

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

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOTS

This document was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and prepared by Prevention Institute

Principal authors:

Linnea Ashley, MPH

Manal J. Aboelata, MPH

Juliet Sims, RD

Sarah Adler-McDonald

© January 2008

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221 Oak Street
Oakland, CA 94607
510.444.7738
fax 510.663.1280

www.preventioninstitute.org

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at the center of community well-being

Acknowledgements

Prevention Institute would like to thank each of the following individuals who gave generously of their time to provide us with the information, photos, and supporting materials that went into each organizational snapshot.

Chris Bedford
President
Center for Economic Security

Joe Schroeder
Urban Organizer
Community Farm Alliance

Rob Sadowsky
Executive Director
Chicagoland Bicycle Federation

Jen James
Associate Director
The Food Project of Boston

Jennifer Lopez
Healthy Living Outreach Facilitator
Get Moving Kern

Kathryn Lawler
Consultant
Lifelong Communities Initiative

Marnie Genre & Max Elliot
New Orleans Food and Farm Network

Sally Flocks
President, CEO, and Founder
Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety

Berry Friesen
Executive Director.
Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center

Ramon Ramirez
Executive Director
Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste
(Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United)

Tim Adams
Executive Director
Teton Valley Trails and Pathways

We would like to recognize Makani-Themba Nixon, Praxis Project and Kolu Zigbi, Noyes Foundation for their thoughtful reflections and guidance during the start-up phase. We would also like to thank key informants from Ypsilanti Health Coalition, One Less Car, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, and Piedmont Environmental Council, who gave generously of their time to describe their policy advocacy and community organizing efforts.

Carol Chao, Janani Srikantharajah, Sam Davidson, and Jesse Appelman were the Prevention Institute staff responsible for many hours of interviewing, data collection, and data analysis. Without their efforts neither the *Map of the Movement* nor the *Organizational Snapshots* would have come to fruition. Thank you.

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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.

NEW ORLEANS FOOD & FARM NETWORK

Knocking down barriers to healthy food access

Formalized in January 2005, *New Orleans Food & Farm Network* (NOFFN) was a small organization with an educational, project-based approach to their work. But that approach changed after Hurricane Katrina.

The storm brought stark inequities and racism within New Orleans into sharp relief. That disparity now informs NOFFN’s commitment to food justice: the idea that everyone, regardless of race or income—and especially the most vulnerable—deserves dignified and ongoing access to healthy, safe, and culturally-appropriate food.

Marnie Genre and Max Elliot were the first NOFFN staff to return in the Hurricane’s aftermath. Having been displaced, they traveled through city neighborhoods surveying the situation. “We saw a lot of opportunities and we thought, now is the time to grow into a larger organization and have a deeper impact in the community,” says Genre. As many were leaving the city for good, Marnie and Max saw an opportunity to stay and rebuild the city’s food system into one that met the needs of growers and residents alike.

We know that together we can rebuild our city’s food system so that everyone has a place at the table.

New Orleans Food & Farm Network

In order to have that deeper impact, NOFFN knew they would need a new strategy that expanded beyond their project-based approach. “Our specific goals changed after Katrina. We were dealing with a different city, and the residents had different issues. We

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION New Orleans, LA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition

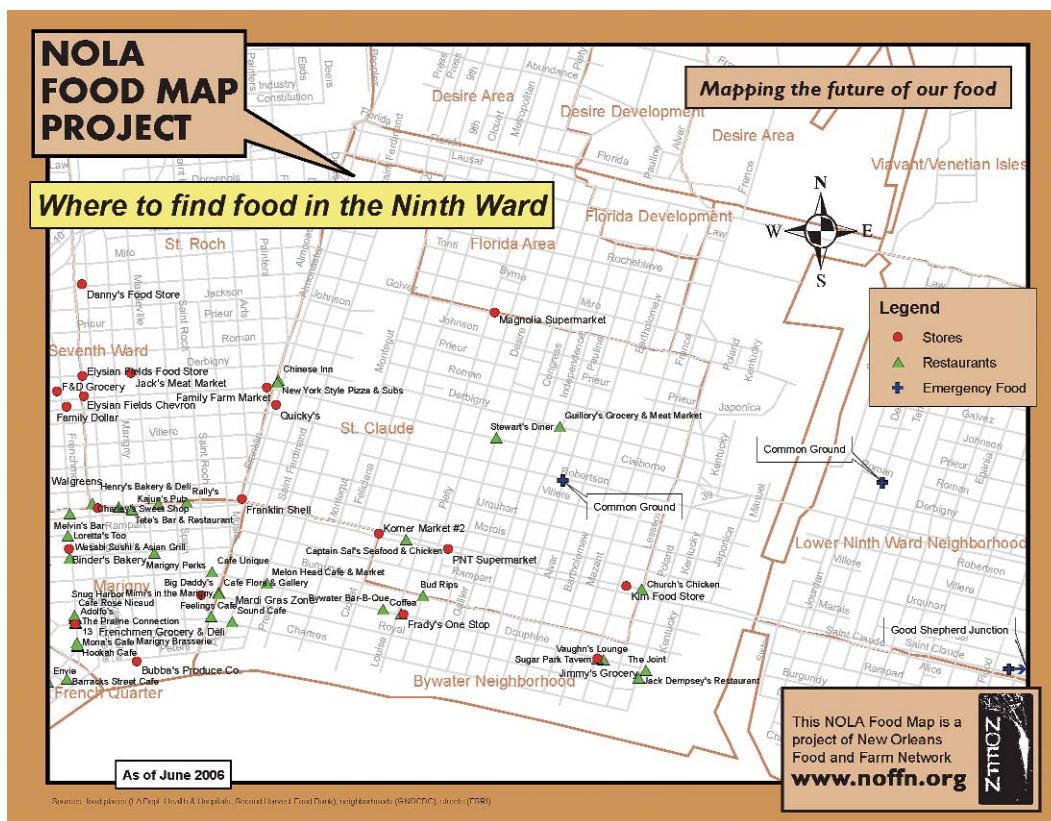
POLICY DOMAINS

■ Food Access/Anti-Hunger
■ Land Use/Planning/Zoning

WEBSITE www.noffn.org

knew that a lot of the changes would need to happen through government and policy channels—and we couldn’t ignore that.”

