

**Looking Back on the Center for Food & Justice's
Los Angeles Fresh Food Access and Nutrition Education Project
1998-2002**

A Report to the California Nutrition Network*
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**A more comprehensive report is also available at www.uepi.oxy.edu/cfi*



Background on the Center for Food and Justice

The mission of the Center for Food and Justice (CFJ, formerly the Community Food Security Project) is to foster a more just, democratic and sustainable food system. CFJ seeks to improve access to fresh and healthy foods in all communities and particularly those where access is most limited. CFJ seeks to make direct connections between those communities and local and regional farmers, through such institutions as schools. Our strategies include developing and evaluating pilot programs; grassroots organizing and coalition building; and conducting research, evaluation, and policy analysis. These strategies factor in environmental, health, community development, social justice, and land use issues to strengthen sustainable family farms, empower local communities, and improve the health of communities and the environment.

The Center for Food and Justice began as a project of the Pollution Prevention Education and Research Center (PPEREC) at UCLA in 1995. PPEREC moved to Occidental College in 1997 and the Community Food Security Project (CFSP) moved with it. A new Urban and Environmental Policy Institute was formed in 1999 that incorporated PPEREC, CFSP, and several other programs and initiatives. CFSP expanded significantly in this period. Its staff increased from 2 in 1995 to 10 in 2002. In 2001, the Community Food Security Project changed its name to the Center for Food and Justice to reflect the recognition of the need for the Center to expand its role in fostering food security research, programs, community participation, and policy campaigns.

CFJ's work is rooted in the Los Angeles region but it works closely with groups in California and throughout the country, through multi-organization projects and participation in and collaboration with the Community Food Security Coalition, the Community Alliance with Family Farms, and a number of other food and justice organizations.

Center programs include the development of a school Farmers' Market Salad Bar program. From a pilot program at one school in Santa Monica in the fall of 1997, this concept has grown into a national farm to school program and major new set of policy initiatives in the area of school food. This includes a USDA funded national farm to school consortium headed by CFJ including several research universities, school districts, and community and farm organizations, and a similar California farm to school partnership headed by CFJ that is funded through the Kellogg Foundation.

The farm to school programs grew out of a pilot program to connect residents of low-income communities to sources of fresh produce through a subscription farming program called the Market Basket Program. Lessons learned from the Market Basket program helped shape the farm to school approach developed in Santa Monica and led to a pilot program to bring farm fresh produce into after school programs.

In 2000, CFJ began to organize parents and other community members to collaborate on advocating for an integrated approach to food and nutrition in Los Angeles schools. These efforts have helped shape and allowed for monitoring of a district process to create a healthy food and nutrition policy.

CFJ has also issued more than a dozen reports on food and nutrition issues and strategies including school gardens, after-school snacks, and gardens and food programs at battered women's shelters. In July 2001, CFJ published a report on the barriers and opportunities for establishing a garden in every school in the Los Angeles school district. In 2002, CFJ produced a report on the barriers and opportunities for expanding healthy snacks in after school programs based on our work with these programs in Los Angeles.

In the summer of 2001, CFJ completed an evaluation of a two-year pilot project to develop gardens and other food programs in domestic violence shelters. Project GROW (Gardens for Respect, Opportunity, and Wellness) was implemented by nine domestic violence shelters across California and funded by the California Department of Health Services. The CFJ helped inspire this pilot program through a feasibility study and then, once the food programs were established, provided training, technical assistance, and evaluation for the nine agency pilot project. In 2002, CFJ produced its own report on Project GROW entitled "Growing Food, Healing Lives" that is available on the CFJ web site.

In the spring of 2000, the Center for Food and Justice co-convened the Food and Nutrition Task Force of the Progressive Los Angeles Network. Between 2000 and 2001, the task force compiled an agenda for city, county, and school district policies to make the Los Angeles food system more just, democratic, and sustainable. On November 3, 2001, CFJ hosted the "A Taste of Justice" conference to bring together residents from the City of Los Angeles to advocate for policies to establish more community gardens and food markets, develop a comprehensive plan for improving food and nutrition, and improve links between farms and public programs. After the conference, the LA Food Network was formed and bi-weekly newsletters with action alerts have helped to establish new collaborations and greater visibility for food and nutrition advocacy in the region.

CFJ is currently one of seven Centers or Programs within the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI). Housed at Occidental College, UEPI programs address issues of work and industry, food and nutrition, housing, transportation, regional and community development, land use, watershed and resource policy and the urban environment. In addition to Nutrition Network funding, CFJ has obtained funding from the USDA, California Department of Health Services, City of Los Angeles, and private foundations.

Nutrition Network-Related Project Activities

In 1998 when CFJ was awarded its first Nutrition Network grant, the Market Basket Program had been operating for about two years. Building on a feasibility study funded by the California Endowment in 1996-97, CFJ had also begun working with the UCLA School of Public Health to introduce salad bars as a strategy for reducing overweight and obesity amongst low-income children in Los Angeles schools. These were the first two projects funded through the Nutrition Network. These projects evolved over the next four years into several other areas but all of CFJ's work has sought to increase access to healthy, farm fresh fruits and vegetables in conjunction with nutrition education.

Between 1998 and 2002, the Center for Food and Justice conducted work in three primary project areas utilizing Nutrition Network funding: Market Basket Program, Farmers' Market Salad Bar and Food Policy in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and After-School Healthy Snack Program. Though not funded through the Nutrition Network, CFJ also worked to develop a community-based food and nutrition policy agenda for the City and County of Los Angeles. Since this policy work will help increase food access in Los Angeles, information about the policy advocacy activities is also included in this report. Activities conducted in each of these areas are described below.

