

# PRAGmatics

*journal of community-based research*

cfsc



## A Collaborative Feast

Accessing Healthy Foods  
in a  
Chicago Neighborhood



Fall  
2004

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## Ode to Breakfast

Breakfast, Oh, Breakfast  
I love you, you're great!

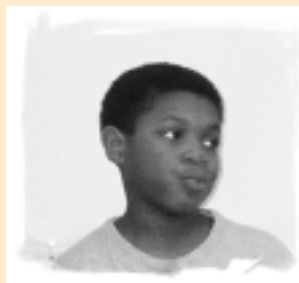
As a morning activity,  
I think you're first rate,

Breakfast, Oh, Breakfast,  
I can't get enough.

I love chomping and chewing,  
and all that good stuff!

But, Breakfast, Oh Breakfast,  
I just need to say—

Breakfast, Dear Breakfast,  
I eat you each day!



*Written by Mr. Roberts' Third Grade Class, Robert Emmet Mathematics, Science and Technology Academy in November 2003—inspired by a nutrition education session led by Loyola Dietetic Interns.*

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Maureen Hellwig

Managing Editor  
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**PRAG**

Loyola University Chicago,  
Lewis Towers, 10th Floor,  
820 N. Michigan Ave.,  
Chicago IL 60611  
312-915-8622  
mhellwi@luc.edu

Visit **PRAG's** web page at  
[www.luc.edu/curl/prag](http://www.luc.edu/curl/prag)

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# Broccoli, It's What's for Dinner!

By Maureen Hellwig



In this issue *PRAGmatics* readers will find an old theme and a new issue as we focus on the work of the Chicago Food System Collaborative (CFSC) funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The old theme is university/community partnership at the service of community-based research and action; the new issue, at least new to *PRAGmatics*, is food security.

The concept of *food security* is aligned with that old adage from community organizing about eating a fish and learning to fish. We can feed the hungry (and we must) but we can and should also teach them to “produce” food, either by growing it themselves or engaging in the system that brings it to the table. Food security also addresses the connection between food and health. In other words, how secure can we feel about what we eat? Will it keep us healthy or make us sick?

Finally, the food security issue is about who controls the answers to the questions just raised. Those who read Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, know that there is a dark side to this issue which runs the gamut from the fields of agri-business to the fast food purveyors who urge us to oversize and overeat the very items that make Americans more likely to become obese, suffer heart attacks, or develop diabetes. The tragedy here is that this corporate food culture message is targeted at our children.

As you will see from this issue, the CFSC has approached the food security issue with a broad array of interventions. But the underlying strategy for all of this work is the deployment of a partnership between the university and the community, between community leaders and engaged academics, who recognize the benefits of collaboration in getting the job done. At the core of this effort you will find the Policy Research Action Group (PRAG) doing what it has been doing for more than 15 years—facilitating engagement, mutual respect, and a deep appreciation for what can be accomplished through collaboration.

Possibly more than any other project PRAG has been involved with, the CFSC represents a multi-university collaboration concentrated in one area of the city—the west side—represented primarily by Austin, but including West Garfield. Loyola University Chicago's School of Nursing, through their Dietetic Internship Program, has faculty and students involved in the CFSC School-Based Nutrition Program (see p. 10). Faculty and students from the Geography Department and Neighborhood Assistance Center at Chicago State University (CSU) are spearheading a research component, which involves mapping of more than 100 grocery stores in Austin and neighboring Oak Park, conducting a Market Basket Survey of local stores, and organizing focus groups of consumers and small corner store owners (see p. 8). Urban Anthropology students from DePaul University were dispatched to interview small grocers to help the CFSC understand their perspective and their role in food security. The CFSC turned to the University of Illinois Chicago's Applied Health Sciences to recruit an evaluation team steeped in the participatory evaluation model that documents process outcomes as well as achievement of goals and objectives (see p. 4).

As in the food business, universities are like easily recognizable name-brands. However, the CFSC is first and foremost a home-grown, local label enterprise. The people who set the table for this collaborative feast more than four years ago include a minister and a community activist. The minister, Rev. Clare Butterfield, had a mission to engage local churches in an Austin Sustainability Circle. Food security emerged as a sustainability issue and the mission helped shape the CFSC table. The community activist is a mom who has a child with food allergies. Struggling to find foods her son could eat from the local stores pointed to the serious problem of access to healthy food in the Austin-West Garfield communities. She did not agonize; instead she organized the Institute for Community Resource Development (ICRD).

Today, LaDonna Redmond is a nationally-recognized spokesperson on food security in general, and the Chicago-based strategy she has helped develop, in particular. She, in turn, has linked with other west side leaders like Jackie Reed, founder of Westside Health Authority, and Mary Nelson, founder of Bethel New Life. One of the most ambitious goals of the CFSC is to build a new, community-based grocery store on the west side to increase access to healthy and organic fruits and vegetables at affordable prices. It is hoped that this store will anchor a food distribution network that will include small grocers and small farmers, all working together for a healthier Austin. Keep an eye on these three influential Chicago women and watch it happen.

# The CFSC Chicago Food System Collaborative— an Interdisciplinary Partnership in Action

By Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar



## Chicago Food System Collaborative Members

*Daniel Block, Chicago State University*  
*Clare Butterfield, Faith in Place*  
*Maureen Hellwig, PRAG, Loyola University Chicago*  
*Janice Henry, St. Martin de Porres*  
*Claire Kohrman, Westside Health Authority*  
*Joanne Kouba, Loyola University Chicago*  
*Louise Martinez, University of Illinois at Chicago*  
*William Peterman, Chicago State University (Retired)*  
*LaDonna Redmond, Institute for Community  
Resource Development*  
*Howard Rosing, DePaul University*  
*Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar, University of Illinois at Chicago*  
*Orrin Williams, Community Activist*

In the fall of 2002, with funding from W. K. Kellogg Foundation, a consortium of community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, technical assistance providers and academic institutions was established and named the Chicago Food System Collaborative. The purpose of the CFSC is to design and implement a comprehensive response to food security issues and to help increase access to healthy foods in low-income communities. The CFSC strategy calls for a systemic approach involving nutrition education and community development activities to address the problem of access to nutritious foods in a working class African American community. Interdisciplinary partnership members include: The Policy Research Action Group (PRAG), of Loyola University Chicago, as the fiscal agent and facilitator for the collaborative; Westside Health Authority, the Institute for Community Resource Development and Faith in Place as community agencies; and Chicago State University, the University of Illinois at Chicago and DePaul University as the other academic institutions.

The project proposed by the partnership is being implemented in Austin, a working class neighborhood on Chicago's far west side. According to the latest census data available, this community is predominantly African American (90%) with approximately 114,000 residents. Eighty-eight percent of Austin residents do not have a college degree.

