

An Act

Presented to the People and to the Congress of the United States of America
 March 18, 2007

We hold these truths to be self-evident,

That the American People deserve access to fresh, whole, nutritious, affordable real food from American Farmers on a daily basis;

That the current use of American farmland and the predominant practices of American agriculture fail to achieve this purpose;

That the physical, social, cultural and spiritual health of the American People absolutely depends on healthy soil, healthy water, healthy plants and healthy animals living in diverse splendor upon the land and in the waters of this planet; and

That the wise use of public funds to support and sustain America Farmers producing real food for the American People is just and good.

Therefore we ask and propose that the Congress of the United States of America enact a Bill entitled The American Food for the American People Act of 2007.

This new legislation will address and correct problems in the current “Farm Bill” and focus public policy on access to healthy real food for American consumers produced by local American farmers and food producers.

We identify the problems needing correction by reviewing the current allocation of public funds for agriculture reflected in the following budget information.

The following table captures key spending categories authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill for the fiscal years 2005 to 2008:

	Outlays in billions of dollars (see notes)				Outlays as percentage of total			
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005	2006	2007	2008
USDA Programs	Actual	Estimated	Budget	Budget	Actual	Estimated	Budget	Budget
Commodity Programs	\$ 19.6	\$ 18.8	\$ 16.4	\$ 15.1	23.0%	19.6%	17.7%	17.0%
Food Stamp Program	\$ 32.6	\$ 35.2	\$ 34.9	\$ 36.8	38.2%	36.8%	37.6%	41.3%
Child Nutrition Program	\$ 12.3	\$ 13.4	\$ 13.8	\$ 13.8	14.4%	14.0%	14.9%	15.5%
All other USDA programs	\$ 20.8	\$ 28.3	\$ 27.7	\$ 23.3	24.4%	29.6%	29.8%	26.2%
Total	\$ 85.3	\$ 95.7	\$ 92.8	\$ 89.0	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Notes on data sources:
 FY 2007 Budget Summary and Annual Performance Plan, USDA
 President's 2008 Budget, Department of Agriculture, Appendix
 President's 2008 Budget, Department of Agriculture

Just three programs receive 70% to 75% of USDA funding: Commodity programs; the food stamp program; and the child nutrition program that funds free and reduced meals for school children. All other programs combined—including community food security, farmers’ market nutrition programs, conservation, energy, rural development, research, education, cooperative extension, etc.—receive less than 30% of USDA funding.

No one can argue with the moral imperative to support access to food with the food stamp and school nutrition programs for people with limited resources and

vulnerable children. However mounting evidence strongly suggests that current federal food policy contributes to the consumption of unhealthy substances that substitute for real food and lead to wide range of health problems, including obesity, Type II diabetes mellitus and other metabolic disorders, cardiovascular disease and behavioral problems. Federal policy contributes to these health problems first with the commodity programs that subsidize the overproduction of corn and soy, the raw materials used for food manufacturing. Federal policy then subsidizes the consumption of manufactured food with food stamps, school nutrition programs, and other emergency feeding programs that rely on USDA commodities and contributions from food manufacturers.

The resulting health problems have greatest severity and disparate impact on the most vulnerable populations, in particular poor people and people of color. Furthermore these same populations live in communities with the least access to fresh, nutritious, affordable real food from local non-emergency sources—communities both urban and rural characterized as food deserts. Food deserts have few if any supermarkets. They have a preponderance of fast food restaurants, corner stores and convenience stores that sell expensive prepared food and manufactured “food” in cans and packages. These products come from the industrial food system, from factory farms and food manufacturing that uses high fructose corn syrup and other chemicals derived from commodity corn and soy to create manufactured edible substitute substances, or MESS.¹ These products became available in the about 35 years ago in this country, at the same time as the epidemics of obesity, Type II diabetes and behavioral problems in school children began.²

We propose that the distinction between real food and MESS becomes the boundary line for American food policy

American small family diversified farmers have the unique capacity to produce fresh, affordable, real food for urban and rural neighbors living in close proximity to their farms. The basic food that goes into the typical American market basket every week, week after week, consists of the dairy, meat, fruit and vegetables that most small family diversified farms can produce everywhere in the United States. Furthermore, Americans spend almost \$450 billion dollars for this market basket of basic food on an annual basis—a huge market for small family farmers if they just had the means to capture that market and compete on a level playing field with the global, industrial food system. This market basket of real food can serve as the boundary line for a new set of American food policy initiatives.