Market Basket Program

From 1995 through 1999, CFJ worked with several community-based organizations and service providers to try to develop a Market Basket Program to expand access to farm-fresh fruits and vegetables in low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles. CFJ staff worked with over a dozen Head Start Preschools, schools, after-school programs, churches, food pantries, child care providers, and social service agencies to develop drop sites, collect orders, and distribute baskets twice monthly. Staff also worked with farmers to identify crops that would be most culturally appropriate to the subscribers participating in the Market Basket Program. A newsletter was produced with each basket distributed to provide subscribers with information about nutrition, participating farms, produce in the baskets, and recipes.

Farmers' Market Salad Bar and Food Policy in the Los Angeles Unified School District

From 1999 to 2001, CFJ worked with the LAUSD to pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bars to improve nutrition of low-income children in the Los Angeles Unified School District. This work included coordinating the ordering and purchasing of produce from regional farms and working with staff at the school sites to prepare farm fresh produce for a daily salad bar option. CFJ also conducted outreach to parents, teachers, and students to promote the use of the salad bar option. Staff worked with students who then conducted their own outreach to other students through classroom presentations and skits at school-wide assemblies. Samples of farmers' market fruits and vegetables were provided at school events and at lunchtime. Parents, teachers, and students were taken on field trips to visit local farms and farmers' markets.

When the pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bars ended in 2001, CFJ staff worked to involve parents, teachers, and students in the crafting of district-wide policies on food and nutrition. This included the formation of a Healthy School Food Coalition to provide education on how policy connects to availability of healthy food at the school sites and to bring community members together to provide a unified voice as to how their concerns could best be addressed in food policy. Staff also participated in a district advisory committee and recruited parents, teachers, and students to participate as well.

After-School Healthy Snack Program

A series of pilot snack programs were conducted at several after-school programs to determine the barriers and opportunities for healthy snacks at after-school programs. CFJ also developed a toolkit for after-school programs to facilitate nutrition education and healthy snack activities. For

a variety of reasons, most of the programs were not able to continue providing healthy snacks after the pilot phase. In a report, CFJ documented the barriers and opportunities for various types of after-school programs to providing healthy snacks. The report also included a series of recommendations for furthering the provision of farm-direct and other healthy items for after-school program snacks.

Los Angeles Food Policy

The Center for Food and Justice hosted a series of meetings of staff of various organizations working on food, nutrition, and hunger in Los Angeles over the past two years to develop a food security and nutrition policy agenda for the City of Los Angeles. The groups then set priorities for campaigns that were most pressing and CFJ organized a conference to bring community members together with organizations to develop food policy campaigns to increase support for community gardens, farmers' markets, healthy school food, and a comprehensive city and county-wide policy on food and nutrition. Held in the Fall of 2001, this conference has then led to a series of other activities including a weekly Taste of Justice Update helping to inform food and nutrition activists about campaigns to get involved in and in the creation of a LA Food Network.

Accomplishments

Between 1998 and 2002, the Center for Food and Justice accomplished a number of objectives, including some major breakthroughs in the development of programs and policies in its farm to school work. It accomplished these objectives through direct participation of individuals in access, educational, and advocacy programs; research, publication, and dissemination of reports and other materials; and a significant increase in organizational capacity.

CFJ's work over the past four years has impacted thousands of people in low-income communities:

- Over 1,000 children and dozens of adults were introduced to the experience of growing food and direct marketing through farms and farmers' markets field trips organized by CFJ.
- Over 2,000 adults and 5,000 children had the opportunity to sample farm-fresh fruits and vegetables at health fairs, on-campus, or at community meetings through tastings sponsored by CFJ.
- Nearly 2,500 Market Baskets were distributed over a two-year period to families and child-care providers through nearly ten community drop-sites.
- Over 400 youth received healthy snacks through the Healthy Snack pilots at eight participating after-school programs.
- Over 1,500 students participated in the pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bar programs in LAUSD and now, approximately 33,000 students have the option of choosing a salad bar lunch at 46 schools in LAUSD.
- Thousands of pieces of print literature, including over 2,000 Los Angeles food access resource guides, have been distributed.
- More than \$25,000 in additional sales for family farms was generated as a result of farm to community programs sponsored by the Center for Food and Justice.

- Print, television, and radio coverage on food security issues was generated, reaching thousands of members of the public as well as policy makers. These included, from 1999 to 2001, two op-ed articles for the Los Angeles Times and one for the Los Angeles Daily News, two half-hour feature stories on food access in low-income areas of Los Angeles and on the Farmers' Market Salad Bar and nutrition issues in LAUSD, and various news, TV, and radio coverage of CFJ-related activities. In 2002, media interest has increased even further, with interviews and stories from news outlets such as the Christian Science Monitor, KPPC Radio in Los Angeles, US News and World Report, the Worldwatch Institute, and CBS News.

CFJ has developed and evaluated important models of increasing access to nutritious and appealing food in low-income communities:

- Piloted the Market Basket Program and after continued assessment and program revision, decided to end the program and apply lessons to institutional purchasing programs.
- Successfully piloted salad bars in the LAUSD that were institutionalized and expanded to 47 schools in the district.
- Piloted a healthy snack program in eight after-school programs to identify barriers and opportunities for providing healthy snacks in after-school programs. Issued a report in 2002.
- Developed a nutrition education, gardening, and healthy snack toolkit for After School Programs.
- Completed a report on school gardens in the Los Angeles Unified School District with recommendations for improving garden viability.
- Presented at numerous conferences and meetings to encourage other communities to take on food and nutrition issues in a community-oriented approach.