Families are almost equally divided between female-headed households and married couple households. While a stronger economy lowered the 1990's unemployment rate for Chicago in general, the unemployment rate for communities like Austin remains high in comparison with the city as a whole. In 1990 it was 6.5 points higher than the city's rate. The average family size is 3.77. The median household income is \$34,000 (compared to the SMSA median of \$44,000) and 27,852 individuals live below the poverty level (City of Chicago, 2000, U.S. Census, 2000). This community also has a high incidence of health-related problems such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems and obesity (City of Chicago, Department of Public Health, 2003).

## Interdisciplinary Partnerships

Interdisciplinary university-community partnerships are at the heart of many social, behavioral and health-related fields as they provide unique opportunities that foster innovation to address pressing social problems. Interdisciplinary collaborative partnerships build on the assets and resources that exist both within the community and academia, bringing experiential and diverse scientific knowledge together.

Additionally, interdisciplinary university-community partnerships allow for a more accurate analysis of social issues, innovative solutions to immediate problems, and increase the likelihood that innovations will be used to benefit society (Suarez-Balcazar, Davis, Ferrari, Nyden et al., 2004). In these partnerships all members become active members of the research and community development components. Within these mutually beneficial alliances, partners engage in joint reflection and analysis of the needs and values of the community, as well as collaborate in all aspects of the partnership's endeavors and use the findings to support social change efforts (Checkoway & Barry 1997; Mayfield, Hellwig & Banks, 1999; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Furthermore, in multiple views of interdisciplinary partnerships, bodies of knowledge and strategies are either blended together or augmented in order to analyze and address the social problem at hand.

Descriptions of interdisciplinary partnership principles, as well as conceptual analyses of collaboration, are available in a variety of fields and disciplines, including community psychology (see contextual model Suarez-Balcazar, Harper & Lewis, in press; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2004); public health (Connors & Seifer, 2000) and sociology (Nyden et al., 1997). Interdisciplinary university-community partnerships have been successful in developing and promoting innovations designed to address social and/or economic issues. Examples of such partnerships include the partnerships for health innovation (Connors & Seifer, 2000); and the partnerships for housing innovation ([www.construction.asu.edu/azpath/](http://www.construction.asu.edu/azpath/)).

### The Context and Processes of the CFSC

This collaborative has followed a comprehensive, interdisciplinary and participatory model in which several process and context issues have been critical in making it work. Using an adapted version of Mattessich's and Monsey's 1992 framework of successful collaborations, we examined the following characteristics; membership factors, the purpose of the partnership, communication, environmental and contextual factors, process and structure, and resources. In addition, we added diversity factors, as they have been critical to the partnership. The following is a discussion of these factors within the CFSC:

#### 1—Interdisciplinary Partnership Members' Characteristics and Roles

The membership composition of interdisciplinary partnerships is vital to the success of the partnership. An important component of the partnership includes each member's background, discipline, ethnic group and affiliation. This refers not only to members, but to potential members of the partnership (Mattessich & Monsey (1992).

CFSC partnership members include: Caucasian female researchers from Loyola University Chicago, one with a background in nutrition and the second is an urban planner and director of the Policy Research Action Group (PRAG). Two female nutrition graduate students from Loyola University have been involved in different aspects of the project. One is African American and the other is Caucasian. Two Caucasian faculty from Chicago State University are also partnership members. (Chicago State is a predominantly minority institution; 90% of the students are African American and an additional 5% are Latino.) The two faculty from Chicago State have degrees in Geography, with expertise in Geographical Information Systems mapping. An African American female and a Caucasian male graduate student from Chicago State are also involved in the project. A female, African American community activist and director of a community development organization, who lives in the neighborhood in which the project is taking place is one of the project co-directors. A Caucasian female sociologist who is a staff member at one of the community-based organizations, and a Caucasian female from a faith-based community organization are team members. An African American female nurse from one of the local neighborhood schools also participates in the partnership. Furthermore, an African American male

community organizer specializing in food and social justice issues, manages the farmers market, and participates in monthly meetings. An anthropologist from the DePaul University Steans Family Center, which promotes Service Learning, is assisting with food access and grocery store research as well as focus groups. Finally, one Hispanic female faculty with a degree in Community Psychology, and a part-Hispanic female research specialist with a background in Public Health, both from the University of Illinois at Chicago, coordinate the evaluation of the project.

Although each partner carries different roles and responsibilities, monthly meetings are open to all partners and the partners are encouraged to provide each other feedback and to assist when needed. Individuals who are affiliated with the participating institutions are welcome to attend the monthly meetings, and any new individuals who want to make a contribution to the project are encouraged to join the partnership.

#### 2—Partnership Purpose

Coalitions and collaborations among several institutions are formed in part because members share a common vision and complementary goals. The purpose of the CFSC is to create culturally appropriate alternatives to the problem of lack of access to healthy foods in a working class neighborhood. Although each of the five project components has its own goals, objectives, strategies and outcomes, the same vision is shared, and in order to achieve the vision, the individual goals are added together. These five project components include a school-based nutrition education program, a farmers market component, a communications component, an Austin research component, and a community grocery store component.

#### 3—Partnership Communication

For partnerships to be successful, communication becomes a critical component that when successful, facilitates the building of trust and respect among members (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2004). Communication among members is facilitated by electronic list management, monthly meetings of all partners, and weekly meetings of individuals who are members of each individual project component. In addition, the partnership has held a one-day retreat to reflect on accomplishments, partnership vision, lessons learned and challenges. Electronic communication is also used to record lessons learned and progress toward each individual project



component. Often, research procedures or strategies are discussed and feedback is provided electronically.

#### **4—Partnership Environment and Contextual Factors**

All academic institutions involved in the CFSC partnership have a long history of building successful, interdisciplinary university-community partnerships. These universities have supported and provided a climate of resources facilitation such as space to hold meetings, and technology support. This is often referred to as “universities engaged with the community” or as action research. Some of the members of the partnership have worked together in various previous projects.

#### **5—Process and Structure of the Partnership**

The CFSC partnership is guided by co-directors who share management of the project. One is the director of PRAG and a staff member at Loyola University’s Center for Urban Research and Learning, and the other is a community leader and director of a community development organization located in the target community. The academic director administers the grant and coordinates and facilitates meetings while the community director guides the direction of the project, maintains contact with key decision makers, including funders, policymakers, city representatives and community representatives. This individual has become a key player in many important circles in the city around issues of food security and access.