We propose that new food and agricultural policy, captured in this American Food for the American People Act of 2007 allocate substantial resources for the rebuilding of local food systems that bring real food from local farms to urban and rural Americans living in close proximity to those farms. For the purpose of this new policy we offer the following definitions:

◆ Food

Food is an edible plant or animal that grows, walks or swims on the earth and its waters with no genetic engineering, no hormone-driven growth, and no synthetic

¹ The acronym for *manufactured edible substitute substance* is MESS.

² For a careful and thorough analysis of these relationships, see Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, and Thomas Lyson, *Civic Agriculture*.

chemical substances to mimic natural qualities. Over millennia human metabolism and cultures have adapted to the foods growing in every ecological niche.

- ◆ Anything else is a MESS (**M**anufactured **E**dible **S**ubstitute **S**ubstance)
Any edible substance other than real food is a MESS. A MESS has genetic engineering, hormone and antibiotic residue from concentrated production, and synthetic additives. Emerging research demonstrates that human metabolism cannot handle MESSes. MESSes subvert food cultures and food sovereignty. MESSes and the processes used in their manufacture and packaging contribute to the alarming toxic load that every human being now carries.

- ◆ Regenerative Agriculture
Regenerative agriculture produces real food using no synthetic chemical inputs—no synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, growth-promoting hormones or antibiotics. Regenerative agriculture repairs the damage caused by synthetic chemical inputs. Regenerative agriculture respects and rebuilds the living soil and sacred earth.

The American Food for the American People Act of 2007 contains three titles intended to complement current the food and agriculture legislation.

Title I: Rebuilding Local Food Systems

The purpose of this title is to allocate public funds to rebuild the infrastructure needed to provide access to local food produced by American farmers and food producers who live within close proximity to the people who consume the food they produce, particularly in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods. This infrastructure includes small diversified farms using low-input, sustainable, regenerative production practices; packing, packaging and processing facilities like small-scale canneries, commercial and shared use kitchens; small-scale local abattoirs subject food safety regulations appropriate to local small-scale production; locally-owned distribution centers; and locally-owned small retail grocery stores selling a market basket of basic food products that includes the majority of foods that people purchase on a regular basis for home consumption.

The funds allocated in this Title will support the building of local food system infrastructure through grants to local governments and private non-profit organizations for planning local food systems. Funds allocated in this Title will subsidize the start-up costs of the businesses operating in local food trading networks through low-interest loans and small grants.

For the purpose of this Title the Congress will annually allocate a sum equal to one percent (1%) of the combined mandatory funding for food stamps, child nutrition and commodity support in current and future farm bills. In the 2008 proposed federal budget this allocation will be \$675 million based on the combined total of \$65.7 billion for food stamps, child nutrition and commodity support.

Title II: Local Food Conversion Program

At the end of the Cold War federal public policy supported the conversion of military infrastructure for peacetime uses. We now propose the conversion of

industrial agriculture infrastructure to produce healthy local food for healthy local consumers. Today in the United States industrial agriculture uses far more farmland for commodity crop production, in particular field corn and soybeans, than needed to produce basic real food. We estimate this excessive utilization of farmland in a range of 637 million acres to 788 million acres.³

Paradoxically, while we use excess farmland, we do not have enough small-scale farming operations to supply food to the American people. We estimate that we have a deficit of 885,000 small family farms producing basic real food for local consumption.⁴

The purpose of this Title is to “right-size” American agriculture for its most essential function, to produce healthy local food for local consumers. Retiring some substantial portion of excess farmland acreage will result in substantial environmental economic and social benefits.

