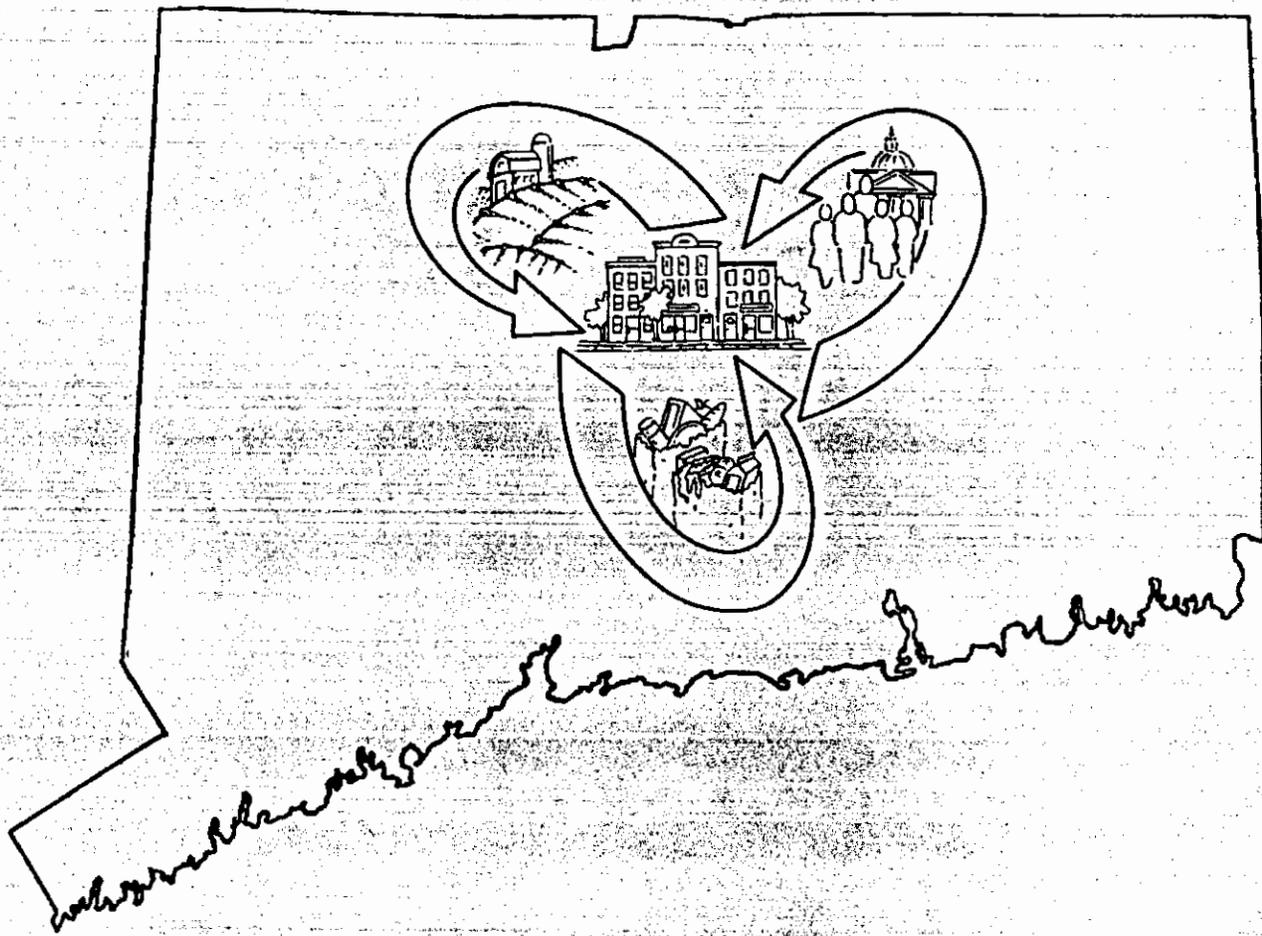


# Toward Food Security for Connecticut



# **Planning and Development Committee's Ad Hoc Food Security Committee Committee Membership**

Rep. Jefferson B. Davis, Planning and Development Committee Co-Chair

Sen. Paul Munns, Planning and Development Committee Co-Chair

Rep. Janet Lockton, Planning and Development Committee Ranking Member

Sen. Eric Coleman, Planning and Development Committee Ranking Member

Dr. Nancy Bull, Associate Dean/Associate Director, UConn Cooperative Extension

Susan Davis, Chair, Hartford Food Policy Commission, Hartford School Food Service

Bill Duesing, Old Solar Farm

Commissioner Shirley Ferris, Dept. of Agriculture  
Represented by Rick MacSuga

Rep. Michael Jarjura, Jarjura Produce

Gloria McAdam, FoodShare of Greater Hartford

Sara Parker McKernan, Connecticut Anti-Hunger Coalition

Sandra Rose, Rose Berry Farm

Walter Welz, Connecticut Farm Bureau

Bob Wiener, JDA Development Company

Mike Williams, Hartford Community Mental Health Ctr., ONE/CHANE

Shannon Wilson, Connecticut Anti-Hunger Coalition

Mark Winne, The Hartford Food System

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 1995-96 interim, the General Assembly's Planning and Development Committee created the Ad Hoc Committee on Food Security. The purpose of the Committee was to bring together a variety of stakeholders to develop a conceptual framework to assess the state's long term food needs and propose a comprehensive plan to meet those needs. While those stakeholders' interests have often been traditionally distinct from each other, and at times even combative when looking at issues of narrow self-interest, it became clear when looking at the full spectrum of food issues that forming new partnerships could benefit the people of the State of Connecticut.

Food security is an emerging concept that addresses hunger, access to food, agriculture and environmental concerns through a comprehensive food systems approach. Whether applied at the community, state or national level, food security integrates agriculture, food supply, nutrition and other food system elements with broader socioeconomic objectives at the community level. Food security means "all persons may obtain a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through local non-emergency sources, at all times."

An important goal of food security, especially at the state level, is to link concerns such as environmental protection and preservation of local farming with urban-based concerns such as reducing hunger and expanding access to affordable food in the inner city. The concept of food security offers policy makers a broader, yet more comprehensive approach to food problems because it differs from anti-hunger objectives in certain crucial ways.

First, food security represents a community need, rather than an individual's plight, as with hunger. Second, whereas hunger measures an existing condition of deprivation, food security is decidedly prevention oriented, evaluating the availability of resources, both at the community and personal levels - to provide each individual with adequate, acceptable food. When effectively applied, a food security approach builds and coordinates community and state institutions to ensure access and availability to an acceptable and adequate diet for its residents.