At monthly meetings, the agenda composed by the academic director is followed in which each individual project member provides an update of activities conducted, strategies implemented and a brief discussion of next steps to follow. All members are free to provide feedback and to comment on each others’ projects. The advantage of interdisciplinary partnerships is that frequently the discussion of a particular issue includes multiple and often complementary perspectives. Although all members are free to comment on a particular procedure and/or provide written or verbal feedback, the ultimate decision on how to proceed is made by the individual directing that particular project component.

#### **6—Partnership Resources**

Interdisciplinary university-community partnerships provide an opportunity for different types of resources to be shared, exchanged and/or maximized. For instance, individuals working in one component have volunteered to assist in the implementation of another component when extra assistance was needed (i.e. data collection). In addition, data resulting from one source (e.g., GIS) has been used to prompt the development of questions for a farmers market survey. Similarly, data that resulted from the farmers market prompted the development of questions for a focus group. Available information has been exchanged and utilized across project components. Also, student assistance has been shared across different project components.

Resources from the community such as residents’ and leaders’ experiential knowledge have been used to shape project strategies. Community contacts have been used to further the goals of the project, and agency facilities that can accommodate large groups have been used to hold monthly meetings. The partnership focused on utilizing community assets and strengths.

#### **7—Diversity**

Diversity is a key characteristic of the CFSC. Diversity and cultural competence are valued and respected. Partnerships in urban areas are diverse across several dimensions including ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic/income, and educational background. All project components have placed special attention to issues of cultural competence including cultural knowledge, skills and awareness. In this case, all components have been developed and implemented, for the most part, with input from the community and community leaders.

#### **Benefits and Challenges**

For a partnership to be successful it’s important that it yield benefits to all members and affiliated organizations. While partnerships are not free of challenges, these challenges can represent opportunities for improvement. Challenges identified by group members have included coordination of schedules, partnership communication, integration of multiple points of view, and equal commitment to the project. To facilitate ongoing reflection on benefits and challenges, members share lessons regularly learned via electronic mail and at monthly CFSC Steering Committee meetings. These lessons are collected by the evaluators and included in project reports. In general, goals and objectives have been met or re-cast because of the effectiveness of the partnership.

#### **CFSC Accomplishments**

- **identify a team that is flexible, adaptable, multidisciplinary and multicultural**
- **reap benefits that from diverse perspectives on project issues**
- **support fellow team members**
- **enhance the ability to address complex social problems**
- **develop a learning community**



*Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar is an Associate Professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy, College of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She currently coordinates the OT community practicum and teaches program evaluation. E-mail ysuarez@uic.edu*

# Food Security— Organizing in the Marketplace

By LaDonna Redmond

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Internationally, food is an organizing issue. In communities around the world, the issue of food sovereignty is the core of the sustainable development movement. While food sovereignty takes shape differently from country to country, it is interesting to see how food is connected to the economic, cultural and political destiny of many communities. In India, for instance, farmers are attempting to regain control of the right to grow rice and feed their families. Recently, these rights have come into question as multinational companies have sought patents for seed that for generations has been cultivated and grown by Indian farmers. In many cases, interests of the corporation outweigh the interests of the farmer. When corporations gain control of the seeds and the plant varieties that those seeds produce, they also control the farmer and his ability to feed his own family. This farmer can no longer steward the land.

The Austin neighborhood on Chicago's west side is a community that seems ripe for exploring and meeting community challenges. Many issues that have been explored in the community have been of great interest to researchers, such as housing and crime. Most of these issues tend to focus on a "problem." The issue is generally solved by creating programs that are, at the core, service-driven. There is nothing wrong with this process; it has worked in many areas such as programs that engage youth in positive activities.

However, no issue has been as multifaceted as food access. Food touches everyone in the community, whether they have too little or have enough, whether they are young or old. Access to healthy food is the crux of the issue regarding community health, yet it has taken many years to unravel just how significant food access is for Chicago residents. Moreover, the issue of food access defies the standard social service approach. Change has to begin by addressing what kinds of food are available in the community and at what cost. In other words, the issue is market-based and change will only occur in that context.

The only way to understand food as a tool for organizing is to take a systems approach. A food system is comprised of many components that include ecological, social and economic factors. The Chicago Food Systems Collaborative (CFSC) embraces an understanding that food access begins with food production and ends with food consumption. When CFSC speaks of food systems, we are talking about local

food systems which support small family farmers, locally-owned grocery stores, and the influence of local institutions, such as schools and churches, on what people eat; it pertains to how much they understand about where that food comes from and which foods are good for their health and which ones may be harming them.

At the core of the CFSC work is the idea that community food access is directly related to individual health. This goes beyond the argument that diets are largely comprised of

personal choice. To some degree this is true, but to a greater degree we purchase what is in the marketplace. In general, the marketplace gives an illusion of access and choice. In reality, we know that a few companies own the majority of products on

supermarket shelves. For example, the top four wholesalers control almost half of the market for Florida tomatoes, and the top two account for three quarters of all freshly-cut salad sold in supermarkets.<sup>1</sup> The Austin marketplace has even dispensed with the illusion of access and choice.

When we examine food, and the issue of access, which includes availability, variety and cost, we see the connection between community access and market factors. Limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables negatively impacts the health of individuals in communities, particularly, those residents with low or moderate incomes. One approach to improving the local food system is working to shorten the distance between food production and food consumption. One way to do this is to build a locally-owned grocery store connected to regional farmers. CFSC is committed to that idea. This will remedy the initial problem of food access. But unless more than one store is built in the area, regardless of its location, someone will not have access to it. The CFSC market basket study has revealed that there are at least 50 corner stores in the Austin community. Granted, some are better than others. However, the availability of some of these stores provides a unique opportunity to impact the Austin marketplace. If several corner stores could increase capacity to carry fresh produce, availability of fresh produce would become available throughout the community. Linking this challenge to the development of a new store is key.

