

Press Release

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Over 300 Doctors, Health Professionals Call For Healthy Farm Bill *More Accessible, Healthy Food Would Help Fight Obesity, Related Disease*

Washington, D.C. – Over 300 health professionals from around the country – physicians, nurses, dietitians and public health practitioners – sent Congressional leaders a letter today calling for the 2007 Farm Bill to be a “Healthy Food Bill,” to better combat childhood obesity and other illnesses by making healthy food more affordable and accessible.

The letter was signed by nearly 160 physicians, including Georges Benjamin, M.D., FACP, Executive Director of the American Public Health Association, Robert S. Lawrence, M.D., Director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for a Livable Future, and Andrew Weil, M.D., best-selling writer on health and wellness.

“The Farm Bill is fundamentally a public health bill,” said Dr. Benjamin of APHA. “Its long reach affects the food security of our nation and, in turn, our health.”

The letter, sent to Chairs and Ranking Minority Members on the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, targets policies in previous Farm Bills that have helped make the calorie-dense foods Americans already over-consume – namely cheap starches and highly processed foods made from added sweeteners and oils derived from corn and soybeans – some of the cheapest to buy.

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

“Our communities are flooded with cheap, unhealthy foods that ultimately are helping drive healthcare costs through the roof,” said Dr. David Wallinga, director of the Food and Health Program at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. “None of us can afford the status quo. Our Farm Bill should support greater access to healthier foods for children, and support farmers growing healthier foods. It's an investment everyone will benefit from.”

From 1985 to 2000, the real consumer cost of fresh fruits and vegetables rose nearly 40 percent while that of sugars and fats actually dropped 7-14 percent. Soda pop prices dropped most of all, by 24 percent in real dollars. By encouraging the

over-production of a few raw commodity grain crops, Farm Bill policies have worked at cross-purposes with healthy eating recommendations, such as those in the USDA's own *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

The letter also singles out the industrial-scale production of food animals raised on grain and routinely fed human antibiotics as growth promoters, which increases antibiotic resistance. Impacts on the health of consumers, communities and the planet from the intensive use of pesticides and fossil fuels in agriculture are highlighted as well.

The health professionals called for a new Farm Bill that will improve access to healthy foods (fresh fruits and vegetables, whole rather than refined grains, and better fats), help ensure better school access to healthy foods, and help to build the infrastructure to get healthy foods to low-income communities.

“This letter reflects our professions’ understanding that the obesity crisis has links to a food system that is seriously out of balance,” said Dr. Robert Lawrence, Director of Johns Hopkins’ Center for a Livable Future, and Professor of Environmental Health Sciences at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “The Farm Bill has to be part of the prescription for improving our health.”

To read the full letter, go to: <http://www.healthobservatory.org/>, or <http://www.farmandfoodproject.org/>.

The *Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy* works globally to promote resilient family farms, healthy communities and ecosystems through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy. <http://www.iatp.org/>.

Founded in 1872, the *American Public Health Association* is the oldest, largest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world. The association aims to protect all Americans and their communities from preventable, serious health threats and strives to assure community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities and preventive health services are universally accessible in the United States. More information is available at <http://www.apha.org/>.

The *Johns Hopkins University Center for a Livable Future* is an academic center focused on the relationships between diet, food production, environment and human health. More information is available at <http://www.jhsph.edu/clf>.