Regional Commission pays special attention to the needs of seniors as it works to improve community design and support city-wide ordinances to support better walking and transportation alternatives and healthy housing for seniors.
- 7. The Food Project of Boston:** Cultivating fruits and vegetables in an urban garden and on a suburban farm leased from the city at minimal cost, youth work with *The Food Project* and participate in community-supported agriculture that brings healthy produce to low-income residents throughout Boston.

8. ***Teton Valley Trails and Pathways:*** Looking to find a balance between responsible development, land conservation, and a physical activity friendly environment, advocates and residents of this rural, sparsely populated city work together to advance local and regional policies that will guide development for years to come.
9. ***Center for Economic Security:*** Working intensively in the low-income city of Muskegon, Michigan, this relatively new organization is galvanizing support for a local, sustainable food system and hopes to get a statewide initiative on the 2010 ballot that will declare healthy, sustainable food as a right for every Michigan resident.
10. ***Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety:*** With a primary goal of increasing pedestrian safety throughout the Atlanta region, this organization has won policy victories and manages an innovative web-based system that allows residents to report barriers to safe walking directly to the appropriate city or county agency.
11. ***New Orleans Food and Farm Network:*** Hurricane Katrina was a recent memory when food scarcity became a frightening reality for many residents who already lacked easy access to healthy foods before the disaster. A food mapping effort started out as a short-term response to residents' need to get access to soup kitchens, grocery stores, or food pantries and now has become a tool for understanding—and filling—gaps in access to healthy foods and community gardens.

## CHICAGOLAND BICYCLE FEDERATION

# On the road to a healthier Chicago, policy advocates promote physical activity

The *Chicagoland Bicycle Federation* (CBF) envisions a region where children and their families can safely walk and bike to school, work, and other important destinations. For Rob Sadowsky, CBF's Executive Director, promoting active transportation isn't simple: "The hardest thing for us is: how do we make a lot of impact in communities that are struggling economically? How do you go in and talk about physical activity and nutrition when people are struggling to work?" Even though none of their wins have come easily, CBF is beginning to see physical activity become a front-burner issue in the region.

Among CBF's statewide policy successes in 2007 was a piece of Complete Streets legislation, requiring that the state include bike and pedestrian pathways in the planning and construction of state roads. In partnership with The League of Illinois Bicyclists, CBF also pushed successfully for state law that will require



CBF WORKS ON POLICY IN ADDITION TO BIKE SAFETY EDUCATION

### QUICK FACTS

**LOCATION** . . . Chicagoland Bicycle Federation

**POLICY JURISDICTION**

Local  State  Federal

**POLICY ORIENTATION**

Policy  Poised  Education

**APPROACH**

Environmental/Institutional  Services/Programs

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

**ISSUE AREAS** . . . Physical Activity

**POLICY DOMAINS**

Bikeability/Walkability

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

cars to have a three foot clearance when they pass bicyclists. A third policy victory for 2007 was a state mandate to set heavier penalties for drivers who crash into school crossing guards.

At the local level, CBF runs a campaign seeking selected street closures that would afford pedestrians the use of car-free streets on Sundays. Working with the Consortium to Lower Obesity among Chicago's Children, CBF advocates for the return of physical education classes and active recess to local area schools. As a lead organizer for the Northeast Illinois Safe Routes to School Task Force, CBF works to make sure that children can walk and bike safely on their way to and from school. Safe Routes to School programs are now cropping up throughout the metro region.

Building the membership base to take on state and local bike and pedestrian issues has taken a mixture of



BIKE EVENTS RAISE MONEY AND AWARENESS ABOUT ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION AND BIKE SAFETY

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organizational coalition building and community-based outreach and engagement. In addition to policy advocacy, the 5,700 member organization also hosts public events and runs programs such as Go Healthy!, which encourages people in low-income communities to incorporate walking and bicycling into their daily lives. Participants are asked to complete 3-day travel diaries, indicating all of their trips and Go Healthy! Coaches help them figure out which trips they can most easily substitute with a walk or bicycle ride. CBF pays two community liaisons to engage Chicago resi-

dents to advocate for safer streets and accessible physical activity opportunities.

When asked about their keys to success, Sadowsky admits, “We’re very effective in what we do. We are not a shouting organization. We praise loudly and scold very softly.” So far, that approach seems to be working, but CBF still faces some uphill battles. Since the State Supreme Court recently declared that bikes were not intended for the road, CBF has taken up a local fight to protect the rights and safety of bicyclists. The Supreme Court’s ruling (*Boub v. Wayne*) discourages municipalities from putting up traffic signs for bicyclists on the basis that the signage would then make cities liable for injuries to bicyclists.

Though disappointed when bike-hostile decisions are handed down from the legislature or the courts, Sadowsky is not deterred. “We have a vision of 7,500 miles (the equivalent of 2.5 trips from New York to San Francisco) of trails and bike lanes in Chicago and the surrounding region. Our goal is to get 15% of the regional population to bike to work. It’s at 1% now.” With their sights set on increased ridership and better infrastructure, CBF and its vocal membership see a lot of opportunities to improve the physical environment so that children and families can be engaged in regular, safe physical activity at school and on city and state roads.