Realizing that the stakes were too high to waste time duplicating the efforts of other organizations, NOFFN started to band together with other local groups who had expertise in food security, public health, and sustainable agriculture to determine the city’s unmet food security needs and the best policy approaches to address them. The result is a new collaborative: *Grow New Orleans Network*. The Network meets seasonally—four times a year—to share resources, develop collaborations, and focus attention on the need for a healthy and sustainable food system for New Orleans. In addition, NOFFN assisted in assembling a Food Policy Advisory Council to advise



AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA, MAPS LIKE THIS ONE WERE DISTRIBUTED TO RESIDENTS THROUGHOUT NEW ORLEANS TO HELP THEM LOCATE FOOD PANTRIES, FOOD STORES AND RESTAURANTS

the city council on how to improve the local food system. Marilyn Yank, NOFFN’s Executive Director, notes that, besides being a panel of experts, the Advisory Council is intended to be a voice for the community.

To guide the work of the Advisory Council, NOFFN and the Grow New Orleans Network created the New Orleans Community Food Charter. The Charter reflects NOFFN’s equity focus stating that strategies to develop a secure and healthy local food system must “remove barriers to fresh, healthy food access for all our citizens. Some of these barriers include lack of transportation, inadequate wages, and the unequal distribution of outlets which offer fresh healthy foods.” The Charter also prioritizes setting aside abandoned land within the city for farming. NOFFN has sought media coverage on the Charter to raise public awareness of its existence. “We feel that the Charter has a much stronger chance of getting formally adopted if the public is aware of its existence and importance,” says Yank.

Though they see this policy work as integral to their mission, NOFFN has not completely left behind

its roots in service delivery. Immediately following the hurricane, many food retailers around the city weren’t operating and food availability was low, but certain neighborhoods were harder hit than others. NOFFN decided to create maps of the most impacted neighborhoods that delineated food-retailer locations for residents to use. Through this work, NOFFN conceived a new Mapping project.

The Mapping project will go neighborhood-by-neighborhood, plotting community access to fresh produce and creating a plan to increase it. The process begins with a detailed map of neighborhood food assets including current food retail locations, potential growing sites, and WIC and Electronic Benefit Transfer services. Using the map as a starting point, NOFFN has started utilizing a participatory process to strategize with residents and neighborhood leaders about how to increase fresh food availability. Once each neighborhood plan is created, NOFFN will use existing community food project funding to implement them.

NOFFN is piloting the project in the Algiers neighborhood. Algiers—a neighborhood with many low-

“While we are partial to urban agriculture projects, we know that interests of the community are primary. Looking at existing strengths and resources and listening to local wisdom before and during project work is so important. That’s why we offer support on a variety of neighborhood food projects—so we fit the work to the neighborhood and not the other way around.”

Marnie Genre
New Orleans Food & Farm Network

income residents—remained largely unflooded following the hurricane. NOFFN felt it was a good place to pilot the project because residents, for the most part, weren’t preoccupied with trying to find a place to live. Furthermore, the neighborhood had a small group of active gardeners and an agricultural heritage.

NOFFN recognized that building a foundational relationship with the community and communicating that its intentions were genuine would be crucial for the success of its work. A large part of its work goes into cultivating those relationships. For example, NOFFN hosts community dinners to celebrate the neighborhood through the sharing of food—which is a real unifier in New Orleans. In addition, it brings in community members to assist in the work whenever possible, and pays them fairly for their time. The group also asks for community input and feedback at every step along the way.

Because the project is community guided, the plan really doesn’t take shape until the residents weigh in. “While we at Food and Farm are partial to urban agriculture projects, we know that interests of the community are primary. Looking at existing strengths and resources and listening to local wisdom before and during project work is so important. That’s why we offer support on a variety of neighborhood food projects—so we fit the work to the neighborhood and not the other way around,” says Genre.

Creating two arms of the organization—one that focuses on networking and policy and one that is committed to community work—has positioned NOFFN to play a key role in the rebuilding of New Orleans’ food system. But for a staff of four, “working in these two worlds is also a challenge.” Luckily, their board and staff are made up of people who are passionate about food systems and community work and who bring different skill sets that support both policy and community work to the table.

NOFFN plans to continue its support and guidance of the Food Policy Advisory Council and its active membership in the Grow New Orleans Network. The Mapping project will also continue, as NOFFN makes its way through the city’s neighborhoods.

Recently, the group received a six-month grant to explore the challenges faced by growers who are farming within the city for a profit. “We want to know what problems they face, what are their training or informational needs, what infrastructure they need.” The intent is to take the assessment and create a tool-kit for growers who would like to start farming within the city. The project also aims to increase demand for locally grown food. NOFFN is working with city chefs to connect them up with growers. “Ultimately, we would like to develop our own urban farm that could be our research and training site and where the community could see what urban farming is like,” says Genre.

New Orleans Food & Farm Network envisions a rebuilt New Orleans with a local food system that is equitable and reflects the priorities of all the city’s residents. The Community Food Charter lays out that vision, and the Mapping project, Grow New Orleans Network, and Food Policy Advisory Council all tie in to support it. Walking the line between policy and community work is a challenge, but NOFFN is strategically laying the groundwork for a better New Orleans—one that supports the health of the whole community.