The community issues of food availability, the quantity and quality of that food, and the sustainability of that food production system are integral to establishing food security. Instead of thinking of food as a series of programs affecting the individuals, food must be thought of as a series of linked systems that provide for communities.

The need for the committee was especially important given the move at the federal level toward a balanced budget and the continued constraints of the state constitutional cap on spending. Without attempting to develop new linkages, Connecticut policy makers, both inside and outside of government, can count on continued narrow self-interest battles to protect turf instead of understanding how coordinated systemic change can benefit all parties involved.

This report is an attempt to place food security on the public policy agenda, and by so doing, maximize the potential of the state's food system to meet everyone's food needs while supporting the quality of life that Connecticut residents have come to expect.

To develop a food security policy for Connecticut, 17 persons were chosen to be members of the committee. They represented the General Assembly, the Department of Agriculture, food producers, community groups, supermarket developers, academics, and other relevant parties.

The three goals of the committee were to:

- 1) Identify current trends within Connecticut that are likely to influence its long term food security;
- 2) Identify and examine the role of state government's agencies and functions that may promote or hinder Connecticut's food security; and,
- 3) Prepare a set of specific recommendations that may be acted upon by the Connecticut General Assembly and the Executive Branch.

To accomplish their work the committee was divided into three working groups: Food Production; Food Consumption; and, Food Distribution. A common methodology was used and each working group developed a problem statement, a list of causes and trends, an assessment of the role of state government, and recommendations for action.

The recognition of several other realities drove the committee's work. One is that Connecticut's food producers could all go out of business tomorrow and Connecticut residents' stomachs could still be filled by imported food with no one really giving much notice. Another is that poor urban residents have the least ability to shop competitively as they are the most underserved by major supermarkets. Yet another is that the disparity between a land's agricultural value and development value, combined with the lack of a coordinated state land use strategy, threaten to pave over Connecticut's prime farmlands.

The committee's recommendations attempt to recognize these and other often conflicting realities of government and society today. They don't look to spend more money, but in fact look to both save money for government and raise revenues from increased business activity. The recommendations call for common sense outcomes built around creating a better Connecticut.

## **Recommendations**

One outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Food Security is a series of recommendations, many complementary in content, which together provide a solid foundation for meeting the goal of food security for all Connecticut residents. The recommendations requiring legislative or administrative action are written with a firm understanding of the state's fiscal condition.

### **I. Legislative Recommendations**

- A. The Department of Agriculture shall be the lead agency for the development and implementation of food security policy in Connecticut. The Department shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with relevant state agencies, departments and institutions regarding food security issues. Given the cross cutting

nature of food security issues, it is important that one agency be responsible for coordinating the development of a food security policy for Connecticut.

- B. A task force should be established to study the feasibility of changing the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Food and Agriculture. The name change would give recognition to the Department's role as the lead agency on food security.
- C. The General Assembly should designate \$5 million of the Connecticut Development Authority's bond fund authorization under the Urban Act for supermarket development in the Bridgeport, New Haven and Hartford. This limited amount of money would leverage many multiples of private investment in the development of supermarkets in our presently underserved urban core cities. Waterbury, unlike the three cities mentioned, has adequate access to supermarkets for its residents.
- D. Allow municipalities the option to increase the real estate conveyance tax on land transfers, provided the increased revenues are designated for the preservation of farmland and open space within the municipality. Fee simple purchase, purchase of development rights, and purchase of conservation easements are all acceptable activities. With the State of Connecticut's retreat from its previous aggressive purchase of development rights program, municipalities should be allowed to develop a funding mechanism to continue the effort.
- E. Relevant state agencies will report to the Planning and Development Committee their efforts at implementing the administrative recommendations listed in Section 11 of the Recommendations. The committee thinks that as many recommendations as possible should be dealt with administratively to lessen proscriptive legislative actions.
- F. The Department of Public Works shall, in coordination with the Department of Agriculture, maintain an inventory of all state owned land that is currently vacant and could be used for food production purposes. The Department of Public Works already maintains a list of all state owned land. The Department of Agriculture will promote the availability of the land and assist individuals or organizations wishing to utilize the land for food production.
- G. The Regulation Review Committee shall, in its scheduled review of agency regulations, consider the impact of regulations on food security.
- H. The Office of Policy and Management shall include food security in its development of the next, and each subsequent, State Plan of Conservation and Development.
- I. Electronic Benefits Transfer technology shall be provided to all food stamp vendors that make \$100 in food stamp transactions per month, including farmers' markets and food delivery or special meal service programs. The use of new technologies should not disrupt existing access to nutritionally appropriate food. It is important to both to the consumer as well as the small businesses supplying the food.

## II. Administrative Recommendations

### A. Food and Nutrition Education and Awareness

1. The Department of Public Health should improve nutrition education and coordination of nutrition services. The Department should work with the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Social Services and the University of Connecticut's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Cooperative Extension System to convene a symposium on food security and nutrition education. The symposium would show the important policy and fiscal benefits to the state by showing the opportunities for positive linkages between farmers, government purchasers, government programs and spending levels and nutrition.
2. At a time when tight dollars encourage diminished standards, it is important to maintain the federal standards for nutritional integrity already being provided to food and nutrition programs that meet individual food intake needs for a healthy life. The Department of Public Health should maintain vigilance to protect current standards.

### B. Transportation for Food Purchasing

1. The Department of Transportation should examine the opportunity to create a pilot program that improves food access (i.e. grocery shuttles) to improve local transportation coordination. Our urban residents, who are among the poorest in the state and often without their own transportation system, are forced to use transportation options that are either expensive (taxis) or that limit what they buy to what they can carry (buses) because they have half as many supermarkets per 1,000 residents as the state average.

### C. Support for Connecticut Agriculture

1. The Department of Agriculture will act as the ombudsman for Connecticut farmers and the farming industry. As we move toward making government more understandable and business friendly, the Department of Agriculture should become the place where the agricultural community turns when it needs help.
2. The Department of Administrative Services should change its purchasing procedures to favor Connecticut grown products. By contracting with Arrow to be our state's full service vendor, we miss the opportunity to achieve real savings on purchase of produce from produce companies. Produce companies, because they are looking every day for produce surpluses that can mean lower prices, can save the state money. They also can help strengthen the market for local growers through aggregating smaller farmers outputs to meet demand.

