

Improving access to fresh healthy food in underserved Louisiana communities

a Food Policy Briefing from the
Food Policy Advisory Committee of New Orleans

The Food Policy Advisory Committee recommends policies to make fresh healthy food more available throughout Louisiana.

- These recommendations focus on bringing more grocery stores and other fresh food retailers into communities that need them. They include public-private partnerships, targeted business incentives, and programs that benefit seniors and families.
- These are achievable strategies which are good for Louisiana businesses and citizens, and which can be applied statewide.

Fresh food retail is critical to healthy families and economic development.

- Making fresh food more available is a key strategy to fight obesity. In many urban and rural areas, it is easy to buy soda and fast food but difficult to find fresh fruits and vegetables. Research shows that people have healthier diets if they have better access to stores that sell fresh produce.
- Grocery stores create jobs, encourage investment and spending, and help make a community a good place to live.

Recommendation: The State of Louisiana should develop a financing program that would provide grants and loans to supermarkets, smaller grocery stores, farmers' markets, and other fresh food retailers that enhance healthy food access in underserved areas.

The State of Louisiana should dedicate funds to stimulate private sector investment in fresh food retail in underserved areas. To make the best use of available resources, Louisiana should create a financing program which is implemented through a public-private partnership (modeled after the Fresh Food Financing Initiative in Pennsylvania, shown on reverse).

A successful healthy food retail initiative will show economic, social, and health benefits

- Projects eligible for grants and loans would include: new supermarket development, renovations and equipment that enable existing stores to sell more fresh produce, public markets, and farmers' markets. Both for-profit and nonprofit retailers would be eligible.
- Financing may be used for purposes such as land assembly and site remediation; construction costs; infrastructure improvements; security; and workforce training.
- Retailers that receive funding should be required to sell fresh fruits and vegetables.



A public-private partnership provides thorough program management for a healthy food retail initiative

The partnership would set award criteria, provide oversight, and leverage funds. Suggested members include:

- Leadership from the Louisiana Legislature & Office of the Governor
- Department of Economic Development
- Department of Agriculture and Forestry
- Office of Public Health
- Community Development Financial Institution(s)
- Louisiana Public Health Institute

The partnership would work closely with fresh food retailers and community-based groups to match projects with the community's specific needs.

An Innovative Model: The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative

The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI) was created in 2004 in response to rising concern over the identified lack of access to fresh foods in certain communities.

The program provides grant and loan funding for fresh food retailers that plan to operate in underserved communities and where infrastructure costs and credit needs cannot be filled solely by conventional financial institutions.

The initiative makes available a \$120 million multi-faceted funding pool. Under the leadership of State Representative Dwight Evans, the State has appropriated \$30 million to the FFFI. An additional \$90 million has been leveraged through a variety of public and private sources, including federal New Markets Tax Credits.

The program is supported through a public-private partnership between the State and three organizations: The Food Trust, The Reinvestment Fund, and the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition. The Food Trust works directly with the supermarket industry, developers, and underserved communities to match the appropriate projects to each area and lend support as the process moves along. The Reinvestment Fund manages the Initiative's financing program. The Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition works to expand employment and contracting opportunities for women and minorities in the projects that are placed in communities.



Accomplishments of the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative*

- **\$38.9 million in grant and loan funding committed**
- **50 supermarkets and grocery stores statewide**
- **3,723 jobs created or preserved**
- **1.2 million square feet of food retail space**

* Figures reflect accomplishments in the first three years of the program.

About the Food Policy Advisory Committee

The Committee is made up of over 30 members from diverse fields, including: grocers and farmers' markets, government agencies, universities, community-based organizations, and banks. The nonpartisan Committee works to identify and promote best practices.

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