These benefits will include (1) cessation of the application of toxic chemical fertilizers and pesticides used in the production of commodity crops that drain through the Mississippi watershed into the Gulf of Mexico, causing the annual dead zone in the Gulf; (2) cessation of pollution of ground water; (3) cessation of unnecessary farm input expenditures for chemicals and equipment used in crop production; (4) restoration of natural habitat in the American prairie and plains, habitats that will eventually support wild and domestic ruminants that can then re-enter the food supply through humane pasture-based livestock operations; (5) economic benefit to small diversified farming operations that develop in response to the growing demand for fresh, local food.

The economic benefit to small diversified farming operations producing real food for local consumers is potentially massive. In the 2002 Census of Agriculture only 451,867 American farms generated more than \$50,000 in annual farm gate revenue. Title I and Title II of this proposed legislation would result in more than 3 million American small farms generating about \$75,000 in annual farm gate revenue from sales of local basic real food to local American consumers.⁵

³ The basis of this estimate involves the following assumptions. To produce a market basket of basic real food for 10,000 people requires between 5,000 (low estimate) and 10,000 (high estimate) acres of farmland. See H. Herrera (2006), *Building Local Food Systems: A Planning Guide*, The Center for Popular Research Education and Policy and New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Rochester, NY. The US Census Bureau estimates the US population on March 17, 2007 as 301,397,939. Thus there are 30,138 units of 10,000 people in the United States at present. Each of these units requires between 5,000 and 10,000 acres of farmland to produce a market basket of basic real food. In the aggregate the United States needs between 150,699,000 acres and 301,398,000 acres of farmland to produce this market basket of real food. The Census of Agriculture in 2002 enumerated 939,279,056 acres of American farmland. The difference between this total farmland acreage and the estimates of acreage needed to produce basic real food yield the estimates of excessive utilization of farmland.

⁴ The basis of this estimate involves the following assumptions. Using the high estimate of 10,000 acres needed to produce basic food for 10,000 people, then we would need 100 farms each 100 acres in size to supply food for 10,000 people, or 3,013,800 farms for the total American population. The 2002 Census of Agriculture enumerated 2,182,962 farms in the US, leaving a deficit of 885,018 farms.

⁵ We estimate from the Consumer Expenditure Survey of the Bureau of Labor Statistics that in 2007 Americans will spend approximately \$450 million for basic foods for home consumption. We assume that new alternative local food systems with fair trading practices can source local food at 50% of the retail price of food, or \$225 million in farm gate revenues for these farms, or \$74,600 per farm for 3,013,800 farms.

The funds allocated in this Title will pay for the retirement of excess American farmland through the purchase of development rights from farmers who themselves wish to retire from farming and who deserve full and proper compensation from the American people for their stewardship of the land and for the investment of their own lives and the lives of their families in American agriculture.

- ◆ *These farmers deserve to retire with their investments protected and made whole financially*
- ◆ *They deserve to retire with the knowledge that the land that they have nurtured will receive stewardship and protection in perpetuity.*
- ◆ *They deserve to retire with honor and respect from the American people for their sacrifices made on behalf of the land, our most sacred resource for the future well-being of our nation.*

Retired farmland will become the property of non-profit community land trusts charged with the protection of the land in perpetuity as either natural habitat or for future use as farmland for the production of local real food in response to the demands of the growing American population.

For the purpose of this Title the Congress will annually allocate a sum equal to one percent (1%) of the combined mandatory funding for food stamps, child nutrition and commodity support in current and future farm bills. In the 2008 proposed federal budget this allocation will be \$675 million based on the combined total of \$65.7 billion for food stamps, child nutrition and commodity support.

Title III: AgriCorps

This Title addresses the need to train a new generation of American farmers to operate the farms and to produce the healthy local real food envisioned in Titles I and II. This Title will establish policy and create for this purpose. AgriCorps will engage and train a new generation of farmers working on small farms using regenerative farming practices.

The AgriCorps program is modeled after the AmeriCorps national service program, AgriCorps will link small-scale sustainable farming, small-scale food processing and urban agriculture operations with people of all ages seriously wishing to enter farming and agriculture. The AgriCorps members will receive stipends and benefits such as free lodging and meals from host farms. They will receive invaluable on-the-job learning and experience. At the end of their term of service they will receive an Individual Development Account award to invest in additional regenerative agriculture education or to help start or expand a small-scale regenerative farming enterprise. The host farmer and farm will receive labor from the AgriCorps member and funding to offset the member's room, board and training costs. AgriCorps members will have academic study and community service requirement in addition to their actual farm training and work.