The Center for Food and Justice has worked to establish democratic processes for community participation, either through advocacy within District or City advisory committees or through the creation of independent organizations that encourage community participation.

- Created and expanded the Healthy School Food Coalition which now has 35 active members (parents, teachers, students, and other community members) from eleven schools. Members of the Coalition are prioritizing their concerns and formulating strategy for working with the district to see those concerns addressed.
- Successfully advocated for parent and community representation in the development of food policy through the district creation of the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee. Parents and teachers from the Healthy School Food Coalition and staff members of the Center for Food and Justice and the California Food Policy Advocates serve on the committee.
- Organized members of the HSFC to testify at hearings and to speak at meetings with several school board members to voice their concerns and advocate for positive change.
- Secured support from the City of Los Angeles for initiating a community-based policy making process around food and nutrition issues. Also obtained support for this model process from the Nutrition Network.
- In 2002, members of the Healthy School Food Coalition organized and lobbied for SB 1520 (Soda Tax Bill) and have begun to organize against the incorporation of foods from

3 major fast food companies into the National School Lunch Program in LAUSD (“Triple Header Program”).

- Through participation in the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee, CFJ staff and Healthy School Food Coalition members have contributed substantially to the formulation of recommendations to be made to the school board regarding improvements in LAUSD school food policy.

On November 3, 2001, CFJ hosted the “A Taste of Justice” conference to bring together residents from the City of Los Angeles to advocate for policies to establish more community gardens and food markets, develop a comprehensive plan for improving food and nutrition, and improve links between farms and public programs. After the conference, the LA Food Network was formed and bi-weekly newsletters with action alerts have helped to establish new collaborations and greater visibility for food and nutrition advocacy in the region.

The Center for Food and Justice has also utilized support from the Nutrition Network to build organizational capacity to further these activities.

- Initiated and secured funding from USDA for a national consortium of organizations working to initiate and evaluate farm-to-school programs.
- Secured additional funding from the Kellogg Foundation to work with other organizations such as the Community Alliance with Family Farmers to explore the creation of local farm networks to supply farm-fresh food to school districts in California such as LAUSD.
- Secured general support funding from private foundations to continue and expand advocacy and organizing for policy and programmatic change.

Challenges

During the course of the Los Angeles Fresh Food Access and Nutrition Education Project, the Center for Food and Justice faced many challenges in building organizational capacity, developing effective partnerships, facilitating program logistics, developing leadership and participation in low-income communities, and fostering policy change. While some of these challenges have been met with new activities or tools, staff continue to work to overcome others.

Organizational Capacity and Flexibility

The Center for Food and Justice grew significantly from 1998 to 2002 and that growth was accompanied by organizational challenges. Challenges included identifying and developing staff, shifting strategy within the confines of existing funding, and setting priorities based on a mission and role within the food security movement. These challenges are also being faced by other non-profit organizations working on food issues as these new organizations have experienced rapid growth during the past decade.

The Center for Food and Justice has sought to identify staff who are concerned about food and nutrition issues, but even more importantly, understand the need to identify and develop leaders and build capacity in low-income communities. CFJ also sought out staff who could be flexible and creative in thinking about the best strategies to utilize to improve food security. This has put

CFJ in competition for staff with a wide range of other social change organizations, from labor unions to community economic development groups.

As the food security movement is relatively new, activists from other social movements are not typically drawn to work in it. This is due in part to the evolution of anti-hunger work over the past decade from its roots in community organizing and building community power towards a more advocacy and service-oriented focus. While the fields of nutrition and public health can provide a base of people who understand food security issues, often, people working in these fields want professional rather than activist-oriented roles. In contrast, a community food security perspective sees access to resources such as income and farmers' markets as a critical component of fighting hunger and poor nutrition.

The need to have flexibility in the strategies chosen to meet certain objectives was also a challenge related to funding and staffing constraints. Oftentimes, after several months or years of work on a particular project, CFJ would identify a need to change strategy from program orientation to policy or organizing, for example. To make such a transition, CFJ needed funding sources that were flexible in allowing for such a change in strategy and, possibly, objectives. For instance, while the original objectives for the Market Basket Program revolved around the number of baskets distributed to low-income families, ultimately staff recognized the primary need for more educational work with parents, youth, and involved organizations. Yet grant proposals had been written and funded to include objectives that required staff time to be spent running the program, even after they determined their time would be better spent conducting workshops or other educational activities. While flexibility was needed as a project evolved, when hired, staff would be selected on the basis of their capacity to meet the goals stated in the grant they were hired under, not necessarily for skills that might be required as the nature and goals of the project changed. For instance, starting up a pilot farmers' market salad bar program required very different types of skills than did organizing parents, teachers, and students to develop their own food and nutrition policy campaign in the school district.

Finally, similar to some of the projects within the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute as a whole, CFJ's work often grew out of a spark of an idea or a good connection between an idea, funding, and an inspired staff person to carry it out. Yet this form of project selection led to priorities that were more ad-hoc rather than priorities set by a broader group of staff and community members. It also led to staff turnover since the model was generally to find a staff person who fit a particular project rather than looking for a staff person to fit into the mission of the organization long term. Significant progress has been made in addressing these organizational capacity issues through incorporation of a strategic planning process involving the Center Director, UEPI Director and CFJ staff, as well as team building, professional development activities, and stronger and more interactive community partnerships. In addition, CFJ has explored the creation of an advisory board, a process that might help the Center to focus its work to better fulfill its mission.