The issue of food access raises other questions about the Austin marketplace. Austin is a community that purchases a lot of groceries. But because the local marketplace is saturated with liquor, candy and fast food options, the impact of \$135 (Con't. on page 13)

*Access to healthy food is the crux  
of the issue regarding community health,  
yet it has taken many years to unravel  
just how significant food access is for  
Chicago residents.*

# The Market Basket Study— What’s Cookin’ in Austin & Oak Park

By Daniel Block

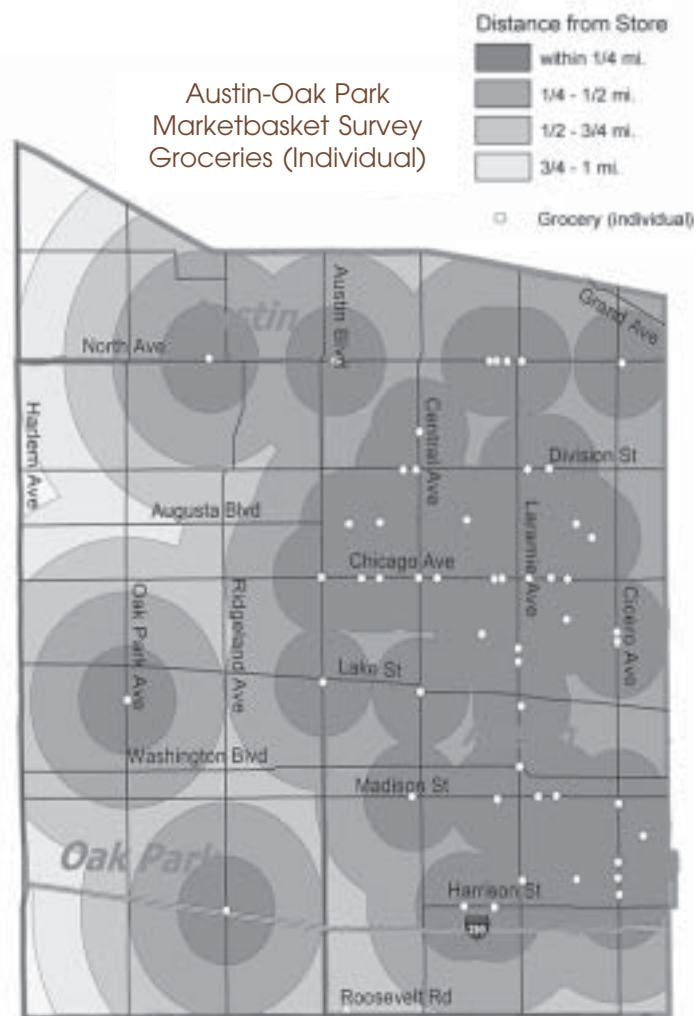
As a recent report from the Metro Chicago Information Center (MCIC) suggests, chain supermarkets in the Chicago area are much less concentrated in predominantly African American and Hispanic communities than in predominantly Caucasian and racially-mixed communities. This recently released report comes as no surprise for residents of many of Chicago’s inner city communities, who have been complaining about the poor access to supermarkets in their neighborhood for years. Few have stopped to ask, however, exactly what the current food access situation is in these neighborhoods. What are the characteristics of the current stores? What do they offer? What don’t they offer? Is the quality good?

**There were 50 “mom-and-pop” corner stores in Austin and only 4 in Oak Park. In addition, there were 19 liquor stores in Austin that also carried some groceries, while traditionally dry Oak Park had none.**

As part of the Chicago Food Systems Collaborative project, a “market basket study” was carried out in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago and neighboring Oak Park. In February and March, 2003, eight teams comprised of students from Loyola University Chicago and Chicago State University joined with community members recruited by the Westside Health Authority, visited 134 stores in the area to check what foods they did and did not carry, food prices, and the quality of produce. The teams carried a list of 102 foods derived from a standard list composed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with additions suggested by community members and by a collaborative nutritionist. The goal was to go to every store in the two communities that sells groceries retail. Only four stores refused entry for this purpose.

The results from the study are complete, and are both predictable and surprising. As one would expect, there is a large difference in the “mix” of market types in Austin and Oak Park. While there were 3 chain supermarkets in Oak Park,

there was only 1 in Austin. There were 50 “mom-and-pop” corner stores in Austin and only 4 in Oak Park. In addition, there were 19 liquor stores in Austin that also carried some groceries, while traditionally dry Oak Park had none. There were other types of supermarkets in Austin, including 2 “discount” markets (Aldi and Save-A-Lot), and 3 “independent” supermarkets. Independent supermarkets may be produce or meat markets that also carry a range of groceries (such as Moo and Oink or Billy’s Produce) or independent or small chain supermarkets (such as Leamington’s or Pan’s).



Overall, there were 9 supermarkets in Oak Park, which has just over 54,000 residents, compared with just 6 in Austin, which has just over 117,000 residents.

So what benefits do chain supermarkets have? What is most evident in their wide range of foods? Chain supermarkets were the only group of stores in our sample that carried almost all of the 102 items, averaging 100.5 of the 102. Independent supermarkets were next, carrying an average of 93 of the 102 items. Then, availability dropped off, with discount supermarkets carrying an average 79 of the 102 items. Items of local interest, such as greens and sweet potatoes, were often missing at these stores. Corner stores carried an average of about half the items surveyed, or 55 out of 102, followed by

chain drug stores (Walgreen's, Osco, and CVS), with 51 of the 102.

The availability of fresh produce was almost equal at the two supermarket types. Both carried an average of over 13 of the 14 items. Discount supermarkets carried an average of 12 of the 14 items. Corner stores and chain convenience stores (White Hen Pantry and 7-Eleven) carried an average of 4 of the 14 and no other store group averaged over 1 item. In general, corner stores and other non-supermarkets had higher availability of long term storage products, such as canned goods and ketchup (available at 120 of the 134 stores), than more perishable items such as fresh produce. Within the produce category, the most frequently available items were potatoes and onions.

The quality of the produce was one of the major differences found in the market study. While there were corner stores in Austin that had very good produce (mainly those where availability was also higher), all of the produce judged "poor" in quality was found at corner stores and liquor stores with food. Surveyors were asked to mark quality "poor" only for produce that was rotting or otherwise should not be sold. Of the 32 corner stores in Austin that carried at least one fresh produce item, 17 carried at least one produce item of poor quality, and of the 17, 9 carried more than one poor quality item.

Price calculations are more difficult to analyze, but are particularly interesting. By far the lowest prices overall were found at discount supermarkets, and by far the highest prices overall were found at chain convenience stores and specialty stores. Independent and chain supermarkets and corner stores all had generally similar prices (corner stores were slightly higher and independent supermarkets slightly lower). When particular types of food are surveyed, however, independent supermarkets and corner stores had lower prices for fresh

produce and meat (note-many corner stores do not carry these items), while they had higher prices for all packaged goods. Apparently, these stores either lower prices on fresh foods to bring people into the store, or lower prices on these items because they must be sold more quickly due to their perishability. Thus, prices at chain supermarkets are not necessarily the lowest in the area; and, prices in Austin are not generally higher than those in Oak Park.

A series of focus groups and consumer surveys will be completed by the end of 2004 to follow up on the results of the market basket study.

In addition to the conclusions from the product survey as shown below, it is important to note the lessons learned from the methodology employed in this study. That is, that the pairing up of students and community residents was an effective technique with many benefits. Feedback from the teams indicated that this combination probably increased cooperation from store owners with the survey. It was also evident that residents felt affirmed in their contribution of local knowledge to this research, and students learned to recognize this contribution and glean valuable experience in hands-on data collection for grounded theory research.