3. The Department of Administrative Services (DAS) should change its use of the federal Food Surplus Commodities Program. Currently under the program, DAS consolidates produce commodity purchases from local schools, forwards the orders to the Department of Defense buyers, who buys the produce which is then sent to the states produce distributor (Arrow) for redistribution to the schools. The process is too burdensome, expensive and cuts Connecticut farmers out of the market. Instead, qualifying local school systems should purchase produce through local sources, and DAS reimburse the schools the amount due. It's administratively simpler. It builds local markets. And, it takes advantage of private sector competition.
  4. The Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) should include agriculture for its next economic sector analysis. Agriculture is a growing market sector in Connecticut. It was identified as a industry cluster by the Connecticut Economic Conference Board. DECD's excellent research department can help better define agriculture's economic impact (estimates range from \$.8 to 2.1 billion) while also calculating the costs of diminished prime farmland on Connecticut's economy.
  5. The Department of Transportation should look to reduce paperwork burdens for gasoline purchases by Connecticut farmers and food banks.
  6. Continued effort should be made to develop farmers' markets and other direct marketing channels for Connecticut grown products. We have seen steady growth in the number of markets and participating farmers.
  7. That growth should continue — The Department of Agriculture should work with the Cooperative Extension Service and the farming community to improve direct marketing techniques and product diversification.
  8. The Department of Agriculture should work through the Regional Market Authority to develop farmers marketing cooperatives to improve their ability to market to larger buyers. Work should also be done to examine the developing value added market which provides importing of out-of-state dollars for CT products.
- D. Utilize surplus food
1. The Department of Administrative Services should donate all edible food stored more than two (2) years to food banks in Connecticut.
- E. Understand impact of technology on customers.
1. Urban supermarkets are built larger in order to handle the spike in activity when welfare checks come out. The introduction of Electronic Benefit Transfer cards can provide the Department of Social Services the ability to phase-in over several days food related benefits to make the creation of urban supermarkets more attractive to potential developers.

# TOWARD FOOD SECURITY FOR CONNECTICUT

## Introduction

For most of its history, Connecticut has taken its food supply for granted. Since its 18th century days as the "provision state" and the early cultivation of the renowned Connecticut River Valley, Connecticut's citizens have rarely regarded food and its availability as a matter for public concern. But like recent public initiatives that have addressed the state's housing, transportation, and environmental needs, sufficient cause exists for Connecticut policy makers to give the security of the state's food system a critical look to ensure that a safe, affordable, and quality food supply is available to all - both now and in the future. As this report reveals, our state's food system is large, complex, and paradoxical. The food industry is a substantial contributor to the state's economy. But at the same time hunger, malnutrition, and limited access to food for the poor have been well documented in Connecticut while publicly-funded food assistance programs and private emergency food sources play an increasing role in feeding the poor. Connecticut has experienced unprecedented growth since World War II, but with a corresponding decline in farmland and open space, and an increase in environmental degradation. State government provides more services and plays a larger role in everyone's life, but the state agencies that address the production availability, distribution, and quality of food rarely coordinate their efforts toward a common goal. This report is an attempt to place food security on the public policy agenda, and by so doing, maximize the potential of the state's food system to meet everyone's food needs while supporting the quality of life that Connecticut residents have come to expect.

## Food Security: Linking the Components of the Food System

A food security analysis gives state government and the cooperating private sector a conceptual framework with which to assess the state's long term food needs and to propose a comprehensive plan to meet those needs. It includes an analysis of available community resources exposing a more diverse set of solutions that benefits all food system members.

Food security is achieved when "all persons may obtain a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through local, non-emergency sources, at all times." While the problem of hunger is intimately related to this concept, food security extends beyond the individual scope that hunger interventions usually address. The community issues of food availability, the quantity and quality of that food, and the sustainability of the food production system are integral to establishing a secure food system. These concepts mark the roles of individuals, private for-profit and non-profit organizations as vividly as governmental agencies in achieving food security through a partnership approach. Therefore, food security is not solely a governmental responsibility, but a responsibility shared by all the members of a community who must look to an array of resources and talents to support the production and distribution systems that make food available.

To achieve food security for the state of Connecticut our food system must provide:

1. Availability of a variety of foods at a reasonable cost.

2. Ready access to quality grocery stores or other food outlets.
3. Sufficient personal income to purchase adequate food for each household member each day.
4. Freedom to choose personally acceptable foods.
5. Legitimate confidence in the safety of available food.
6. Easy access to understandable and accurate information about food, food production, and nutrition.
7. A sustainable (non-polluting, commercially viable) agriculture base producing a significant amount of food for the region.
8. The availability of sufficient natural resources such as fertile agricultural soils and clean, viable marine fisheries.
9. Access to private and public land suitable for household food production.
10. Effective information and outreach designed to put people in touch with food programs.
11. A nutrition standard that meets individual food intake needs for a healthy life.
12. An emergency food system designed to meet short term personal emergencies and major disruptions in the food supply, i.e. disaster relief.

## **The Food System**

The food system is composed of stakeholders from three broad areas. One is the conventional, market-based food supply including growers, processors and manufacturers, wholesale distributors, grocery stores, restaurants, and other retailers. Second are the publicly supported programs that include WIC and food stamps, local food policy councils, economic development agencies, health and social service agencies, and schools. The final sector includes alternative food suppliers such as emergency food providers; home, school and community gardens; community supported farming; non-profit community developers; and farmers' markets. While coordination between these areas is not the norm, e.g. food producers working with low income food providers, all three play vital and interrelated roles in achieving food security.

Separate from these three areas are a host of players who are not directly connected to the food system, but whose actions affect it. For instance, urban and town planning officials who permit new development on prime farmland or a private developer whose suburban mall development drains business and vitality from older downtown shopping cores. Though more distant and seemingly remote, policy actions taken over the course of many years, such as the interstate and intercity highway systems, pull people from urban centers and subsidize the transportation of food from distant agricultural locations such as California.

There are clear advantages in developing and implementing policies that encourage a comprehensive and integrated approach among the food system's components. Similarly, there are advantages in examining the long term impact of policy decisions that may influence the future direction of Connecticut's food system as well as the quality of the environment and urban life. Bringing together the needs of farmers with the needs of low income families can mean new markets for farmers and better food for all. There are multiple benefits in joining seemingly disparate food system stakeholders: schools that buy locally grown food and students who learn from farmers; a low-income neighborhood developing a supermarket that eliminates transportation costs to suburban stores and provides jobs for local residents; and a community garden which beautifies a neighborhood, makes productive use of a vacant lot, and builds a sense of community. A future-oriented approach to the food system suggests that we can prevent other problems from occurring while also benefiting our food supply. Providing for the reduced use of agri-chemicals or restricting development from waterways and the coastline will mean cleaner drinking water and safer, more productive fisheries. A food security approach is long term as opposed to short term; it examines multiple and interconnected relationships rather than single project needs; it is sustainable as it looks towards the limitations of natural resources, both locally and globally; and it is community-oriented as opposed to placing the entire onus for problem-solving on the government or the individual.