Partnerships

While partnerships have been essential to the work of the Center for Food and Justice, a few of the partnerships did not develop as intended. In the first few years, CFJ wrote deliverables that required the participation of other organizations into its Nutrition Network grants. Given the

often rapid turnaround in the grant writing process, deliverables were set before obtaining a memorandum of understanding from a few of those organizations in order to better spell out commitments. In most cases, while the other organization was excited about the overall program and wanted to do the work, commitments to *their direct funders* came first and left little time to focus on their subcontract or partnering commitments.

Another difficulty in conducting work as community food security activists has been building constructive partnerships without disempowering those who are not professionals. Oftentimes, professionals—from school district administrators to food advocates to social service providers to food security project staff—assume that they have more complete or accurate information than community members since they are working on these issues full-time. Thus, these professionals are often called on to identify problems and solutions in low-income communities and then seek funding to carry out their designs. In contrast, the Center for Food and Justice has sought ways to involve parents, teachers, students, and other community members in identifying the problems and coming up with solutions, while also utilizing the resources of professional staff.

One emerging model is the involvement of parents, teachers, and students in both the Healthy School Food Coalition (HSFC) and the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee (CNAC) created by the School District. This structure allows parents, teachers, and students who are just beginning to articulate their concerns and to learn about the possible solutions to come together to develop their own analysis outside of the school district process that is dominated by professionals. Since HSFC meetings are open, school district professionals have sometimes attended and participated in community meetings without considering their relative power, the process has not been perfect. But even these situations have provided an opportunity for community members to discuss the difference between professional expertise and the need to build community power to express their own concerns.

Partnerships with Limited-Resourced Community Organizations

CFJ's work, particularly in the after-school healthy snack area, has been constrained in part because so many after school programs and social service programs are stretched thin. Thus, these programs lack the resources to integrate buying for healthy snacks or coordination of a Market Basket program into their existing workload. Thus, institutional support is needed. For instance, if the school district snack menu were improved through a farm-direct purchasing strategy, many additional after-school programs could access these healthy snacks with little additional work.

Farm-Direct Produce Distribution

Given the immense task of preparing over 700,000 meals per day, getting produce from small farmers to each of the participating schools in the school district also presented logistical complexities in terms of food procurement and preparation. Compared to the medium-sized districts with which CFJ had worked, the Los Angeles Unified School District was less willing to test alternative means of purchasing and distribution. Therefore, CFJ used more of its own organizational resources to make the farmers' market purchasing system better meet the district's needs.

Similar logistical hurdles came up for small after-school programs with limited resources to make weekly purchases from multiple sources. Many programs did not have transportation or staffing to pick up produce from farmers' markets when they were open.

Thus, for institutional purchasing, CFJ identified a need for a distribution network of farmers to deliver produce to school districts, after-school programs, and other such facilities. Through grants from the Kellogg Foundation and from USDA, CFJ has begun working with other farm groups such as the Community Alliance with Family Farmers and the Community Food Security Coalition to identify purchasing and distribution networks to better meet the needs of school districts across the state. One such opportunity is through the Department of Defense fresh produce purchasing program that facilitates purchasing from farms for school districts. CFJ and its partners have been exploring with DoD the development of a major new initiative in this area beginning with the new school year in September 2002.

Need for Community Involvement and Leadership Development

Throughout the food security projects that CFJ engaged in, staff recognized the need to foster community participation and ownership of the projects. While community involvement and leadership development were critical to all programs, from the Market Basket Program to the Healthy After-School Snacks to the Farmers' Market Salad Bar Pilot Programs, they often also proved to be the most time- and resource-consuming elements. Grant agreements often defined deliverables in quantitative terms, such as numbers of baskets distributed or number of students served. This required staff to focus their time on forcing the programs to produce these deliverables, rather than building sustainability for the programs through community involvement.

With each of the programs, however, staff worked to find key roles for parents, youth, or other community members that would give them an opportunity to play a leadership role. For instance, at each site where Market Baskets were distributed, one or more parent volunteers were recruited to sign up subscribers, collect money, and help assemble baskets at the site. An advisory group of child-care providers and participants was formed to help guide the development of the Market Basket program. Since the snack pilots were short in duration, CFJ focused on identifying one or more staff from each after-school program site who might champion the continuation of healthy snacks and nutrition education after the pilots ended.

One important lesson learned in piloting the Farmers' Market Salad Bar in the Los Angeles Unified School District was that a base of support from the school community was needed to ensure the continuity, expansion, and institutionalization of progressive changes. At the first pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bar school in the Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District, the school principal, several staff members, and parents at the school site had all voiced their support for the program before it began. The superintendent and school board had also agreed to the pilot and the food service director, while initially skeptical, was not opposed to the pilot program. This community involvement was not as strong in the Los Angeles schools and the school communities were disconnected from the district administration.

In LAUSD, CFJ staff began trying to get FMSBs into the district using an "insider" approach. Staff worked with a group of public health researchers from UCLA through schools they had

identified as a) having principals who were conscious of the need to improve nutrition and wanted to host an innovative program at their school and b) having a kitchen and cafeteria set up conducive to a FMSB.¹ The Deputy Food Service Director at LAUSD was skeptical, but agreed to tour the FMSB program at Muir-SMASH Elementary School in the Santa Monica district. This tour led to her agreement to allow CFJ to pilot the Farmers' Market Salad Bars in two schools while also working with the district to pilot a non-farmers' market salad bar in a third school. CFJ did not require garnering of parent, teacher, or student support for the program, which later proved to be a major impediment to the sustainability of the program.