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*Daniel Block is an associate professor of Geography and director of the Fred Blum Neighborhood Assistance Center at Chicago State University. He has an extensive background in food studies and Geographic Information Systems and is a founding member of the Chicago Food Systems Collaborative. He received a Ph.D. in geography from UCLA in 1997. E-mail: dblock@csu.edu*

## Study Conclusions

- 1—Chain supermarkets carried the majority of the items.
- 2—The most available items were staples, such as catsup, spaghetti sauce and spaghetti, white rice, and white sugar, with a longer shelf life.
- 3—The least available items were "health" foods often associated with vegetarians, such as tofu and frozen veggie burgers.
- 4—Organic food was primarily available only at chain supermarkets.
- 5—Other than the one chain supermarket, organic food was rarely available in Austin.
- 6—All poor quality fresh produce found was at corner stores and liquor stores with food in Austin.
- 7—Of the 34 corner stores and liquor stores with food that carried fresh produce in Austin, 19 had at least one poor quality item.
- 8—The five corner stores in Austin that carried at least 10 of the 14 fresh produce items have no poor quality items recorded.
- 9—The overall average price of food in Austin is lower than the average in Oak Park.
- 10—The price of food at discount supermarkets is significantly lower than chain supermarkets.
- 11—The price of food at chain convenience stores, chain drug stores, gas stations, and specialty stores is significantly higher than chain supermarkets across almost all product categories.
- 12—The price of fresh produce and meat is generally lower at independent supermarkets and corner stores than at chain supermarkets. The opposite is true for all other food categories.

# Working to Change the Nutritional Environment and Eating Patterns of Chicago's Austin Residents

*By Joanne Kouba*

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From the moment of conception to our senior years, nutrition is critical to health. The relationship has long been recognized in connection to normal growth and development. Many of us have recollections of a maternal, mealtime mantra related to strong bones and milk or colorful vegetables and eyesight. Health care professionals have for many years stressed the importance of nutritional adequacy for normal infant, child and even adolescent development. In addition, food intake is a concern because deficiency diseases may develop if nutrient intake is not adequate.

Often the term nutrient deficiency evokes images of distant countries. However, nutrient adequacy has been and still is a concern in the United States. Probably the most widespread example of a vitamin deficiency in the U.S. was the pellagra epidemic of the early 1900s. It is estimated that approximately 87,000 deaths were attributed to the lack of niacin, secondary to a low-protein diet with a limited variety of foods (Whitney, 1999). Even in recent years, this concern for nutritional adequacy was one of the motivating factors for initiation of governmental programs to combat hunger and nutrient deficiency diseases in the U.S. Hence, the Food Stamp, National School Lunch, and Older American Nutrition programs came into being.

## Too Much of a Good Thing

Recent decades have witnessed the emergence of new and different nutrition concerns influenced, ironically, by an overabundance of food. Epidemiological evidence related to weight status indicates that the prevalence of overweight and obesity is 61% in the U.S. adult population and 15% in our youth based on surveillance data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) III (CDC, 1997; USDHHS, 2001). While the prevalence of overweight (defined as a Body Mass Index between 25-29.9) has increased from 33%-35% in the last two decades, the increased prevalence in obesity (defined as a Body Mass Index >30) is alarming. Obesity has almost doubled in the U.S. adult population from 15% in 1980 to 27% in 1999 (USDHHS, 2002, 2001). Considerable disparities among certain racial and ethnic groups have been identified. For example, in the African American (AA) adult population, the prevalence of overweight/obesity has been reported to be 66% overall and 71% for women (USDHHS, 2002, 2001). In AA youth in Chicago, overweight prevalence has been reported to be over 50% (Whitman, 2004).

Overweight and obesity are considered risk factors for the leading morbidities and mortalities in the U.S. (such as heart

disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes mellitus, and hypertension). While not as immediately life-threatening, overweight is a risk factor for other problems such as osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, depression, asthma, and social stigmatization. These can negatively impact quality of life, work productivity and emotional health. Not surprisingly, substandard lifestyles for the individual, family and community may develop. The burden of overweight is significant. It is estimated that unhealthy dietary patterns and lack of physical activity account for approximately 300,000 deaths every year (Allison, 1999; McGinnis, 1993).

Increasingly, this is becoming a concern for our youth as well as adults. Evidence suggests that overweight adolescents are more likely to become overweight or obese adults with early onset of risk factors related to chronic disease or lower socio-economic achievements (Dietz, 1998, 1998, Ernst, 1994; Freedman, 2001, 1999; Gou, 1994). Like other adverse health situations, behavioral, social and cultural practices interact to reinforce dietary and physical activity patterns that perpetuate this condition.

The interest in food and health has led to the analysis of various dietary constituents in relation to disease prevention. As a result, major public health documents have been developed which provide dietary advice to foster optimal growth, development and disease prevention in the U.S. population. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines, Healthy People 2010, and the Surgeon General's Call to Action are examples (USDHHS, 2000, 1992). However, considering the long latency period of obesity-related morbidities, protective measures need to be implemented early in life to gain benefit. This, coupled with patterns of diet and health in youth, make school-aged children appropriate for assessment and intervention related to health and nutrition.

## Report Card on Dietary Habits of Our Youth

A healthy diet is recognized as necessary for optimal physical growth, cognitive development, emotional health and school performance in children. However, reports on the dietary quality of this group highlight some areas of concern. Based on information from the 5000 children that participated in Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII), dietary patterns in children and teens fall short of recommendations (Gleason, 2000). In fact, only 2% of those surveyed met optimal diet recommendations.

Less than 30% of children consumed recommended daily servings of fruit, vegetables, grains or dairy leading to suboptimal intakes of calcium, iron and various vitamins. On

average, children consume the equivalent of 25 teaspoons of sugar daily. Primary sources include sugar-sweetened beverages (such as soda and juice-type drinks), frozen dessert products and candy. These are calories that provide minimal amounts of beneficial dietary constituents. Children are also consuming higher intakes of fat and sodium than recommended (USDA, 2000). Skipping meals was also found to be problematic. More often than not, children did not eat breakfast. Common reasons were lack of time, or preferred foods were not available. Those that ate 3 meals/day had higher intakes of iron, fruit, and fiber.

The Healthy Eating Index (HEI) is another tool used to evaluate overall dietary quality. The score is based on 10 items ranging from food group adequacy to excessive intake of things like fat and sodium. An optimal score is 100. Based on CSFII data, the HEI scores for school-aged children, adolescent girls, and adolescent boys are 66, 61.6, 60. The trend is that as children get older, their dietary quality declines. A quick summary of nationwide surveys illustrates that children's diets are not optimal and may be contributing to this problem of childhood overweight (USDA, 1998).



