



TO: Robert W. Healy, City Manager
FROM: Claude-Alix Jacob, Chief Public Health Officer
DATE: May 20, 2011
SUBJECT: Response to Calendar Item #3, adopted 4/25/11

Text of Order: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to refer the Seattle Farm Bill Principles to the Food and Fitness Policy Council and ask for a report about how Cambridge should participate in this initiative.

The Seattle Farm Bill Principles are a framework of values aimed at creating a healthier food system in the U.S. The recommendations were put forth by the Seattle City Council in February to provide guidance to members of Congress on the importance of access to fresh and nutritious food and other critical issues as they begin considering the 2012 renewal of the Farm Bill.

The first Farm Bill was enacted during the Great Depression to aid struggling farmers, and over time it has become the federal government's primary agricultural and food policy tool. The Farm Bill currently helps fund nutrition programs (including SNAP/food stamps, emergency food assistance, school lunches, the Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC) and the Farmers Market Nutrition Program), commodity foods, subsidies to farmers, conservation programs, agricultural research, food safety programs, and USDA grants that support farm-to-school programs and food policy councils, among other things.

The Seattle Farm Bill Principles offer direction for policies, regulations, programs, funding opportunities, technical support and research priorities that would promote a healthier and more sustainable food system, if incorporated into the 2012 Farm Bill. Here is a summarized version of the six guiding principles:

1. *Health-centered Food System.* Improving the health of the nation's residents must be a priority in developing policies, programs, and funding.
2. *Sustainable Agricultural Practices.* Promote farming systems and agricultural techniques that prioritize the protection of the environment so that the soil, air, and water will be able to continue producing food long into the future.
3. *Community and Regional Prosperity and Resilience.* Develop strategies that foster resiliency, local innovation, interdependence, and community development in both rural and urban economies.
4. *Equitable Access to Healthy Food.* Identify opportunities and reduce barriers by developing policies and programs that increase the availability of and improve the proximity of healthy, affordable, and culturally-relevant food to urban, suburban, and rural populations.
5. *Social Justice and Equity.* The policies reflected in the Farm Bill impact the lives and livelihoods of many people, both in the U.S. as well as abroad. Develop policies, programs, and strategies that support social justice, worker's rights, equal opportunity, and promote community self-reliance.
6. *Systems Approach to Policymaking.* Consider the interrelated effects of policies and align expected outcomes to meet the goal of a comprehensive health focused food system.



The Cambridge Perspective

Like Seattle and other U.S. communities, Cambridge would benefit from a Farm Bill that placed greater emphasis on creating health-centered food systems and promoting sustainable agriculture. The Farm Bill impacts Cambridge in numerous ways, including:

- The Farm Bill helps fund commodity foods served in the Cambridge public schools. During the first eight months of the 2010-2011 school year, the Cambridge Public Schools received \$72,360¹ worth of donated commodity food for the school meals program, which had a significant impact on the nutritional value of meals. Commodity food included ground beef, beans, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables, brown rice, whole grain pasta, low fat cheese, trail mix, and peanut butter. Certain foods, like brown rice, whole grain pasta, and frozen wild Maine blueberries, for example, would not be accessible to school meals if they were not available as a commodity food.
- A Growing Healthy USDA grant in 2005 (part of the Farm Bill) established the ongoing Cambridge Public Schools Farm-to-School Program and the CitySprouts school garden program.
- The USDA Fruit and Vegetable Program (part of the Farm Bill) funds (~\$100,000/year) a free daily “fruit or vegetable” snack to students in four Cambridge Public Schools.
- The Farm Bill affects the budget of government funded programs like SNAP (food stamps), which is available to many Cambridge residents and also can be used to purchase fresh produce at farmers’ markets.
- The Senior Center Meals Program serves food from the government commodity program.

If Congress adopts the Seattle Farm Bill Principles as a framework for the 2012 Farm Bill, potential positive outcomes for Cambridge include higher nutritional quality of commodity foods through improved access to regionally grown foods and food procurement, as well as pricing policies that would favor the purchase of healthy foods for government-subsidized feeding programs.

Recommendation

The Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council supports the Seattle Farm Bill Principles because:

- As there have long been concerns about unsustainable farming practices supported by past farm bills, the Principles lay the foundation for developing a healthier food system on the national, regional, and local levels.
- The 2012 Farm Bill will impact on access to healthy foods in Cambridge.
- If U.S. cities and towns work together on this issue, they can help create a healthier food system for the nation.

The Seattle City Council is asking that local, regional, and national partners to join them in endorsing the Principles by signing on as a “supporter” through the website, <http://seattlefarmbillprinciples.org>. In response, the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council recommends that the City of Cambridge officially sign on as a supporter of the Seattle Farm Bill Principles.

¹Jack Mingle, Director of Food Service for the Cambridge Public Schools, personal communication, May 13, 2011.