After a year of piloting the program in three schools, the district decided to stop purchasing produce through the farmers' market channels. The district did utilize the outreach strategies that CFJ had developed and applied them to the creation of a salad bar model using produce procured through traditional wholesale channels. Though these salad bars did not directly benefit local family farms or connect students directly with their food source, the salad bars did provide important points of access to fruits and vegetables that students were likely to eat.

Meanwhile, CFJ staff began receiving calls from parents and teachers from schools around the district asking for help in getting salad bars (often, specifically farmers' market salad bars) at their schools. CFJ staff began to meet with these parent and staff groups to provide information about the school district process, make presentations, and work with them to get salad bars at their schools.

By the fall of 2001, LAUSD had instituted the salad bar program in 25 elementary schools. These salad bars—which allow a child to create a meal that is based on fruits and vegetables—whether farm-direct or not, were a positive step towards healthy alternatives in the lunchroom.

While groups from some schools were asking the district to provide a Farmers' Market Salad Bar at their school, the district administrators would not agree to this request. One group of parents from a middle-income school met with district representatives who told them that they could have a salad bar but it would not be stocked with farmers' market produce. The parents agreed, but requested a follow up meeting in 3-6 months to evaluate the possibility of getting farm-direct produce, as this was an important factor to them. The district administrators would not commit to taking any steps to assist in making this a real possibility and after the initial two pilot schools during the first year, no other school was able to get farmers' market produce into their salad bar.

Meanwhile, staff at the Center for Food and Justice realized that it had not been able to sustain the two pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bars, in part because it had not built a base of support at the community level in those schools. In fact, many parents were not even aware that there was a salad bar at their children's school or that it was stocked with farm-direct fruits and vegetables.

¹ CFJ looked for kitchens with enough space to wash, prepare, and store fresh fruits and vegetables. The school also needed to have a cafeteria with a large enough space to house a salad bar with enough space for students to walk by on both sides under the supervision of adult monitors. Many schools in the district do not have one or both of these features since many kitchens and cafeterias have been replaced by classrooms due to increased enrollment and class size reduction.

Thus, while our goals were much broader than simply improving access to healthy food (i.e., CFJ wanted to develop institutional support of local family farms and show youth where their food comes from), many people in low-income communities of Los Angeles had not been exposed to information about the importance of supporting a local food supply. CFJ recognized that parents, teachers, and students had varying levels of information about nutrition, family farms, farmers' markets, and sustainable agriculture. Staff saw that parents, teachers, students, and cafeteria workers had other issues with the school feeding programs that they wanted to see addressed. These issues could provide a first step in building a base of people who would act to improve school food quality and address equity issues. CFJ staff could then work with people to broaden their analysis to include food justice issues such as access, support of local farms, environmental and workplace issues related to food and agriculture, and teaching students how to grow their own food.

In 2002, the Healthy School Food Coalition has been developing campaigns that will provide immediate results as well as discrete tasks for members to take on to develop their leadership skills. Examples include phone trees where members call other parents, teachers, and students to explain what is going on and how they can get involved. Writing letters, participating in visits to school board members, participating in the district's advisory committee, and testifying at board meetings provide other opportunities for participants to experience their own potential to influence change.

Fostering Participation in a Large School District

One significant challenge to increasing access to farm fresh fruits and vegetables in low-income schools was doing so within the Los Angeles Unified School District, which serves over 700,000 students. In such a large district, there was little opportunity for parents, teachers, and students to participate in decision making on food and nutrition policy or even to know where to begin.

In any situation, there are challenges to developing leadership among low-income community members to advocate on their own behalf and organize others to do the same. In a large school district, where there are many large problems to tackle, this challenge is greatly magnified. CFJ identified several other groups doing work on school reform and, in some cases, worked with members of those groups to incorporate food and nutrition as an issue.

Most significantly, CFJ created or advocated for the creation of two new entities to give community members a voice in district food policy. The first was the Healthy School Food Coalition, an independent body with a steering committee comprised of parents and teachers. The second was the District's creation of the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee. CFJ informed parents, teachers, and students of the opportunity to participate in this Committee and several of the community members CFJ recruited to apply were selected to serve.

Challenge of Geographic Dispersal

One challenge that arose throughout the project was selecting which regions to work in. In the case of the Market Basket Program, staff from child-care centers, after-school providers, and other organizations operating around the county expressed an interest in serving as a drop-site. However, since one objective of the Market Basket program was to bolster sales at farmers'

markets in low-income communities, it was often logistically difficult to transport produce from the farmers' market to community centers that were geographically disbursed.

A similar situation arose in selecting which parents, teachers, and students to focus most energy on when organizing around the LAUSD food program with limited time and staff resources. One of the goals of the Healthy School Food Coalition is to help constituents in these geographically disbursed regions stay connected. One strategy attempted was to vary the location of the meetings. Meetings are now generally held in a location that is central to most members, and rides are arranged for those who have difficulty getting to the meeting location.

Thus, while the pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bar programs provided distinct school communities in which to work, fostering participation in the Healthy School Food Coalition on district-wide policy is less geographically tied. As of the summer of 2002, the group is currently grappling with the issues of whether to choose other pilot school sites to establish policy and program and whether to work to maintain the citywide structure of the HSFC.