### CFSC School-Based Nutrition Project

Key community leaders in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago brought the issues of food access, nutrition and health to the attention of community residents, university partners and a funder to create the Chicago Food Systems Collaborative (CFSC). The CFSC works through research and action strategies to address these issues. The purpose of this arm of the School-Based Nutrition Project (SBNP) is to improve the dietary quality and nutritional status of Austin residents through nutrition education of school age children and their parents and networking with other aspects of the project.

The SBNP involves assessment of and intervention for children and their families in one private and one public school in Austin. For children in grades 3-6, assessment included anthropometrics, blood pressure and 3-day food records. For parents, assessment includes food records and interviews. Letters were sent home to 376 parents and caregivers inviting them to participate in the assessment phase of the project. Of the initial recruitment, 102 responses were

returned. Of these 51 indicated a willingness to participate, but only 16 interviews were completed. Difficulties in completing data collection were encountered due to scheduling or missed interviews.

Of the data collection that was completed, the following insights were obtained. The prevalence of overweight and obesity seem to be comparable or greater in this population compared to a sample of Chicago or national data for African American populations. The prevalence of overweight and obesity combined was 83% in this adult female population. This is approximately 20% greater than the overall U.S. prevalence of combined overweight and obesity. The prevalence of overweight in the children measured was 40%. This is comparable to or exceeds other surveillance reports in the AA population in Chicago (Whitman, 2004). No cases of hypertension were identified in children. Dietary quality was scored using the Healthy Eating Index (HEI). The overall HEI was 59 in children and 58 in adults. The average HEI score is 66.6 for children 7-10 years of age based on USDA data (USDA, 1998). Similar to the finding of limited produce in the community (see Block article on page 8), children and adults in Austin consumed less than optimal servings of F/V. On



average, adults consumed 4 servings of F/V daily and children consumed only 2.9 servings of F/V daily. These were based on 3 day averages of 10 children and 8 adults who completed the food records. A total of 54 food records were returned from 18 study participants.

Fat intake averaged 40% for adults and 37% for children, which is considerably higher than the 30% recommended by the Dietary Guidelines, Healthy People 2010 Objectives, the American Heart Association, and American Cancer Society. Protein intakes were appropriate for each group. Not surprisingly, carbohydrate intakes were about 5-10% lower than recommended. Sodium intakes were found too high at 3826 mg and 3112 mg daily for adults and children respectively. The recommended limit is 2400 mg. This is aimed at preventing the development of hypertension which is particularly high in the AA community. Milk and dairy intakes were 1.1 servings and 1.5 servings daily for adults and children. This results in calcium intakes that were approximately 50% of recommended levels.

Since September 2003, one nutrition education session monthly has been delivered to each of 13 different classes at these schools by Loyola University faculty and students. Teachers were consulted so that sessions could support classroom curriculums. In addition, they address concerns identified by students, teachers, and parents. A total of 137 sessions were conducted during the 03/04 academic year. One of the first activities was a self-assessment of diet quality with the development of a “top ten list” of ways to improve diet for the grade/class. This led to subsequent topics for monthly sessions such as “wake up your brain with breakfast,” “smart snacking,” and “fuel your body.” In March, with assistance from staff from the Center for Neighborhood Technology, each classroom received an “earth box” that was planted with vegetables and flowers. From April to June, the students and teachers cared for the plants and were able to take home samples. This introduced the idea and some basic skills in urban gardening with the goal of increasing interest and intake of fruits and vegetables. This was tied into food access activities of the CFSC the following month by focusing on the Austin Farmers Market, located in the Emmet School parking lot. When possible, the nutrition sessions were designed to correlate to the classroom curriculum of the month. For example, in November, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students at Emmet studied poetry. The nutrition session included reading several children’s poems about foods. The students wrote poems about healthy foods. Mr. Roberts’ class worked together to write the “Ode to Breakfast” which was printed in the CFSC quarterly publication, “Good Food,” and distributed to students and parents. Another month, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at St. Martin’s school studied muscles and bones in science. The nutrition session that month focused on calcium and protein. Each session included some writing and math activities as requested by many teachers.

Teacher surveys were completed at the end of the first semester. Responses were positive (average scores of 3.7 on a 4. scale) with regard to beneficial content, creative and engaging activities, and focus on healthy lifestyle patterns. The return rate was 40% for teacher surveys. Teacher surveys were again favorable in the spring. Plans for continuation of the program will be discussed this summer with school principals and CFSC partners.

### Student Involvement— A University-Community Model

The Chicago Food Systems Collaborative is funded under the “community partner-higher education” program of the Kellogg Foundation. As it was planned and implemented, the School-Based Nutrition Project is a model that illustrates this concept in several ways. While the primary objectives of the CFSC are to benefit Austin residents, the collaborations and relationships, which developed as a result of the partnerships, provided valuable opportunities to university students as well. Post-baccalaureate dietetic interns, undergraduate dietetic students, and one nursing student were involved with planning, data collection and implementation of the SBNP and food access activities (as part of the Market Basket Survey). In

some instances, students and community workers were paired together as data collection teams for grocery store surveys. The discussions that followed illustrated to faculty members that awareness of community and nutrition issues increased in both groups. Other students were able to be involved in both planning and implementation phases, which provided insights into the complexities of community-based projects. The unique opportunities to collaborate with partners, who come from a variety of social science, educational, and health disciplines were also unique to the project.

### Significance of Work and Where to Go from Here

The work of the SBNP suggests that childhood overweight and poor dietary quality are present at higher levels in the two Austin schools when compared to nationwide data. Considering that these problems are complex and multifaceted, so must be the solutions. The community-university partners of the CFSC endeavor to design and implement feasible and culturally acceptable, community-level and individual strategies that will improve health through access to and selection of high quality, nutritious foods. Initial activities have included monthly nutrition sessions in the two targeted schools and linking with CFSC food access activities. Future activities will include continuation and growth of the SBNP by developing a parent network, discussing the feasibility of parent/family activities and expansion to other schools outside of Austin.

