

Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP) is a non-profit collaboration of urban and rural community and business leaders that exists to catalyze change in the food system of Southeastern Michigan. The strength of FSEP comes from the combined effort of five county administrations, farm organization leaders, food industry heads, community groups, and food system and economic development experts and resource providers. The geographic focus area of FSEP encompasses the five counties of Jackson, Lenawee, Monroe, Washtenaw, and Wayne.

FSEP was officially launched in early 2005 to identify economic opportunities and implement creative solutions to chronic issues relevant to the food system in the region. They provide research, education, and outreach with urban and rural partnerships, resulting in agricultural development opportunities, sustainable communities, and healthy local economies. Members say this is unlike other organizations because FSEP addresses the whole loop from farm to table in order to help deliver local goods.

Agriculture is the second largest industry in Michigan, and Michigan is the second most agriculturally diverse state in the nation. Agriculture is fundamental to our regional economy, cultural identity, and quality of life. FSEP and its partners recognize the inherent and diverse benefits of a regional approach to food and agricultural economic development. This project combines the interests of both urban and rural communities in Southeastern Michigan.

The priorities of FSEP are based in land stewardship, economic development, farmland preservation, social equity and public health, and aim to impact social, environmental, and economic justice. Improvements to the Farm Bill offer an opportunity to affect the priorities stated by FSEP. Therefore, FSEP is interested in educating stakeholders and advocating for specific changes to the 2007 Farm Bill.

FSEP priority initiatives include:

- Local agriculture and food business innovation and entrepreneurship
- Market research and development
- Farm to School program development
- Food system education and outreach

Federal agricultural policies have contributed to a number of dramatic changes in the U.S. food supply, one of which is the obesity epidemic among adults and youth. The 2007 Farm Bill offers an opportunity to shift U.S. agricultural policy in a direction that enhances public health, land, water, and air quality, etc., while benefiting farmers, rural communities and the environment.¹

FSEP is completing work that is consistent with the following policy recommendations to be included in the adopted 2007 Farm Bill:

- **Encourage and support a new generation of farmers and ranchers.** We need public policy that supports their entry into sustainable farming and ranching livelihoods through training, technical assistance, and access to credit and land.
- **Encourage a new, primary role for conservation in federal farm policy.** This will increase total conservation funding, protecting and strengthening the current land retirement and resource easement programs, and accelerating the shift to increased working lands stewardship assistance.
- **Reward superior land conservation systems in agricultural production.** A comprehensive stewardship incentives system that includes at its heart an expanded and streamlined conservation security program will support family farms and rural communities in a manner that promotes resource conservation and environmental enhancement.
- **Assist farmers' and ranchers transition to organic production.** Existing and new entry farmers and ranchers should be supported in their conversion to organic agriculture to meet consumer demand and support healthier environment and food supply.
- **Support entrepreneurship as a rural development strategy.** A package of rural development and micro-enterprise programs will provide the resources

necessary for rural people and rural communities to leverage the spirit, creativity, and opportunities entrepreneurship creates.

- **Include sustainability criteria that guides all conservation and energy title programs seeking to promote renewable energy.** To ensure the emerging renewable energy industries benefit U.S. family farmers and rural communities while safeguarding soil, water, and biodiversity.
- **Increase food access by supporting local food production, processing, distribution and retail infrastructure** that both provides more fresh fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods to, and creates economic development opportunities for, communities—especially including lower-income communities.
- **Increase access to healthy foods through the federal nutrition and food assistance and programs,** such as by requiring that certified farmers’ markets in low-income areas be equipped to redeem Food Stamp benefits through Electronic Benefit Transfer, strengthening the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Senior Farmers’ Market programs, expanding the programs that bring fresh farm products into schools and ensuring that all of the programs are sufficiently funded to be able to provide healthy, nutritious foods.
- **Encourage local procurement policies by schools and other institutions** to increase access to healthy foods, create new markets for farmers and encourage the development of healthier, community-based food systems.
- **Promote local food systems and healthy food production by keeping smaller, more diverse farmers on the land.** Possible strategies to do so might include giving new farmers greater access to land and credit for small-scale operations, or

expanding “green payments” programs to reward farmers for growing healthy foods.

- **Reform commodity programs** to establish a fair market price floor. Fair prices for crops would benefit farmers and rural communities, support diversified cropping systems, and likely curtail the proliferation of cheap sweeteners, added fats and oils, and industrially raised meat in the food system.
- **Revise the commodity portion of the food assistance and nutrition programs.** As the commodity programs distribute commodities purchased by USDA from excess stocks, they likely provide foods already abundant in the American food supply. The foods provided to those who need them should make it easier, rather than more challenging, to consume a healthy diet and to meet the federal dietary guidelines.
- **Shift federal research dollars toward healthy foods** that are under-consumed by Americans and production methods that provide more health benefits. Curtail research that promotes overproduction of already abundant commodities, contributes to artificially low commodity prices and perpetuates an industrial model of agriculture.

Policies in the Farm Bill affect not just farmers but rural communities, the environment, energy, conservation, health, hunger, market concentration, labor and immigration. Literally everyone has a stake in the 2007 Farm Bill.² Specific changes to the Farm Bill would enhance all of these areas in the five counties of Michigan that is the geographic focus of FSEP.

FSEP leadership requests the opportunity to discuss these important legislative decisions with elected officials.

References

¹ Schoonover, H. *A Fair Farm Bill for Public Health*. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

Minneapolis, MN: May 2007.

² Lilliston, B. *A Fair Farm Bill for America*. The
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.
Minneapolis, MN: March 2007.