Challenge of Language Differences

The issue of Spanish translation is an important one for any group working in low-income communities in Los Angeles. In all of its programs, CFJ has worked to create access to monolingual-Spanish speaking community members. CFJ has almost always had one or more fluent Spanish-speakers on staff. The bi-monthly newsletter produced for the Market Basket Program was produced in Spanish and English.

A translator is available at Healthy School Food Coalition meetings for monolingual Spanish-speaking members. Simultaneous translation equipment is borrowed from City Council members and other community organizations. Simultaneous translation was provided at the Taste of Justice Conference.

However, translated meetings tend to run at a different pace than meetings conducted solely in one language but many English-speaking participants are not used to changing their speaking pace or otherwise modifying their behavior for a dual-language audience. This is slowly changing over time as the Coalition continues to meet on a more regular basis and members interact and solidify relationships with one another.

Another challenge is that monolingual, Spanish-speaking members of the HSFC are often intimidated to speak or participate in front of their English-speaking counterparts. To address this the CFJ staff coordinator is organizing more one-on-one visits with the Spanish-speaking members before each meeting to familiarize them with the topics that will be discussed so that they feel more prepared to participate. The CFJ staff coordinator is also developing workshops for and facilitated by monolingual Spanish-speaking members. These organizing activities are not meant to be exclusive or divisive but will instead give Spanish-speaking members the space to ask questions, to voice their opinions, and to grow more confident in their abilities to participate in the Coalition.

Need for District-wide and City-wide Policy

In 2000, the LAUSD was awarded a large matching grant to develop a Nutrition Network program to provide nutrition education in low-income schools. The Nutrition Network program was housed in what had been the district's school garden program and a similar approach to implementation was used. This voluntary team approach was meant to encourage schools to participate but there were no official policies requiring schools to provide the same opportunities to all students across the district. Schools with Nutrition Network Teams became eligible for salad bars, funding, and other resources.

Inequities due to the lack of district-wide policy became evident as CFJ staff worked with parents and teachers from those schools that did and those that did not participate in the LAUSD Nutrition Network program. At some schools, teachers had encountered barriers (such as a principal who was unwilling to let the school form a nutrition team, have a salad bar, or start a garden) that they could not overcome because they did not have the institutional support of the district. A school board policy in support of gardens, nutrition education, and salad bars would help ensure that this barrier does not create inequity among schools.

Another common problem identified was the limited number of teachers who were willing and able to take on the additional responsibility of putting together a Nutrition Network team. As teachers in the district are under extreme pressure to implement standardized curriculum and to improve standardized test scores, many teachers do not feel willing or able to take on such an endeavor. Yet this lack of teacher interest or capacity should not prevent the students from accessing a salad bar, garden or other nutrition program.

Thus, while the activities being implemented at the schools selected to participate in the Nutrition Network program may have improved access to nutrition education and nutritious choices, a policy is needed to ensure the district's commitment to ensuring these improvements for every student.

Similarly, many regions of the City of Los Angeles do not have access to resources to support community gardens, encourage the siting of new supermarkets or farmers' markets, or otherwise foster nutritious diets. A citywide food policy, such as the one CFJ has advocated for over the past several years, would help to rectify these disparities.

Third Party Role in School District

Throughout CFJ's work with school districts, staff have contemplated the role of an outside advocacy organization in pushing for changes in school food services. CFJ has played different roles with different districts. In the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, despite encountering initial mistrust, CFJ staff were allowed to pilot the Farmers' Market Salad Bar program and have full access to school staff and community members. Because UEPI director Robert Gottlieb was also a former parent at the school chosen for the pilot, CFJ staff were better able to identify leaders in the school and work more effectively to gain community support for the program.

In the LAUSD, however, the district food service administration was more skeptical and staff did not have any relationships with the school community. Therefore, initial outreach and efforts to

build community support for the program were not as effective as they had been in Santa Monica.

Though CFJ did not have extensive relationships in LAUSD, over time, the staff developed a reputation among parents and teachers in the district for assisting school community members in bringing about positive change. CFJ staff promoted the LAUSD Nutrition Network program and encouraged schools to develop Nutrition Teams and participate in the mini grant program. In some cases, staff worked with the school teams to develop their proposals. CFJ also helped parents and teachers understand how the salad bar program worked and identify district officials to contact to request such a program in their schools.

After developing contacts throughout the district, CFJ helped to organize the Healthy School Food Coalition to enable parents, teachers, and students to identify their common concerns and advocate on their own behalf for changes that would address their needs. Thus, CFJ moved from playing a role of program facilitator to playing the role of community organizer. In this role, CFJ organized forums where community members could come together to voice their concerns, identify ways to work together to let the district know what their concerns were, learn more about the issues, become better advocates, and develop their own leadership.

Thus, CFJ moved from working as an insider setting up pilot programs in the district to working with community members to advocate for changes from the bottom up. Both roles were important but could not be played simultaneously. In the long term, community participation will help the district become more responsive to community concerns and will foster a base of people who want to ensure the success of the district's food service program. In the short term, the district often saw such community participation as a threat. Similarly, staff of the LAUSD Nutrition Network program expressed feeling threatened by parents, teachers, and students organizing for district-wide policy change.

CFJ has learned that it is critical for any group working for positive change in a school feeding program to identify multiple effective approaches for making that change. It is also critical for groups to collaborate with allied organizations, such as the California Food Policy Advocates, who can play an advocate role and help push for policy change from several directions.

Lessons Learned

Through these experiences, the Center for Food and Justice has learned several important lessons, divided below into programmatic and organizational lessons.

