

Sample OP-ED on Food & Nutrition Programs in the Farm Bill Reauthorization

As Congress works to reauthorize the Farm Bill this year, we have a significant opportunity to improve the nutritional quality of all Americans' diets. Obesity is literally growing out of control. 2006 statistics indicated that the vast majority of states have seen obesity rates double since 1990, and all but a few states saw significant increases in that rate from 2005 to 2006. Hailed as one of the greatest and most expensive health threats of our time, the rising obesity epidemic is costing the health care system and the American economy billions of dollars every year.

Yet at the same time, many Americans are going hungry. It is becoming increasingly difficult to lead healthy lifestyles with a lack of proper guidance and affordable healthy food options. Eating the wrong foods has not only caused widespread weight gain, but also malnourishment, leading to birth defects and decreased performance in school.

Now there is an opportunity to begin to reverse these trends. It is critical that we work to ensure that the 2007 Farm Bill contains several key provisions that would combat both obesity and hunger, by expanding on successful fresh fruit and vegetable programs for children in our schools, promoting proven public health approaches and education in schools and food assistance programs, and increasing the consumption of healthy foods by providing better access to affordable nutritious foods. The bill should also help participants in nutrition programs make healthy life choices. For instance, one important new initiative would provide recipients with vouchers to use at farmers' markets, where they could purchase fresh, healthy food-to the added benefit of local farmers.

As we stand right now, one in three children in America will eventually develop Type II diabetes, and many before they reach the age of 18. Many of our nation's children do not eat enough fruits and vegetables daily, while other children go without food at all. Already we have gained worldwide reputation for having some of the poorest health-and the greatest health disparities. These are urgent problems that demand immediate action, and we urge Congress to ensure these key public health provisions are included in this year's Farm Bill reauthorization.

