

# *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

Prevention Institute is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, the organization has focused on injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, health disparities, nutrition and physical activity, and youth development. This, and other Prevention Institute documents, are available at no cost on our website.

221 Oak Street  
Oakland, CA 94607  
510.444.7738  
fax 510.663.1280

[www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org)

Prevention  
Institute  
Putting prevention  
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.

# 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. <b>Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste</b> <b>(Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United)</b> . . . . .	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.

## PIÑEROS Y CAMPESINOS UNIDOS DEL NOROESTE

# Farmworkers' Union improves healthy food access and physical activity opportunities

**R**amon Ramirez of PCUN, *Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United) has been organizing farmworkers in Oregon since PCUN started with less than 100 members in 1985. Now, with over 5,300 members, more than 95% of whom are Mexican and Central American, PCUN has built a movement of farmworkers empowered to influence working and housing conditions as well as the ways food is grown and distributed. Above and beyond core efforts to improve labor conditions, PCUN works to improve many aspects of farmworker health, including pesticide exposure and access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities.

“We’re seeing a lot of farmworkers getting diabetes,” says Ramirez as he enumerates half a dozen of his staff with diabetes who are also obese. “Our children are susceptible and many of the people with diabetes are indigenous people from Oaxaca and Michoa-



LAST YEAR, PCUN SOLD 6 TONS OF ORGANIC PRODUCE TO MOM AND POP SHOPS IN LATINO COMMUNITIES

### QUICK FACTS

**LOCATION** . . . . Woodburn, OR

**POLICY JURISDICTION**

- Local
- State
- Federal

**POLICY ORIENTATION**

- Policy
- Poised
- Education

**APPROACH**

- Environmental/Institutional
- Services/Programs

**EQUITY FOCUS** . . . . Strong

**ISSUE AREAS** . . . Nutrition and Other

**POLICY DOMAINS**

- Affordable Housing
- Agriculture/Sustainable Food Systems
- Economic Development
- Pollution/Toxin Reduction
- Food Safety
- Immigration Reform

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

can, so we take the responsibility to explore options for improving health of our people very seriously.” Through *Radio Movimiento: La Voz del Pueblo*, PCUN’s recently licensed FM radio station, PCUN reaches millions of people around the country touching on health issues from pesticide exposure to sustainable farming and has recently begun to cover healthy eating and diabetes prevention.

Many of PCUN’s policy successes have simultaneously addressed farmworker health and food access. PCUN has worked intensively to curb pesticide spraying, develop policies to ensure that workers know what chemicals they are using, and convince growers to go





THE LABOR UNION HAS NEVER BACKED DOWN FROM ISSUES THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACT IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

---

from conventional to organic farming when feasible and safer. PCUN has also developed a union label process which certifies corn and strawberries as union-grown products that are cultivated with little or no pesticides. Through relationships with local churches, markets, and Willamette University, farmworkers have helped distribute and market union label produce because it is grown under humane working conditions. Not only does union certification represent a seal of approval for workers rights, but it has also increased local access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Just last year, PCUN sold 6 tons of organic produce grown by small and organic farmers to mom and pop shops in Latino communities that would not otherwise have carried such produce. “It just would not have happened without PCUN’s push for these local markets to carry the union label vegetables,” according to Ramirez. Soon, PCUN’s market will expand to Lewis and Clark University.

Based in Woodburn, Oregon, a town of about 20,000 that is more than 50% Latino, PCUN has built a labor-community union which extends beyond its immigrant workforce into the lives of families. PCUN supports youth organizing for better educational opportunities, women working toward economic development, and improved housing conditions for immigrants. Through their *CAPACES* program, PCUN builds capacity among workers to hone their leadership, organizing, and political skills to help grow and sustain the movement. As part of their coordination efforts, PCUN convenes union members, youth leaders, and women organizers at monthly meetings to

discuss joint concerns. Ramirez admits that health issues like diabetes have been “front and center for the past six months.”

Even though PCUN is first and foremost a labor-union, it has never backed down from issues that negatively impact immigrants and their families. Ramirez believes that food access, physical activity, working conditions, housing, voting rights, educational opportunities, and economic independence are all interconnected. As an example, without improved housing, PCUN would have never been able to offer activity classes to local residents. Ramirez sadly recounts hosting an international fact-finding delegation. After having visited labor camps in Uganda, Namibia, and The Philippines, the delegates revealed that the Mexican farmworkers in Oregon lived in the worst housing conditions of all. This revelation was a turning point for Ramirez. He pushed for PCUN to work with partner organizations to establish a community development corporation that would build quality, affordable housing for farmworkers. New housing projects liberate farmworkers from harsh living conditions and, now, each housing development has a community center with health, education, and safety programs supported by PCUN. Residents can now participate in yoga and dance classes in their housing complexes and although the residents are having fun, Ramirez notes, “The dancing and the yoga are not just for fun, they are for health, too.”

PCUN started the farmworkers union from scratch at a time when the labor movement was in a downward spiral. Now PCUN has grown into a vibrant and vocal vehicle for Latino farmworkers and their families in the northwest. PCUN’s consciousness about the connections between food, economics, human dignity, and the environment provide a powerful example of how truly good solutions solve multiple problems. Looking forward, Ramirez sees the work of PCUN as empowering workers and their families to speak up about basic issues such as access to fresh water and restrooms in the field, to continuing on the path of putting issues like how food is grown, where it comes from, and who has access to healthy options on the public agenda.