FACTS
Linking Food Production with Healthier Diets
Farm Bill Reauthorization

OVERVIEW

As our nation wrestles with an obesity epidemic and the increasing prevalence of diabetes and the impact of cardiovascular disease (CVD)\(^1\), the relationship between our government’s investment in agriculture and health is more important than ever. Public health advocates are promoting a consistent farm to fork policy that links the foods grown and produced in the U.S. with American consumers, emphasizing those foods recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans – fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seafood, and low-fat dairy.\(^2\)

The farm bill is a multi-year bill that authorizes programs that address agricultural policy, food issues, nutrition, hunger, and public health comprehensively. The farm bill covers several important areas relevant to food availability and consumption including nutrition, farm commodity support, conservation, and crop insurance. After a short expiration at the end of 2012, the farm bill was temporarily extended through the end of the 2013 fiscal year.\(^3\) Lawmakers will once again debate the future of farm bill in the coming months.

INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

Improving access to healthy foods and making them more affordable for consumers is an important priority for the public health community in the farm bill. The farm bill can help make healthy foods more available by supplying them within government feeding and nutrition programs, school and community programs, and national, state, and local markets.

THE LINK BETWEEN HEALTHY FOODS AND HEALTHY LIVING

- One reason for the alarming trends for obesity and diabetes in the U.S. population, as well as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, is that too many children and adults do not eat a healthy diet.\(^4,5\)
- A diet high in fruits and vegetables can reduce the risk for many leading causes of death and can play an important role in weight management.\(^6,7\)
- Fewer than 1% of U.S. children meet at least four out of the five components that American Heart Association uses to define a healthy diet and only 0.3% of adults achieve this standard.\(^8\)
- The beginning of CVD (atherosclerosis, fatty streaks in the arteries) can start early in life and is influenced by modifiable risk factors, including a healthy diet, over the course of a lifetime.\(^9\) If people reach middle age (~age 50) with fewer risk factors, then they have a better chance of a lower lifetime risk for CVD mortality, increased survival and improved quality of life.\(^10\)

THE ASSOCIATION RECOMMENDS

Initiatives like the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, the Farmer’s Market Promotion Program, the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, and nutrition education in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) connect farmers to market opportunities and increase
access to healthy foods in communities and schools. The association will advocate that the next Farm Bill:

- Maintain current funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) and protect the integrity of the program. The FFVP began as a pilot program in the 2002 Farm Bill and has now expanded nationally to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories with $1.2 billion in funding from the last Farm Bill provided over 10 years. An independent evaluation found that the FFVP increased students’ average fruit and vegetable consumption by a health-promoting 15% in participating schools, but did not increase overall caloric intake, suggesting that children replaced less healthy foods in their diets with fruits and vegetables.
- Maintain restored cuts in fiscal year 2014 and seek current funding for SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed) in subsequent years. Strengthen the program to ensure low-income Americans have the ability to make healthy choices, increase fruit and vegetable consumption, and reduce their risk of chronic disease and obesity. Incorporate physical activity into SNAP-Ed curriculum.
- Establish a multistate incentive pilot to promote increased SNAP purchases of fruits and vegetables at farmers markets and other healthy food retailers and support private/public partnerships and programs like Wholesome Wave and Double Up Food Bucks that have shown great success.
- Ensure SNAP participants have access to healthy food by providing Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) point of sale devices to farmers markets, farm stands, green carts, and other non-traditional food retailers.
- Maintain funding for and promote the Agricultural Marketing Service's Farmers’ Market Promotion Program (FMPP). Ensure funding support and streamlining existing farmers’ market, community food, and agriculture marketing and food hub development programs to increase their effectiveness; better connect low-income people and communities with nutrition assistance programs; increase access to healthier food; improve outcomes and efficiency; and promote economic development and job creation.
- Maintain funding for the National Institute of Food and Agriculture for vital research on nutrition, hunger and food security, and obesity prevention.
- Provide funding for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) to bring supermarkets, grocery stores into underserved rural, urban and suburban areas, increasing access to healthy food, creating new jobs, and generating new economic opportunities in low-income communities across the nation.

3 American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012, P.L. 112-240 (January 2, 2013)
7 Rolls J, Ello-Martin JA, Tohill BC. What can intervention studies tell us about the relationship between fruit and vegetable consumption and weight management? Nutr Rev 2004;62:1-17