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*Joanne Kouba, MS, RD is a Registered Dietitian and faculty member in the Neihoff School of Nursing at Loyola University Chicago. She also directs the Loyola Dietetic Internship. Her research interests are related to health maintenance and disease prevention through optimal dietary patterns. Current projects are related to school-based nutrition interventions in youth. E-mail: jkouba@luc.edu*

*Sources for Ms Kouba’s article are found on pages 17 and 18.*



(Left to right) LaDonna Redmond, ICRD/CFSC Director; Joanne Kouba, Loyola University School of Nursing, CFSC's School-Based Nutrition Program Coordinator; Kevin O'Reilly, Associate Principal, Emmet School, Daniel Block, Chicago State University, CFSC's Research Coordinator



(Con't. from page 7)

million that Austin residents spend on groceries is shifted to surrounding communities, such as Oak Park. Some might think that Austin residents shopping in a neighboring suburb is no big deal. However, the multiplier effect of money spent in Oak Park is of great concern. If Austin residents could spend the 135 million grocery dollars in Austin, or some significant portion of it, this could increase the revenues of the local stores, provide more jobs, and more local sales tax revenue to support other services. And, CFSC believes, it could support the development of a new, full-scale, community-based grocery store. In summary, the main goal of CFSC is to see how spending of this magnitude can be harnessed to support the economic development of the Austin community.

Finally, there is an issue of perception that must be addressed. Much of the healthy food access issue is cloaked in stereotypical views of African American communities.

#### Misconceptions-Perceptions About African-American Communities

- There is a limited interest in healthy food
- No one cares about the environment or sustainability
- Fresh vegetables wouldn't sell because no one knows how to prepare them
- Organic food is not appealing to black people because they can't afford it

These views are misconceptions based upon faulty assumptions. However, upon further examination, we find that nationally, African Americans spend \$47 Billion on groceries.<sup>2</sup> And in fact, there is a high incidence of organic usage among African Americans as well as individuals of Hispanic and Asian descent. All three of these groups are more likely to buy organic than the general population overall.

Additionally, price is not a deterrent; over half of the organic food purchasers make less than \$50,000 annually.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that most of the national conversations regarding food access are held in forums where people of color are not represented. Yet, there is a tendency to speak to the "needs" of these communities by providing services such as nutrition information pamphlets and food pantries, without addressing local capacity to change food availability. So, while the right to healthy food access is now on the radar screen of many politicians and community activists, and we can even read about it in *Time* and other major publications, healthy food access is an issue that must be addressed in an innovative fashion that goes beyond booklets, pamphlets and classes. It must begin with creating choice at the local corner store. Then eventually, every Austin resident will have as much access to fresh fruits and vegetables as desired.

*LaDonna Redmond is the Project Manager for the Chicago Food Systems Collaborative and is a Food and Society Policy Fellow, a professional fellowship supported by the Kellogg Foundation.*

*E-mail: songobisi@netzero.net*

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<sup>1</sup>Calvin, Linda et al., 2001, *U.S. Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Marketing: Emerging Trade Practices, Trends, and Issues* (Agricultural Economic Report No. 795.) Washington, DC: Market and Trade Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

<sup>2</sup>Food Marketing Institute (FMI) FMI's retail membership is composed of large multi-store chains, regional firms and independent supermarkets. Its international membership includes 200 companies from 50 countries.

<sup>3</sup>Laurie Demeritt, president and chief operating officer of The Hartman Group. 2004 U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Outlook Forum presentation.

# The Austin Farmers Market— Creating Community Access to Fresh Fruits and Vegetables



By LaDonna Redmond & Orrin Williams

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As in many aspects of American life, changes in the food system abound. The industrial food system is now a global system that gives preference in production and distribution to large scale agriculture and commodity crops. Where there was once a thriving local food system that allowed truck farmers to bring food directly to urban communities, there is no longer such a system. Truck farmers have all but disappeared. On the other hand, the relationship between sustainable agriculture and public health outcomes is clear. Increasing production and access to affordable, fresh, high quality farm products can have a positive effect on the environment and on the health of people. Therefore, consumers are calling for better quality food and healthier food in the marketplace. This demand is recreating opportunities for small farmers and the return of a local food system. While various outlets such as grocery stores and restaurants meet some of our food access needs, farmers markets are another important outlet. The importance of a farmers market as part of the food system framework in the community cannot be overstated.

The important role that farmers markets can play in creating more opportunities for community fresh food access, and for supporting local farmers, is critical in meeting one of the short term goals of the Chicago Food System Collaborative (CFSC)—to improve access by improving the AustinMarket.

Because the Austin community has limited retail access to fresh fruits and vegetables within the community (*See Market Basket Study, p.8*), farmers markets offer an important venue for improving food access in communities, at least on a seasonal basis. Yet supporting the development of a farmers market is quite challenging. The issues that the Austin Farmers Market (AFM) faces are of two types: market-based and farmer-based. They include:

**Market-Based**—the limited numbers of farmers that are available to come to farmers markets, limited support for municipal administration of the farmers market program, and negative perceptions regarding the socioeconomic profile of the Austin community and its ability to purchase food.

**Farmer-Based**—distribution issues related to getting products to the farmers market, costs associated with transportation and labor for the farmers.

## The Market Side

Market-based challenges begin with the fact that the farmers market program in the city of Chicago is administered by the Mayor's Office of Special Events. The Mayor's Office of Special

Events (MOSE) is responsible for 31 farmers markets across the city and has an annual operating budget of \$36,000. It is clear that the farmers market program is a popular one around the city. However, due to the current fiscal crisis that most cities are facing, the city of Chicago is not able to provide adequate program support. For example, the farmers markets staff cannot recruit farmers or conduct visits to farm sites. This has created a window of opportunity for brokers to pose as farmers or limit participation to the larger farms. This kind of activity undercuts the smaller farmers' ability to sell profitably and tarnishes the reputation of the overall farmers market program. A higher budget and more staffing and/or better collaborative efforts, with local groups partnering with city agencies, could increase both farmer and consumer participation in less affluent neighborhoods. Currently, MOSE allows farmers to select the community where they want to sell products. When a farmer chooses a high volume market they are then also obligated to sell at a market that is under-supported. The self-selection tends to further isolate markets that need more support. Staffing does not allow MOSE to monitor the attendance of farmers at underserved markets.

The public and farmer perception that the Austin community is poor is also a barrier to getting more farmers to the market. Economically, the Austin community is average when it comes to per capita income and housing costs. Austin is also the largest Chicago community area with 117,000 residents. If one percent of the residents came to the Austin market on any given day, the farmers would not have enough product to meet the demand. Finally, the Austin community spends \$134 Million annually on groceries. Ninety percent of this amount leaves the community. Thus, avoidance of the Austin marketplace is obviously based on misperceptions. Support from the MOSE office could help address the poverty stigma by recruiting farmers to visit the community and directly addressing fears that farmers may have when trying to sell in less affluent, but not poor, communities.

## The Farmer Side

Initially, in 2002, CFSC formed a partnership with Heifer Project International and the Pembroke farming community, in eastern Kankakee County, about 60 miles south of Chicago. CFSC agreed to provide a market in the Austin area of Chicago for the farmers. CFSC's support for the market was initially focused on building a strong customer base by promoting the market in the community. While it was suggested that all

the farmers needed was a viable market, this was only part of the solution; the farmers needed additional support. Issues of production, labor and transportation proved to be very challenging and limited the farmers' ability to participate.