## **Food Security Concerns**

Ignoring Connecticut's food system carries with it a number of direct and indirect costs to both the public and private sectors. For instance, nutrition related illnesses such as cancer and cardiovascular disease result in millions of dollars in health care costs, and poorly nourished children require higher special education costs now and even higher social costs later. Studies performed by the American Farmland Trust demonstrate that developed farmland costs communities more in services than it yields in added revenues. Connecticut's over-dependence on the defense industry has painfully demonstrated that it is wiser to have a highly diversified economic base, including a strong agricultural and food sector, rather than one that is too heavily weighted in any one sector. Poverty, with its symptoms of hunger, dependence on emergency food, high food assistance program case loads, and limited access to good food stores, strongly suggests that our market-based food system does not work well for hundreds of thousands of Connecticut residents.

From a food security perspective, there are three major areas of concern: Consumer, production, and distribution. Each one has its own unique set of problems, but is essential to the overall security of the food system.

## **Consumer Concerns**

Food security concerns among consumers fall into two categories: A general lack of knowledge and understanding about nutrition, food safety, and food production; and special food problems of the state's substantial poverty populations and elderly. As the nation has moved from a rural based economy to a more urbanized one, consumers are now more removed from direct involvement in food production. Consumers lack reliable information of food production systems, food distribution, and food consumption. They often don't know where to buy or how to identify Connecticut-grown produce. Many are so disconnected from the local food supply that they believe that food can be grown in Connecticut all year round or simply don't know or don't care

where the food comes from or how it was produced. Additionally, consumers wonder if the food supply is safe for consumption (news coverage during the summer of 1995 of chemical use at the state's blueberry farms caused public alarm). The long term effects of diet on human health are the subject of considerable and often contradictory discussion.

"If everyone would try to grow their own food for a year they would have a lot more respect for the growers that do it for them now."

An unidentified farmer speaking at a recent conference.

With respect to poverty, food consumption is deleteriously affected by a host of factors. Lack of personal resources contribute to a person's inability to secure food for self and family resulting in the need for public and private assistance programs. Food is often the most flexible item in a family budget. When faced with the choice between housing and food, many families will cut food spending to pay for shelter. Low income, inner-city residents often have limited access to affordable food stores or the transportation to travel to suburban food stores. This condition diminishes the value of public assistance funds such as food stamps and WIC and further reduces a person's ability to choose from a wide array of affordable and nutritious food. Certain demographic characteristics of communities where poverty is conspicuous are directly associated with food insecurity.

- According to 1990 census data, 6.8 % of Connecticut residents live in poverty (defined by the government as a yearly income, for a family of four, of \$14,350), however, in Connecticut's three major cities — Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport — the figure is at or above 20%.
- 76,572 Connecticut children 18 years old and younger live in poverty (1990 Census data) at a federal income guideline of \$14,350 for a family of four.
- Families living in poverty spend 20 to 50% of their income, including WIC and Food Stamps, on food compared to higher income families that spend 10 to 15% for food.
- In 1993 an estimated 19.4 % of all children under the age of 12 in Connecticut were hungry or at risk for being hungry, approximately 102,000 children (Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project, Food Research and Action Center, 1995) As with the state poverty percentage, the hunger percentage is an average and would be higher for urban, inner-city areas than suburban and rural areas.
- In an earlier study by the same group (1991), Connecticut had the highest rate of hunger among the seven states that were surveyed.
- About 9% of all Connecticut residents, or 302,341 people, received food stamps in fiscal year 1994/95.

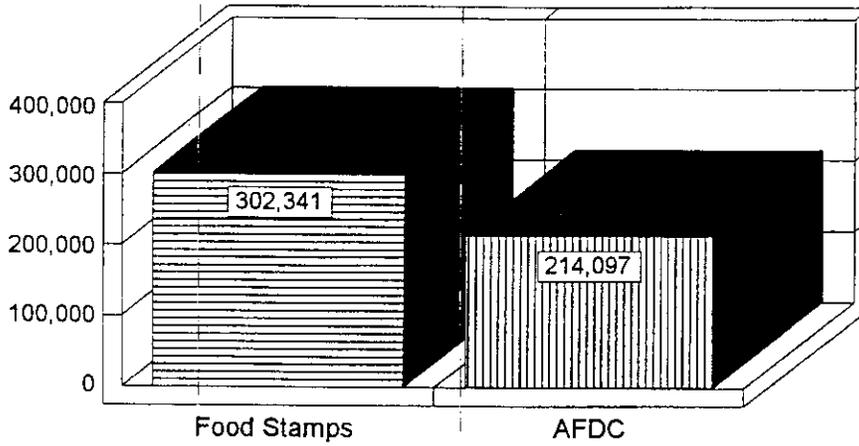
"Hunger symptoms are not obvious so it's hard to tell which children are hungry without probing into each student's life. I have asked classes and had a fourth or more of the kids say they hadn't eaten breakfast. Children can't be taught, despite a teacher's effort, if they are hungry."

Susan Davis, nutrition educator in the Hartford school system.

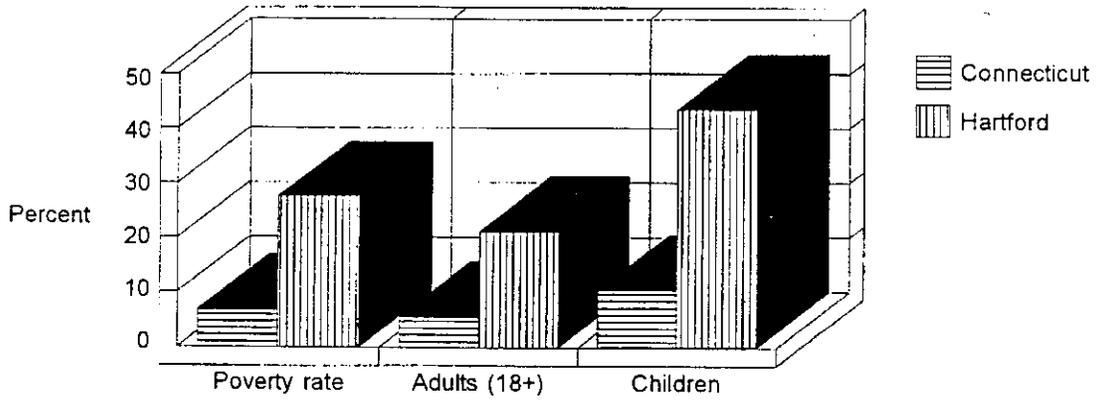
Malnutrition is related to poverty, specifically undernutrition and diet related diseases that are more prevalent in poor communities. Though the population in general is afflicted by the same diet related diseases, disproportionate rates among poor communities create a need for more substantial nutrition interventions. There is a direct association between an individual's nutritional status and his/her disease status. Equally important is the association of poverty, malnutrition, and disease. Nutrition education can encourage people to make better food choices, but the effects of that education may be negated by poverty and limited access to nutritious, affordable food. Current research on nutrition, health, and poverty demonstrates that:

- “Undernutrition along with environmental factors associated with poverty can permanently retard physical growth, brain development, and cognitive function.” (The Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children, Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition, Tufts University, 1994).
- Inadequate nutrition is a major cause of impaired cognitive development and is associated with increased educational failure among impoverished children.” (Dr. Ernesto Pollitt, The Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children, Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition, Tufts University, 1994)
- Special education costs can be reduced, children will learn better in school and become more productive adults if they have adequate nutrition during formative years. A 1994 study of Connecticut educators found that 86% of teachers thought that the school breakfast program had significantly reduced hunger among students.
- Low income and minority populations are disproportionately affected by life-style and diet related diseases which contribute to increased need for medical services (CDC, NHANES III, HHANES, GAO).
- Children who are hungry in the US suffer from more school absences, more frequent illnesses, and diseases such as anemia than their counterparts who are not hungry (CCHIP, FRAC, 1993).
- Lack of awareness about food assistance and emergency food programs contributes to non-participation by eligible individuals (CCHIP, FRAC, 1993).

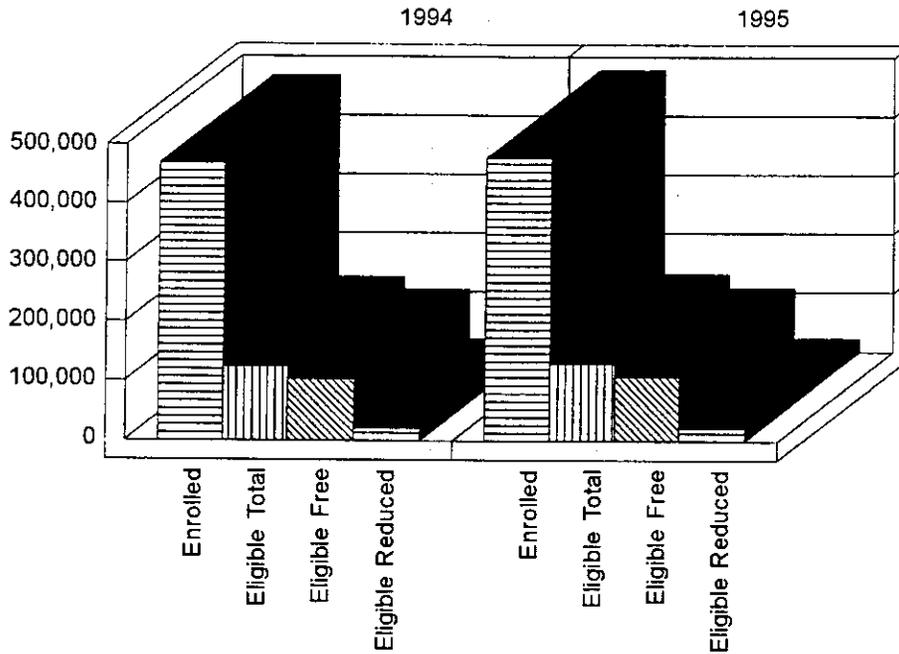
# Unduplicated recipients of Food Stamps and AFDC in Connecticut Fiscal Year 1994-95



## 1990 Census Poverty Rates Compared



## Connecticut School Lunch Program



## Food Distribution Concerns

The equitable distribution of food is central to the establishment of food security in Connecticut. Food distribution involves all steps of moving food from the grower to the consumer. A review of food distribution systems and processes reveals several gaps that adversely affect low income consumers, Connecticut farmers, and food banks. The gaps include the lack of supermarkets in low income urban areas, the inability of Connecticut farmers to access certain state markets, obstacles facing the emergency feeding system, and problems facing the implementation of the new Electronic Benefit Transfer system for recipients of public assistance.

### Access to Supermarkets

“For someone with transportation problems, you don’t want the hassle of shopping more than absolutely necessary. I go once a month or less if I can get by. Taking a cab costs me \$14 each way, then I have to wait as long as three hours to get picked up. But a bus is impossible, I usually have 8 or 9 bags to bring home. A person using food stamps has the same problem because they pick up the check once a month and usually have nothing left to eat so they go right to the store to stock up. Unless they have a car they are probably going to do all of their shopping for the whole month that day.”

Diane Lewis, staff member at the Connecticut Anti-Hunger Coalition, and a Hartford mother who has used federal programs and currently shops for groceries without a car.

For much of Connecticut, adequate access to full-line, competitively priced supermarkets is not a problem. A recent Connecticut Magazine story (February, 1996) on the state’s supermarket industry paints a picture of consumers confronted with a dizzying array of supermarket goods and services available from an unprecedented number of large chain supermarkets. What’s missing from this portrait is any discussion of the lack of full-line supermarkets in lower income, urban areas. A recent University of Connecticut study, “The Urban Grocery Gap,” quantifies the comparative disadvantage of living in a lower income area when it comes to food shopping. According to the study, which compared Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport to higher income portions of their respective metropolitan areas, low income areas have, on average, .47 grocery stores per 10,000 population. In addition only 67% of the families in these low income areas have a vehicle. This compares to higher income communities where there are 1.03 stores per 10,000 population and 96% of families have a vehicle.

Price comparisons conducted over the years have generally found that urban based stores are more expensive than suburban based stores — even when the comparison is made between two units of the same supermarket chain. Reduced competition and choice in these areas diminishes a person’s access to good quality, affordably priced food. This access barrier contributes to the poor health status and undernutrition problems mentioned above. Additionally, these communities and their low income residents are faced with transportation issues that can prevent them from reaching the chain supermarkets in outlying communities where competition creates a better selection and price.