The funds allocated in this Title will support the initial development of AgriCorps and the implementation of the first five years of AgriCorps operations, beginning with pilot programs in 10 states throughout the United States, including New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Texas, California, Mississippi, Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska.

For the purpose of this Title the Congress will \$2 million dollars per year per state for its AgriCorps Program.

Additional Considerations

1. Budget Neutrality

The American Food for the American People Act of 2007 does not propose new or added funding to the Farm Bill or any disruption of existing programs authorized in the Farm Bill. Our analysis of past USDA expenditures indicates that these funds may be available from *unused* mandatory commodity and food stamp allocations. Alternatively we propose finding funds for these proposals from other Federal programs whose operation may expire soon, in particular military operations.

We do not propose to take any funds away from existing programs in the Farm Bill to make these proposals budget neutral. We propose only using unused funds. We further propose establishing an American Food for the American People Reserve Fund to receive unused funds from commodity and food stamp allocations and to distribute them in accord with the legislation proposed in the American Food for the American People Act of 2007.

2. The Importance of Local Food Systems for Homeland Security

At a time when America deals with unprecedented threats to national security the need for self-sufficiency and protection of the food supply from attack is essential. A critical principle for ensuring a stable food supply is the principle of multiple redundant food supply chains. A few global food supply chains are much more vulnerable to disruption than thousands of local food supply chains. Thus the rebuilding of local food systems infrastructure has an essential place in the national defense and for ensuring homeland security. The needs of national defense and homeland security provide fundamental justification for the use public funds for rebuilding local food systems

3. Relationship of The American Food for the American People Act of 2007 to Other Proposed 2007 Farm Bill Legislation

This proposed legislation complements key policies with historic tenure in the Farm Bill, including price supports and equity for American commodity farmers; food and nutrition programs; improved conservation and natural resources programs; farmland conservation; environmental protection; rural development; urban agriculture initiatives; urban food retail initiatives; enhanced support for limited resource farmers and ranchers; protection of farmworkers from exploitation and abuse; and others.

The authors of this proposal fully support these long-established policies and new policy proposals to enhance their effectiveness. Our purpose is to focus on the local food systems that can actually feed the American people with healthy real food.

Authorship

Hank Herrera authored the first draft of this document and is solely responsible for its content. The document is under review from a group of interested organizations

and individuals and will undergo continuous refinement as we receive critique and recommendations.

This document benefited from discussions conducted over the past year with the Outreach and Diversity Policy Committee of the Community Food Security Coalition; participants on the Community Food Security Coalition list serve; participation in the deliberations of the Policy Committee of the Community Food Security Coalition and the Health Food and Community Committee of the Farm and Food Policy Project; research conducted by the Center for Popular Research, Education and Policy and the New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group; Ideas contained in this document were presented at the Farm Bill Forum organized by the California Food and Justice Coalition and Food First in October, 2006 and the American Public Health Association in November, 2006.

Endorsement

Organizations and individuals wishing to endorse The American Food for the American People Act of 2007 can contact Hank Herrera, The Center for Popular Research, Education and Policy, 693 East Avenue, Suite 101, Rochester, NY 14607, phone 585-473-4630, fax 585 271-0194, email hank@c-prep.org.

National Alliance for Healthy Food Policy: A Proposal

In order to carry this legislation forward we now propose the formation of the National Alliance for Healthy Food Policy. The Alliance will be an informal association of allies who support this proposal. This Alliance will bring together ordinary citizens, individuals and organizations who want to bring these proposals into reality through Federal, State and local legislation. The National Alliance will take on the challenges of developing, refining, seeking endorsement and informing elected representatives at all levels of government of the importance of this legislation. The National Alliance will unite food consumers and food producers into an effective and powerful voice that carries the message that Americans deserve to eat healthy real food from local farmers and food producers on a daily basis.