In an effort to assist the farmers, CFSC refocused on the Pembroke community and decided to provide small cash incentives to the farmers. CFSC data indicated that farmers spend \$250 before they sell the first product. The idea around the cash incentives was to cover that cost of participation. The incentive was tied to market attendance. Farmers needed to come to the market a set number of times consistently for which they would receive an incentive at the end of the market season. Additionally, CFSC contracted with a local farmer, who also sold products at the market, to recruit farmers for the AFM. Covering the costs of getting to the market improved the farmers' attendance at the market considerably.

Issues related to the ability to plant and harvest products in time for the market indicated that CFSC needed another partner in the collaboration. The University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign (UIUC) was asked to join the collaboration to help us better understand what the true needs of a farmer community are, and who can provide the expertise needed to assist the farmers. After a tour of Pembroke and meeting with the farmers, the Dean of the School of Agriculture promised to help.

Pembroke farmers are also receiving assistance from the Illinois Department of Human Services-Team Illinois. IDHS has assigned a staff member who spends two to three days a week in Pembroke, meeting with people and gathering data to inform a strategic plan to lift this community out of poverty. In addition to improving infrastructure like roads and the local water and sewer system, IDHS is considering a commitment to buy products from the Pembroke farms for distribution in its feeding programs, as well as coordinating a response from the other 31 state agencies.

Lastly, aside from issues among the Pembroke farmers, other local farmers that are organic or sustainable create yet another interesting wrinkle in the development of local food systems and farmers markets. This is an issue that has broader implications for the entire sustainable food system beyond the issue faced by the Austin community.

The CFSC efforts focus on creating access for all people. However, there is unwillingness among some farmers to grow products that are culturally appropriate for the Austin consumers. Many farmers prefer to grow what are considered high-end gourmet varieties which coincide with their preference for markets in affluent urban and suburban communities. There is an apparent danger that a designer label could also be attached to organic food as it becomes more accessible only to people that can afford to buy it, in designer farmers markets, much like designer clothes. However, this is the antithesis of what local food system strategies are intended to achieve. Sustainable agriculture is traditionally associated with a concern for social justice, not social prominence.

Undoubtedly, organizing a high quality, vibrant farmers market envisioned by the CFSC for Austin is possible. Nevertheless, CFSC does not intend to put all of its food access

eggs in one basket, as indicated in its plans for a new Austin supermarket (*See p. 7*). Nor is the new supermarket the only other basket. A pilot food distribution project is being considered with the Pembroke farmers at its core. The concept is based on the new supermarket as an anchor that buys from the Pembroke farmers for the supermarket plus 20 to 30 of the 50 mom-and-pop corner groceries spread throughout Austin. There would be a pick-up service from Pembroke and a delivery service to the corner stores that agree to be "subscribers," a variation on the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) concept for individual households.

### The Bottom Line

Collaboration among local organizations and city and state agencies is critical in improving the capacity to develop more successful markets in underserved communities, thereby increasing direct marketing opportunities for farmers. Organizations such as CFSC and CLOCC are building these kinds of partnerships to create a consensus food policy agenda. CFSC is also partnering with the Chicago Department of Public Health to address issues of healthy food access. CFSC and CDPH will coordinate a citywide task force that includes grocery store owners, distributors, universities and community residents to examine food access in under-supported communities and develop a strategy to address these inadequacies. It is anticipated these discussions will focus on the development of grocery stores as well as supporting farmers markets.

We cannot overlook opportunities to create economic development in urban communities through direct relationships with family farmers, in what can be a great economic win-win for urban and rural communities alike.

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*LaDonna Redmond is the Project Manager for the Chicago Food Systems Collaborative.*

*E-mail: [songobisi@netzero.net](mailto:songobisi@netzero.net)*

*Orrin Williams is a community activist who has a deep concern for the Earth. Orrin has worked on issues that range from environmental justice to food sustainability.*

*E-mail : [globalorrin@yahoo.com](mailto:globalorrin@yahoo.com)*



## CFSC Continues to Expand Its Collaborative Approach Partnering with Groups Like CLOCC, Healthy Schools Campaign and the Chicago Public Schools



The mission of the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC) is to confront the childhood obesity epidemic by promoting healthy and active lifestyles for children throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. Their work fosters and facilitates connections between childhood obesity prevention researchers, public health advocates and practitioners, and the children, families, and communities of Chicagoland, focusing on children of ages three to five years. Under the leadership of Dr. Matt Longjohn and Dr. Katherine Christofell, CLOCC has provided important research that has brought the obesity problem to the attention of the media and local policymakers. CLOCC resides within Children's Memorial Hospital's Institute for Education and Research. *For more information: [www.clocc.net](http://www.clocc.net) or phone 773-327-9548 or 773-327-9831*



## Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Task Force to Promote Healthy Eating & Smart Choices

This Task Force was convened to build a partnership between community institutions and all members of the CPS community—parents, teachers, administrators, and others (e.g. food service vendors) to promote lifelong healthy eating and active lifestyles among students. The task force is organized around these principles:

*Good nutrition is important to learning and academic achievement.*

*Learning healthy eating habits is important to a student's quality of life and disease prevention.*

*Schools and the school community play an important role in teaching healthy eating habits.*

*Healthy eating is influenced by family, community and culture.*

The convenors of this task force include: *Rochelle Davis*, Healthy Schools Campaign, *Ruth Edelman*, Edelman Worldwide, *Maged Hanafi*, CPS Food Services & Warehousing, *LaDonna Redmond*, Institute for Community Resource Development and CFSC, *Margie Schaps*, Health & Medicine Policy Research Group, and *Sue Susanke*, CPS Food Services & Warehousing.

The formation of this task force was one of the outcomes of an effort spearheaded by the **Healthy Schools Campaign** to urge CPS to change their policy regarding vending machines in schools. It had been successfully argued in both Los Angeles and New York City that vending machines generally make less healthy food choices accessible to students to compete with potentially healthier choices offered through the school lunch program. In April, 2004, CPS announced a new vending machine policy that would require machines to offer better choices, as well as formation of this task force to address healthier choices in the cafeteria as well. A first step in this new strategy will be a pilot program called "Cool Food" to be tested in ten schools for the 2004-05 school year, that will offer students a salad bar as a lunchtime option.

# Working to Change the Nutritional Environment and Eating Patterns of Chicago's Austin Residents

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Policy Research Action Group  
Loyola University Chicago  
820 N. Michigan Avenue  
Lewis Towers 10th Floor  
Chicago IL 60611