Value of Utilizing Farm-Fresh Produce

The Center for Food and Justice's work over the past four years has demonstrated the value of utilizing farm-fresh produce to improve the healthfulness and appeal of institutional food programs to improve child nutrition. The Farmers' Market Salad Bars piloted in two elementary schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District demonstrated that children would increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables when appealing produce is made available to them. Similarly, the after school programs that participated in the pilot healthy snack program reported

that the youth in their programs were surprised at how tasty “healthy” snacks could be. At some sites, participants voted the farmers’ market oranges the most juicy they had ever tasted.

Fostering Community Participation

While these programs were important, it was also essential to engage parents, teachers, students, and staff to become advocates for obtaining nutritious food on their school campuses or after-school programs. Without these community voices, the programs were likely to be cut as soon as the pilot programs ended even if they were shown to be effective. While the pilot programs were demonstrated to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, without having involved parents, teachers, students, and program staff in their development, the programs were often not championed by anyone in the community. While important, the programs by themselves could not address all of the concerns that community members had about food in their communities. Thus, it is important to involve community members in identifying the needs in their community, as well as the possible pilot programs or other strategies to use in meeting those needs.

In addition to engaging community members, it is also essential to provide an organizational vehicle for these members to become unified in setting priorities and working towards identified goals. Otherwise, each individual will have their own pet issue but, working alone, none of the issues will be heard by the institutions needing to change. The Healthy School Food Coalition provided such a vehicle for organizing for a strong food and nutrition policy in the Los Angeles Unified School District. However, CFJ did not identify or create a similar vehicle for after school healthy snack advocacy. In contrast to progress being made on the district food policy front, there has been little movement forward in developing strategies to improve after school snacks.

Policy Change and Accountability Structures

CFJ learned the importance of fostering school district-wide and citywide policy on food and nutrition to ensure access, participation, equity, and long-term change. As important as the policies developed, however, are the processes utilized to develop those policies and to monitor implementation. Any policy development and implementation process must provide structures for community participation in the development and execution of those policies.

Officially-sanctioned advisory bodies with strong nutrition advocates from the parent, educational, and nutrition communities should be employed to draft food policy and to ensure that policy or programmatic changes are executed as community members intend them to be. This need became especially apparent when a large county-wide after-school program for families participating in CalWorks, created as a result of community pressure, did not implement the nutrition policies for which they had received funding. It is clear that once the advocacy results in policy change, mechanisms need to be established to ensure that the policies passed are implemented properly, and that new issues identified by community members are also addressed.

In addition to officially-sanctioned advisory bodies where representatives of various communities can participate and voice their concerns, independent groups of community members are needed to provide a more open forum for voicing community concerns and identifying strategies to ensure that institutions heed those concerns. The Center for Food and Justice facilitated the development of the Healthy School Food Coalition to provide such a forum

for influencing the school district food policy in LAUSD. Similarly, CFJ has co-founded the Los Angeles Food Network to provide an independent community voice to advocate for healthy and just food and nutrition policies in the City and County of Los Angeles.

Generating Media Coverage

Generating print, radio, and television coverage on the value of an integrated approach to healthy food has been essential for influencing change, especially at the policy level. Center for Justice staff authored or co-authored at least four op-ed pieces that were run in the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Daily News. Staff and parent members were also quoted in stories for local newspapers and radio shows on a regular basis. CFJ staff members were asked to participate in full-length feature stories on a prime time current event television program on two occasions. These media appearances provided CFJ an opportunity to frame the problems of hunger, obesity, and diet-related disease in a community food security context. By reaching thousands of members of the public at a time, including policy makers and elected officials, these media appearances bolstered CFJ's efforts to organize and advocate for policy and programmatic change to increase access to nutritious foods and nutrition education in low-income communities.

Organizational Flexibility

To maximize effectiveness, CFJ found it needed flexibility to expand programs or change direction. This requires an adaptable staff with a wide array of skills and a base of new staff to hire from when new projects are funded. It also requires funding from a broad array of sources, including general support sources, that allows CFJ to scope out new programs, conduct research, or even conduct new program activities not specifically outlined under any grant received.

When programs shift direction or approach, staffing needs change. For instance, when the Farmers' Market Salad Bar program was first piloted in the LAUSD, CFJ needed a coordinator who could work with schoolteachers, students, and food services staff to implement the pilot. However, once the pilots had been conducted and the district had assumed full responsibility for operating them, the CFJ coordinator's role shifted to working with parents from other schools in advocating for salad bars and involving them in the development of a district-wide nutrition policy. As the skills needed to conduct these activities were different than the ones originally needed to start pilots, staff needed additional training or reassignment.

The day-to-day work of the projects often left little time for staff development activities needed for future work. For instance, as the school meals program shifted from program to policy work, staff had to jump right into the next strategy even if they had no training or experience with it.

To widen the base of qualified staff, CFJ learned that it needed to increase opportunities for staff development and to cultivate potential staff through volunteer and activist opportunities. Through grassroots organizing, leaders can be identified who may also meet staffing needs.

In terms of funding, Nutrition Network funds alone were insufficient to fully carry out the successful programs. However, by leveraging funds from the Nutrition Network, CFJ was able to

obtain funding from other sources, including local government. By combining funding from other sources, program budgets allowed for adequate staffing to meet goals and objectives.

Recommendations for Working in Large Institutions

The Center for Food and Justice has identified several recommendations for organizations working to improve nutrition in large school districts and other large institutions.