The disappearance of modern supermarkets from urban areas is in large part a reflection of the suburban migration of the postwar years fueled by poor land use planning and governmental policies of subsidized home mortgages and highways. As middle and upper income families have left the cities for the suburbs, the supermarkets (like other retailers) have followed them. The relatively easier availability of land at better prices in the suburbs and the gradual growth in the

size of typical supermarkets accelerated this trend. Simultaneously, urban neighborhoods declined into greater poverty, and more farmland and open space were lost to development.

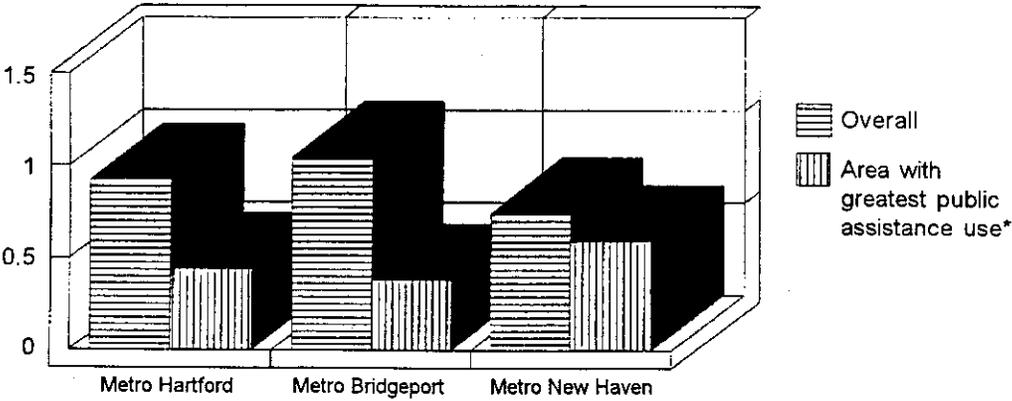
The situation has now progressed to the point where Connecticut's larger cities are nearly devoid of modern supermarkets. Hartford, for example, has the new Stop & Shop on New Park Avenue, which has a largely urban clientele but is still located less than one-half mile from the West Hartford town line. The only other chain store in the city is an older, small (15,000 square feet) Edward's unit on New Britain Avenue. The only chain supermarket in New Haven is the Stop & Shop at Amity Plaza, which is located north of the Merritt Parkway on the Woodbridge town line and serves a largely suburban customer base. Bridgeport presently has four chain supermarkets, but the two newest and largest are located next to each other on North Main Street and again serve more suburban clientele. Of Connecticut's largest cities, only Waterbury can be said to be more or less adequately served today.

"The chief concern for ONE/CHANE is that the people who can least afford the high prices are having to use the corner markets as a primary source of food. There is no readily accessible supermarket in the poorest neighborhoods in Hartford. These people are paying family members and friends for rides to supermarkets, buses are no good for large volume purchases. We are trying to develop a supermarket in North Hartford to address this need."

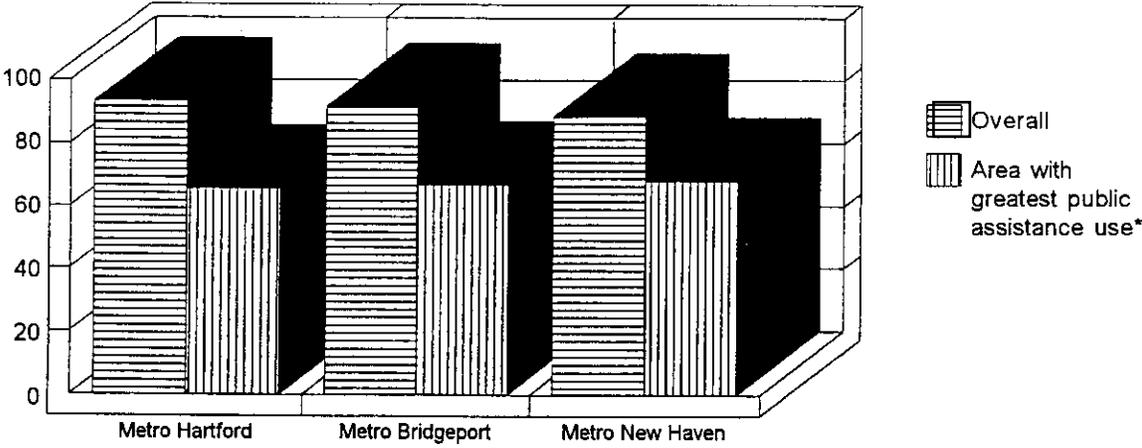
Larry Charles, Executive Director of ONE/CHANE,  
a community organization in North Hartford.

Urban residents are also far more likely to rely on means of transportation other than private cars to do their shopping. According to a recent ridership survey by Connecticut Transit, 25% of the responding bus passengers indicated that they primarily use the bus for trips to the supermarket. For the urban customer who is carrying groceries and using public transit, they can only purchase what they are capable of holding. If they choose to hire a cab, they will be able to purchase more than they can carry, but will need to save enough money to pay the cab fare. Alternatively, they may choose to do only part of their food shopping at the supermarket and the rest at a more expensive but closer neighborhood store.

### Grocery Stores Per Capita



### Percent of Households with at Least One Vehicle



\*Zipcodes where at least 9.14% of households receive public assistance  
 SOURCE: The Urban Grocery Store Gap (University of Connecticut Food Marketing Policy Center)

## **Institutional Purchasing of Connecticut Grown Products**

“Its very difficult to get my foot in the door with any of these institutions. Either the kitchen isn't equipped to prepare the fresh product or they don't know how. When I developed a value-added product that eliminates much of the staff time usually associated with fresh product, they still don't want it because I am not their full-service vendor. I can't seem to make the right connection with the vendor or the food service operation.”

Bill Collins, a Rocky Hill, Connecticut farmer trying to sell to State of Connecticut institutions.

The State Department of Administrative Services (DAS) purchases for all of the state run institutions, agencies, and programs except the food service operation at the University of Connecticut. The current bid contract for food states that when available, at the price, quantity, and quality stipulated, the vendor should purchase Connecticut grown items. Despite this stipulation DAS doesn't have a record of the amount of Connecticut grown items it actually purchases. In addition, there is a strong indication that recent changes in state purchasing practices — a new one-vendor contract system — as well as the recent involvement by the federal government in food purchasing for Connecticut's institutions limit the ability of many farmers to sell to these institutions. The reasons given for the new purchasing method are to increase efficiency and secure lower prices through larger volume orders. However, these systems have made it harder for small and medium size growers to sell to produce brokers who had served state institutions. In pursuit of possible efficiency gains, the state DAS has eliminated or drastically crippled the ability of Connecticut farmers to sell to state institutions.

