

June 13, 2007

Rep. Collin C. Peterson
Chair, House Committee on Agriculture

Rep. Bob Goodlatte, VA,
Ranking Minority Member, House Committee on Agriculture

Sen. Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee

Sen. Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Republican Member, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee

Re: Strengthening the Farm Bill to Reduce Childhood Obesity, and Improve our Environment and Nation's Health

Dear Sirs,

We, the undersigned, are physicians and healers, public health and other health professionals, not farmers. But we eat, we have patients and families who eat, and so we care about what farmers grow. We want to see the 2007 Farm Bill become a "Healthy Food Bill".

Obesity and unhealthy eating constitute a national crisis, with \$117 billion per year in estimated treatment and indirect costs. The epidemic of child obesity, however, promises a worse crisis in the making – these children will have more heart disease, diabetes, cancer and stroke, in some cases not long after they become adults.

Today's agricultural policies are inconsistent with healthy eating. They help flood our communities, including our schools, with high-calorie, nutrient poor, highly processed foods made from cheap starches, sweeteners and oils derived from grains and soybeans. These foods are a big part of the health problems we face. We must do better.

U.S. agricultural policy helps to make unhealthy foods some of the cheapest, "most affordable" to buy. It also contributes to a population deficient in healthful omega-3 fatty acids, with likely impacts on inflammation and other chronic disease – heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. We must do better.

We also care about how farmers grow our food. Current farm policy promotes agricultural methods that deplete water resources, and use pesticides and fossil fuels intensively, with impacts on consumers, communities and our climate. By underwriting the industrial-scale production of animals raised on grain, our farm policy also supports significant air and water pollution.

Grain-fed animals raised under confinement can be more disease-prone than those raised in traditional pasture-based systems. These animals are routinely fed human antibiotics to counter disease and to promote more rapid growth. The Institutes of Medicine confirm this

practice hastens the spread of antibiotic resistance, while in medicine we are losing our arsenal of antibiotics that work. We must support healthier agriculture.

With the 2007 Farm Bill, our government has the opportunity to invest taxpayer dollars in a food system that promotes rather than hinders individual health. Farmers, communities, and the health of our environment would benefit as well.

We urge you to make sure this Farm Bill advances Americans' health and well-being. The Farm Bill should:

- Give all Americans better access to healthy foods (fresh fruits and vegetables, whole rather than refined grains, and better fats), and especially to locally produced foods that will support farmers and strengthen the economic and environmental health of our communities.
- Help ensure better school access to healthy foods, making the diets of schoolchildren more consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Take proactive steps to make fresh produce and other healthy foods more affordable relative to unhealthy foods, as well as to help build the infrastructure needed to get these foods into even our lowest-income communities.

We thank you. And we look forward to a "Healthy Food Bill" that becomes the first step in putting Americans on the path to healthier eating, food production, and living.

Sincerely,

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