- Identify strategy and organizational identity (i.e., are you a think tank, advocacy group, community organizer, or some combination, etc.?).
- Work to link education and program strategies to policy, organizing, and advocacy strategies.
- Recognize that strategy might change and be ready to shift gears and change tactics if needed.
- Especially when working to effect change within a large institution or region, coordinate efforts with organizations working with District staff as an “insider” as well as with other groups mobilizing community members as “outsiders”.
- Build grassroots participation by asking community members to define the most important issues and ensuring that the district has a process for hearing the voices of concerned parents, students, and teachers.
- If a community organizing approach is chosen, organize educational forums and fun activities and tasks for people to engage in to build leadership skills.

Outcomes

Over the past four years, the Center for Food and Justice’s food security projects in Los Angeles have resulted in a number of important outcomes.

- As of June 2002, salad bars now operate in 46 schools in the LAUSD providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables to approximately 33,000 low-income youth.
- A study conducted by the UCLA School of Public Health found that students at the participating pilot salad bar schools consumed an average of one additional serving of fruits and vegetables daily than before the salad bars had been installed.
- LAUSD created the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee to include parent, student, and other community members in the development of food policy.
- The Healthy School Food Coalition -- a parent, teacher, student coalition -- has been formed and will continue to advise the district of community concerns about food and nutrition and participate in policy formation. The group now has 35 active members from eleven schools that are prioritizing their concerns and formulating strategies for working with the district to see these concerns addressed.
- A toolkit for after-school programs to guide implementation of nutrition education, gardening, and healthy snack activities has been developed, disseminated and tested.
- A report has been issued on the barriers and opportunities of healthy snacks in after-school programs.
- A Los Angeles Food Network has been formed to keep advocates and residents informed of food and nutrition policy issues and events. Electronic newsletters have been circulated to at least 143 individuals and organizations bi-weekly, with the numbers of subscribers continuing to increase as the L.A. Food Network expands.

Through our activities over the last four years, CFJ has also built capacity and a reputation for providing community members with a vehicle to affect change in Los Angeles. Funding from and participation in the Nutrition Network has been critical to the development of this capacity and these relationships. With these elements in place, CFJ is poised to now help influence the creation of a school district-wide policy that will increase access to nutritious and appealing food and reduce availability of unhealthy food in schools that serve over 700,000 students. In partnering with the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness, the California Food Policy Advocates and numerous other groups, CFJ is also set to build a network that will hold the city accountable for improving food access through policies that support community-based food resources such as gardens, farmers' markets, and food stores and that reduce availability and marketing of unhealthy foods. And with its educational work, research capacity, and policy analysis, CFJ has been able to provide community groups and healthy food advocates valuable tools in promoting healthy food and building organizational and community capacity to make change.

Attachment 1: History of Funding of the Center for Food and Justice

Year	Funder	Purpose
1994	UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (UC SAREP)	Research the feasibility of a subscription farming program in low-income neighborhoods.
1995	Environmental Protection Agency Region IX	Development of Market Basket Program as pollution prevention strategy.
1995	UC SAREP	Establish pilot Market Basket Program.
1996	The California Endowment	Develop programs in several new areas including investigating the feasibility of a farmers' market salad bar program in a low-income school in Santa Monica and the feasibility of garden programs in battered women's shelters.
1996	California Community Foundation	Market Basket Program in conjunction with Southland Farmers' Market Association and Crystal Stairs, Inc.
1997	The California Wellness Foundation	Continue and expand programs including Market Basket, farm to school, and gardens for survivors of domestic violence allowing the programs to take root and become institutionalized by government entities.
1998	The California Endowment	Expand the Market Basket Program to new child-care sites, Head Start preschools, and other community centers.
1998	Department of Health Services Maternal and Child Health Branch (DHS-MCH)	Conduct workshops in three regions of California to further explore the feasibility of and interest in establishing gardens and food security programs in battered women's shelters.
1999-2001	DHS-MCH	Establish gardens and food security programs in nine battered women shelter programs as part of a two-year pilot program. Occidental CFJ is funded to provide technical assistance, training, and conduct evaluation.
1998-2002	California Nutrition Network	Original funding was to lay the groundwork for working with the Los Angeles Unified School District on a pilot farmers' market salad bar program and continue developing and evaluating the pilot Market Basket Program. A pilot after school healthy snack program was also funded along with work to develop the Healthy School Food Coalition.

1999-2001	USDA Community Food Projects	Support the development of pilot farmers' market salad bars in the Los Angeles Unified School District.
1999-2002	City of Los Angeles Community Development Department	As a result of advocacy by the Los Angeles Food Security and Hunger Partnership, funded the Market Basket Program, healthy after-school snacks, and the Taste of Justice Conference.
2000-2001	The Haynes Foundation	Conduct research on the barriers and opportunities for school gardens in the Los Angeles Unified School District and the development of a school food policy.
2001	California Nutrition Network	Contract to organize a food security training for Nutrition Network grantees.
2000-2002	California Wellness Foundation	General support for programs and policy work to improve food security. This funding was critical to CFJ's ability to participate in statewide coalitions and alliances such as the Nutrition Network and the Community Food Security Coalition's California Policy Summit. It also enabled CFJ to be flexible and respond to opportunities without having to wait for a new funding cycle.
2002	California Nutrition Network, City of Los Angeles	Update and translate the Los Angeles Fresh Food Access Guide and conduct fresh food access workshops in low-income communities
2000-2004	USDA Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems	Expand pilot programs and evaluate farm to school programs in several states through a national consortium led by the Center for Food and Justice
2002-2006	W. K. Kellogg Foundation	Expand Farm to School Programs throughout California through a statewide team of several organizations led by the Center for Food and Justice