The DAS is also responsible for administering the federal commodity food program. The actual purchasing of food is now done by the Department of Defense which gives qualified state institutions and agencies, such as local school systems, a list of items from which to choose. Using federal credits, the DOD bought apples in October from out-of-state sources which, according to one Connecticut produce broker, displaced 20,000 cases of Connecticut grown apples from the local market.

“The State has taken some actions in their purchasing department that have caused a major downward shift in the Connecticut produce industry. The centralized buying program through Arrow paper, a full service house, is going to cost the state more money because the distributor is going to purchase from specialty wholesalers. These specialty wholesalers were selling directly before the system changed. The commodity program for schools and institutions brings in large quantities of western produce to be sold at subsidized prices through the U.S. Department of Defense. This practice has displaced thousands of pounds of CT product. Arranging the program to purchase local product would make more sense for the state economy.”

Dave Yandow, owner of Fowler and Huntting Produce Wholesale, Hartford, CT

Farmers in Connecticut are typically small and medium size operators. These farmers do not produce the quantities of product required by DAS for major state contracts. Many do not have the equipment necessary to minimally process fresh produce to make it easier for large, low staffed, cost-conscious kitchens to prepare. Investing in equipment that would reduce food service preparation time, i.e. a bean picking machine that also trims and cuts the bean, would improve the marketability of local crops. Likewise, the development of a Connecticut farmers cooperative would give small and medium size growers the capability to combine their product for sale to large institutions.

## Food Banking

The demand for emergency food assistance is increasing 10 to 30% each year. In 1994, the Foodshare Commission of Greater Hartford and the Connecticut Food Bank distributed a total of 7.1 million pounds of food which constitutes most of the emergency food distributed by the private sector. With the proposed cuts to federal food assistance programs and a short adjustment time, the demand on the private sector will continue to increase. Increasingly, local emergency food programs are turning to Connecticut's four food banks, whose total membership includes 630 food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. At the same time, food banks are faced with decreased donations from the national food industry (a traditional source) because of improved waste reduction technology. At Foodshare, the Hartford area food bank, their food sources have shifted significantly from 1990 to 1994. Their total food sources almost doubled from 1,998,320 pounds in 1990 to 3,551,277 pounds in 1994. Of their 1990 donations, 31% were from the national food industry and 45% were from local sources. In 1994, 9% of their donations were national and 73% were local (the balance of the donations came from commodities and purchased food).

## The Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) System

The proposed Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program will place current food stamp and other public assistance benefits on an electronically encoded debit card. Potentially, this change will assist supermarket retailers because it will give recipients greater spending flexibility and, as was seen in Maryland, the first state in the nation to fully implement EBT, even out shopper spending over the month. This program could support supermarket development in low income neighborhoods where food stamp use constitutes a large share of a household's food purchases, but EBT could harm overall access to food outlets like farmers' markets, neighborhood stores, and home delivered meal programs for the elderly which may not have access to the necessary phone and electric hookups required to support EBT equipment

## Food Production Concerns

"Everyone who has the necessary skills to be a successful farmer can get into a different field where the rewards are easier to come by or bigger. In other words, anyone with the ability to develop the business aspects of farming moves into a more lucrative business. The ones who stay are the die hards and the fools."

"People are very price sensitive to produce. Supermarkets are able to offer more attractive items than in the past. I am still getting the same price for my broccoli as I did 10 years ago."  
Brian Kelleher, Enfield, Connecticut farmer.

By most measurements, Connecticut's agricultural production would appear to be on the decline. The number of dairy farms has declined from 4,540 in 1950 to 304 in 1993. Connecticut has seen the largest percentage loss of farmland in New England over the last decade. **Nationally, Connecticut ranks 49th in the percentage of land devoted to farming.** From 1940 to 1987 the number of acres in Connecticut devoted to agriculture has declined from 1.5 million to 400,000. And not only is the land leaving farming, the farmer is leaving the land. The average age of a farmer in Connecticut today is 56, proportionally fewer young farmers entering the profession to replace those who are leaving.

Yet agriculture is a vital force in the Connecticut economy. The contribution of agriculture to the state's economy is estimated to be 9,000 jobs and \$844 million annually (Connecticut Agriculture and Resources 2000, University of Connecticut, 1995). Connecticut farmers produce a substantial share of the state's egg, dairy, and seasonal fruit and vegetable needs. Local farmers can maintain an advantage over larger, industrialized producers located in other parts of the country or globe by their close proximity to the consumer. Connecticut growers can select varieties and harvest dates for product quality rather than durability for long distance shipment. And the decline in the defense industry has created renewed interest among Connecticut workers in agriculture as a vocation.

But monumental problems face agriculture in an urbanized state like Connecticut. They include governmental and economic policies that promote non-agricultural growth at the expense of agriculture; a national and global agriculture which is concentrated in its ownership, increasingly dependent on high technology and unsustainable inputs, and globally-oriented in its markets. Connecticut farms must compete simultaneously against suburban sprawl at home and a large-scale, highly mechanized food production and distribution system that operates on a world-wide scale. Produce buyers for New England supermarkets no longer define "locally-grown" as food that was produced in New England. Locally-grown can mean, in terms of freshness, the time it takes to transport that food from the fields to the supermarket. In that respect, a green pepper grown in Chile and flown to Logan Airport in 24 hours is viewed by produce buyers as just as fresh as one grown in Connecticut.

Why then should we care about Connecticut agriculture if all the food we need can come from somewhere else? To answer that question we must take the long term view of our national and global food system. First, we need to keep in mind that food is energy. It requires 10 kilocalories of energy to produce and ship one kilocalorie of food from California to Connecticut. The world's supply of fossil fuel resources is finite, and we only have to go back 15 years to remember long lines at the gas pumps and double digit annual food price inflation that was due primarily to high oil prices. Secondly, food growing regions of this country are also under pressure from growth in the same way that Connecticut is. California is not just a nice place to grow food, it is also a nice place to live. The population of California's Central Valley, the nation's richest agricultural region, is expected to triple by the year 2040. According to a study by the American Farmland Trust, this growth rate would reduce the value of agricultural production in the Valley by a cumulative \$49 billion. Additionally, the "production at any cost" approach to agriculture in the West has drained aquifers that are vital to irrigation and has left a legacy of contaminated soils. There is enough history and current data to predict with some certainty that the national and global food systems of 50 years hence will be vastly different from the ones we have today. Are we so sanguine about the future of our food supply that we are willing to sacrifice our natural resources, especially Connecticut's fertile soils, and to lose our agricultural skills and support systems (suppliers, UConn extension staff) because the rest of the world will provide for us?

