



Promoting smart, fair food policy for New York

## **Testimony to the New York State Food Policy Council: 2015 Annual Summer Meeting July 15, 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Council with our reflections on the work of the New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College and their implications for the important tasks facing the New York State Food Policy Council in the coming years. The Center was created four years ago and its mission is 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. Through interdisciplinary research, policy analysis, evaluation and education, the Center leverages the expertise and passion of Hunter College and CUNY students, faculty and staff. In our testimony today, we highlight four policy opportunities for the New York State Food Policy Council that have emerged from our recent work with policymakers, advocates, service providers, universities, researchers and city agencies.

### **1. Improve coordination of new public, non-profit and private food and food policy initiatives at the local, county and state levels.**

In the last several years, government, non-profits and businesses have initiated multiple efforts to improve availability of healthy food, protect farmland, reduce food insecurity, and improve the wages and conditions of workers in the food sector. These new endeavors testify to the growing recognition that our food system needs to change and that many key stakeholders endorse such changes. At the same time, however, too often these initiatives are not coordinated, not evaluated, fail to explore potentials for synergy, or duplicate services. As a result, New York State misses an opportunity to achieve full value for its substantial investments in food.

The New York State Food Policy Council has the mandate and the credibility to further develop its activities to address this problem. By creating a complete inventory of existing food policy initiatives in New York State, convening organizations and people working on similar problems in different parts of the state, and encouraging more systematic evaluation of all state food initiatives, the Council could make an important contribution to improving coordination among the various food programs and policies in the state.

### **2. Develop a coherent statewide approach to the development of Good Food Jobs, decent jobs that provide healthy affordable food to people who need it**

The food sector has the potential to help solve two of New York State's most pressing problems: (1) creating more entry level decent jobs that can help people and families move out of poverty and (2) reducing food insecurity and diet-related diseases in New York City. By developing a comprehensive plan to coordinate existing efforts in these two domains, identify opportunities and gaps in existing programs and defining a Good Food Jobs vision for a vital sector of the state's economy, the New York State Food Policy Council could be in the forefront of developing new national models for creating good

food jobs. It could also play a leading role in ensuring that New York City and New York State food workforce development programs are maximally coordinated. Our Center's two reports, *Jobs for a Healthier Diet and a Stronger Economy* and *The Public Plate in New York City: A Guide to Institutional Meals*, (available on our website: [www.nycfoodpolicy.org/research](http://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/research)) provide additional background on this topic.

### **3. Grow the public sector in food to better achieve public goals of reducing diet-related disease and promoting food security**

Although conventional wisdom regards the food economy as being largely within the private or market sector, in fact tax payers support a substantial portion of this economy through institutional food programs, food benefits such as SNAP and WIC, agricultural subsidies, food safety regulation, and other public programs. Too often, however, these public sector programs fail to coordinate approaches to use public funds and service to solve the public problems of diet-related disease and food insecurity. As a result, both these problems continue to grow, despite substantial public investment in their solution.

Once again, the New York State Food Policy Council is well-situated to contribute to solutions. It could commission a full accounting of the public sector in food in New York State—all those places where tax payer funds or government workers touch food—and an assessment of the cumulative impact of this funding on priority public problems. It could encourage state policy makers, advocates and academics to consider better ways to use the public funding already allocated to the food sector to achieve public policy goals and invite state agencies that work across different food domains (e.g., food benefits, farmland protection, agricultural markets, nutrition and health, workforce development) to propose new ways to leverage their resources to achieve more.

### **4. Expand efforts to discourage promotion and reduce availability of unhealthy food, especially to children**

In the last decade, New York State and New York City have made good progress in making healthier food, especially fruits and vegetables, more available to all New Yorkers. While this work needs to continue and grow, by itself, experts increasingly realize, it will not be enough to control the epidemics of diet-related conditions such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. To achieve that goal, it will be necessary also to reduce intake of foods high in fat, sugar and salt, those highly processed foods most associated with diet-related diseases. This will require better protecting children against the relentless marketing of foods associated with preventable illness and premature death, reducing the ubiquitous and growing availability of unhealthy food in new settings, and ending all public subsidies of unhealthy food.

The New York State Food Policy Council could encourage the Governor and State Legislature to develop new initiatives in these areas, convene organizations working in this domain in New York State to identify best practices, and support initiatives such as creating soda-free zones in public institutions, removing unhealthy food from vending machines in public buildings, and encouraging the development of community-based counter-marketing campaigns.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with the Council, to provide additional evidence to support such initiatives, and to assist in their implementation. For more information contact Nicholas Freudenberg, Distinguished Professor of Public Health at City University of New York and Director of the New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College at [nf@nycfoodpolicy.org](mailto:nf@nycfoodpolicy.org) or visit [www.nycfoodpolicy.org](http://www.nycfoodpolicy.org).