

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

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOTS

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Table of Contents

Overview	1
1. Community Farm Alliance.	3
2. Get Moving Kern.	6
3. Chicagoland Bicycle Federation	9
4. Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center	11
5. <i>Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste</i> (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United)	13
6. Lifelong Communities Initiative.	15
7. The Food Project of Boston	17
8. Teton Valley Trails and Pathways	19
9. Center for Economic Security	21
10. Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety	23
11. New Orleans Food and Farm Network.	25

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.

GET MOVING KERN AND GREENFIELD WALKING GROUP

Latino parents get things moving in rural Kern County

What do a walking group and an Obesity Prevention Task Force have in common? Everything for *Greenfield Walking Group*, an active group of Latino parents who identify barriers to safe physical activity and discuss community solutions as they walk through their rural neighborhood in Kern County, California.

When *Get Moving Kern*, a coalition of organizations focused on healthy eating and active living, were chosen as the community partner for The California Endowment’s Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) in October 2006, they were required to set up a task force to work with the local health department that would include residents. “I didn’t just want to set up a task force of organizations and then ask a few residents to come be a part of our group after an agenda had already been set. I really wanted to start with a coalition of residents. So, I



COMMUNITY RESIDENTS PREPARE TO CONDUCT A WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION Bakersfield, CA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition and Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

- Bikeability/Walkability
- Food Access/Anti-Hunger
- School/Afterschool/Childcare Nutrition

WEBSITE www.getmovingkern.org

looked around at what was already happening in our community and I found a group of parents who first met at a nutrition class and had decided that a good way to keep in touch was to start walking together. “When I asked if they would be interested in making healthy changes not only for themselves, but for their entire community, they were open to it,” says Jennifer Lopez, Healthy Living Outreach Facilitator for *Get Moving Kern*.

Out of that initial conversation, two walking group leaders stepped up to meet the challenge of leading a resident task force. They decided to call themselves the *Greenfield Walking Group*. They began inviting more residents to join them to discuss what kind of policies or changes to their environment would make it easier



PARENTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS OUT ON A WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT

to eat healthy and be active. The most frustrating barriers they faced were all of the obstacles they had to overcome as they just tried to walk and talk in their local park. Aggressive stray dogs harassed the group. The group had to avoid stepping on hypodermic needles. And as they walked they were frightened of being mowed down by unyielding motorists.

The group decided to conduct a walkability assessment of the park with help from California Walks and invited city staff and other organizations who could support their efforts. “Everyone had a horror story about the park. The walkability assessment gave them an opportunity to share their stories with the people who could help them develop solutions,” remarked Lopez. After the walking portion of the assessment, participants broke up into small groups and mapped out where they had encountered barriers to walking and playing in the park with their families. The maps highlighted places with rampant graffiti, where street lights and park lights had been shot out, and where a speed limit sign had been knocked down. Walkers also pinpointed locations where they had encountered a flasher; witnessed an attempted kidnapping, evidence of sexual activity, open air drug use, gang recruitment, and a drive-by shooting.

Conducting the walkability assessment in conjunction with city staff provided *Greenfield Walking Group* with the opportunity to share the steps they had already taken to improve the walking environment and

to learn how they could do more. Relationship-building was crucial. It helped the residents get to know the people they would need to call on from animal control, graffiti abatement, parks and recreation, law enforcement, and public works in order to maintain park improvements.

Greenfield Walking Group members also partnered with their local school district and identified a need for afterschool physical activity opportunities for children in kindergarten to third grade. The group sat down with school district administrators and afterschool staff and what emerged was the adoption of new policies to increase opportunities for healthy eating and active living throughout the district. Nevertheless, Lopez is keenly aware that getting policies adopted is only the first part. “We’re going to have to work hard to make sure things are implemented and sustained.”

Lopez feels that things seem to be coming together so quickly for the *Greenfield Walking Group* because the families are at the center of identifying the problems and their solutions. “It is a power shift for us as professionals in the field to consider these neighbors as the true experts of their communities, but if we can respect that, the motivation for change is powerful on all fronts,” advises Lopez.

Now groups throughout the county and the region are calling on the parents in the *Greenfield Walking Group* to get their input and feedback. For example, as the Kern Council of Governments works



HYPODERMIC NEEDLES WERE ONE OF MANY BARRIERS THAT DISCOURAGED PARENTS AND FAMILIES FROM USING THE PARK



TOGETHER PARENTS OF THE GREENFIELD WALKING GROUP DISCUSS PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING WALKABILITY

through its process to discuss the master plan for the San Joaquin Valley, as well as their county general plan for transportation and transit, they have held special sessions with the *Greenfield Walking Group* to get their input into the process. The group now provides technical assistance to residents and organizations throughout Kern County on how to transform their communities. California Walks shares the experience of the *Greenfield Walking Group* as the advocacy group conducts walkability assessments throughout the state.

In addition to the group's proactive and prevention-focused activities, the group also wrestles with issues like poor air quality and health insurance which affect their quality of life. "Many of the residents already have diabetes and their children struggle with

asthma," says Lopez. "No matter how committed they are, they cannot come outside to walk on bad air days (Bakersfield has some of the worst air quality in the nation) and so there are some basic unmet needs for those with diabetes and no health insurance." As a result, group members have also made their voices heard on statewide legislation that could improve air quality, make health care affordable, and require restaurants to post nutrition information on menus.

To celebrate their one-year anniversary the *Greenfield Walking Group* held a celebration in their local park and was joined by Bakersfield Mayor Harvey Hall, the Superintendent of Greenfield Schools, and the Head of the Kern County Health Department. "This highlights a real success in bringing together residents, the health department, city government, and schools to work together, not just at this event, but to make real long term change in Kern," says Lopez. An example of that change will be the creation of a walking path along the most treacherous part of the park, to make it easier for parents to walk and push strollers.

Says Lopez, "We think other community residents can benefit from knowing that we started out as a group of parents who decided to walk together and now we're making change happen in our community." To inspire other communities, they decided to develop a *fotonovela* depicting members of the *Greenfield Walking Group* and the Mayor of Bakersfield working together to improve community health. They are distributing the *fotonovela* to health departments in communities throughout the Central Valley.