



## Promoting smart, fair food policy for New York

### Testimony to the New York City Council Committees on Governmental Operations and Contracts on Oversight on An Update on FoodWorks September 25, 2013

Nicholas Freudenberg, DrPH, Distinguished Professor of Public Health, CUNY School of Public Health and Hunter College; Faculty Director, New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I congratulate the City Council and the participating city agencies for their substantial progress in implementing FoodWorks and its vision to improve New York City's food system. I speak on behalf of the New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College, of which I am Faculty Director. The Center was created in 2012 to develop intersectoral, innovative and evidence-based solutions to preventing diet-related diseases and promoting food security in New York and other cities. The Center works with policy makers, community organizations, advocates and the public to create healthier, more sustainable food environments and to use food to promote community and economic development. We thank the City Council and the Speaker's officer for their support of our Center.

I want to talk about two issues addressed in FoodWorks and propose specific steps the City Council and the Mayor can take in the coming years to further advance the vision described in FoodWorks. Both are the subject of reports by the NYC Food Policy Center.

First, I discuss the potential for the city to play a stronger role in creating more good food jobs in New York City. Last month, we released our report *JOBS FOR A HEALTHIER DIET AND A STRONGER ECONOMY: Opportunities for Creating New Good Food Jobs in New York City*. The report defines good food jobs as jobs that pay a living wage, provide safe working conditions, and make healthier food available to all New Yorkers. Increasing the number of good food jobs can contribute to reducing three of the city's most serious problems: high unemployment rates, especially among low income families; high rates of food insecurity and hunger; and rising rates of obesity and diet-related diseases. The report describes several projects in New York City and elsewhere that are working to create good food jobs and assesses their accomplishments and limitations. We call on the City Council and the next Mayor to work with employers, labor union, universities, workforce developers and other to create 10,000 new good food jobs in New York City by 2020. To encourage innovative thinking, we describe six strategies that each has the potential to create at least 1,000 new jobs. These are:

1. Increase enrollment in the Department of Education's School Lunch and Breakfast programs to generate new school food jobs and train school cooks to use less salt, fat and sugar and prepare more fresh food.

2. Create the New York City Healthy Food Truck and Street Vendors Project to assist aspiring entrepreneurs, including recent immigrants, unemployed people, or small business owners to prepare and sell healthy, affordable street food in New York City neighborhoods, parks and tourist destinations.
3. Build new food processing plants in New York City that can process regionally grown food for institutions and small retail outlets thereby creating new jobs and markets for New York State farmers while further improving the nutritional quality of food served in the city's institutional food programs.
4. Create or expand social enterprise organizations that can win contracts for institutional food in private schools, universities, health care facilities and city programs by providing affordable healthy food. Creating local businesses that can sell healthy, regional, fresh and processed food to these institutions creates jobs and improves the health of vulnerable populations.
5. Provide additional training and compensation to home health aides to prepare them to become healthy food shoppers and cooks for people with diabetes and other diet-related diseases in order to prevent hospitalizations and improve disease management.
6. Enroll an additional 250,000 eligible New Yorkers in SNAP (Food Stamps) to increase demand for healthy food in small groceries, bodegas, farmers markets and community supported agriculture projects and enlist the city's advertising agencies and food organizations in a citywide pro bono social marketing campaign to increase demand for healthy food. To realize this goal, we'll need to convince Congress not to make draconian cuts in SNAP.

In our report, we describe specific steps the Mayor, the City Council and other organizations can take to grow new good food jobs in New York. The report is available at <http://nycfoodpolicy.org/research/>.

Our second report assesses New York City's institutional food programs that serve 270 million meals and snacks a year. We describe the impressive accomplishments of the Mayor's Office of the Food Policy Coordinator, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and other city agencies in promulgating and implementing use of the New York City Food Standards. We then suggest some additional ways the city can use the more than \$500 million a year of city, state and federal funds it spends on institutional food both to further improve the nutritional quality of food served to the city's most vulnerable populations and to leverage changes in the city's food system as a whole. We also propose new ways the city can think about centralizing some parts of the city's institutional food system in order to achieve economies of scale while still leaving each agency and provider the flexibility to adapt their food program to their particular setting. This report will be ready for distribution later this Fall. Our recommendations in both these reports build on and strengthen several of the new ideas listed in the Fall 2013 FoodWorks Update.

For more information on the NYC Food Policy Center at Hunter College visit our website at [www.nycfoodpolicy.org](http://www.nycfoodpolicy.org) or email Nicholas Freudenberg an [nf@nycfoodpolicy.org](mailto:nf@nycfoodpolicy.org)