"Farming in the suburbs has good and bad points. Since there are a lot of people around us, we have been able to develop direct markets and an agri-tourism business which have made us a successful farm. The down side is that many of the people in the suburbs don't understand farm activity and are not prepared to deal with the noise of the irrigation system that runs all night, the bird control, and other measures that we take to maintain our crops. We also have a lot of people trying to use our land for recreation purposes but

they are reckless and can damage crops or get hurt. Most of the time the people who have the most trouble living near us are the ones who are moving away from the city and move on again in a couple of years. The people who have lived here for years have a better understanding of our operation and our way of life.”

Sandra Rose, Glastonbury, Conn. fruit grower.

Driving around Connecticut, it is easy to see patterns of growth comprised of new housing developments and shopping centers that disregard any interest in farmland preservation. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture's farmland preservation program has purchased development rights to 25,000 acres representing 162 farms over the last 16 years. Between 1983 and 1993, when 15,000 of these acres were purchased, over five times that much farmland was lost to development.

The most daunting challenge facing those who wish to protect farmland, open space and other environmentally sensitive areas, is the preoccupation with individual property rights. The historian Samuel Bass Warner said that the genius of American land law “lay in its identification of land as a civil liberty instead of as a social resource.” It is likely that the future of the Connecticut landscape and its farms will turn in large part on this question of land as a civil liberty or a social resource. As Connecticut's inventory of open land declines, the size and scope of the public interest in land will increase. Land will have an increasing value for those who want to produce food for their own consumption or to earn a livelihood. Interest in land will be a greater for those who are concerned about the nutritional needs of low income and elderly people. Those who appreciate the aesthetics of open land and the contribution it makes to the quality of life will find it even more precious. Communities that continue to respect their agricultural traditions will have an even greater stake in the future use of their remaining open tracts. And developers and land use planners will recognize the need to bank land for future development that's of a more critical and general need. As the list of interested parties grow, land's value as a social resource may begin to take precedent over its status as a civil liberty.

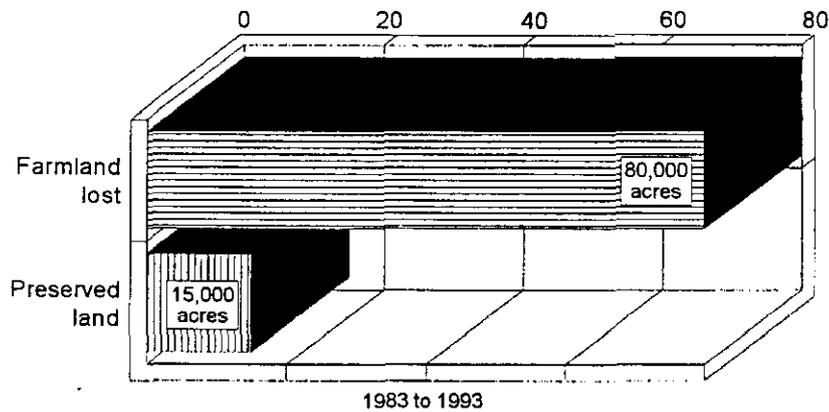
It may not only be Connecticut's farms that are lost if the future security of the food supply is neglected. Hartford area towns with traditions of farming like South Windsor and Glastonbury each gained over 5% in population between 1990 and 1994 while Hartford itself lost 11% of its population. Statewide, Connecticut has experienced modest population gains since 1980 (5%) while Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport have lost substantial numbers of people (7% to 11%). Since 1983 there has been a 7% increase in the number of new houses constructed outside of the cities while thousands of housing units stand vacant in the cities. During the same period, 80,000 acres of farmland were lost to development. Public policies which continue to support suburban sprawl and do not address the quality of life in Connecticut's inner-cities will only contribute to urban blight, growing racial and class divisions, and further farmland loss.

In addition to the above discussion of food production and land use, it is important to keep in mind the following facts about farming and farmland in Connecticut:

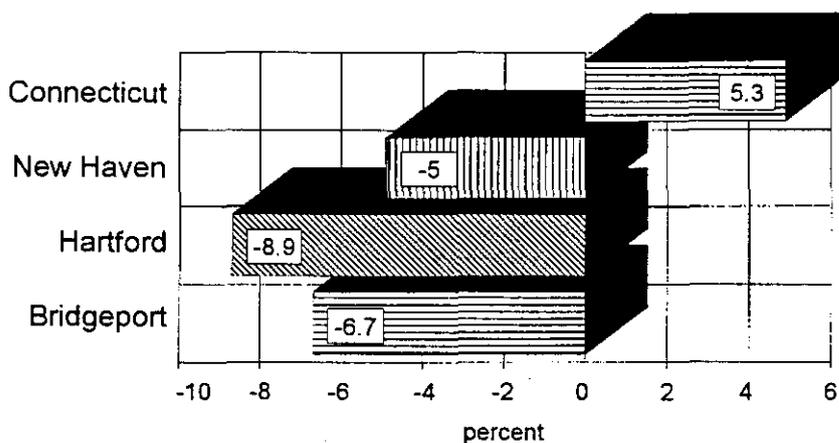
- Residential land costs municipalities more per acre to render services than it generates in revenue while farmland generates more than it costs. In Hebron Connecticut residential land generates \$1 for every \$1.06 it costs; farmland generates \$1 for every \$0.43 it costs.
- Of the New England states Connecticut has lost the largest percentage of farmland since 1984 with a 16.7% loss.
- Of U.S. states, Connecticut ranks 49th for acres of land in farms with 390,000 acres

- Connecticut has the second highest rate of malls per capita in the country yet it ranks 45th in percent of land farmed, 12% currently.
- According to state agriculture officials the fastest growing agricultural industries are non-food and “high-end” food crops such as greenhouse/nurseries, yielding 29.9% of total cash receipts in 1993, and aquaculture, primarily oysters, which yielded 11.8% of total cash receipts.
- Suburban encroachment into farm areas and lack of awareness of farm practices on the part of most residents creates conflict between farmers and non-farmers.
- If state residents adopted the USDA Dietary Guidelines and consumed Connecticut grown products as part of that change the agriculture industry would expand tremendously. Based on 1984 population and 1987 consumption and production figures an additional 103,029 acres of crop land would be used for production generating an additional \$86,168,000 income (Better Nutrition in Connecticut: Opportunities for Expanding Fresh Produce Production and Consumption, The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, 1988).

### Connecticut Farmland



### Urban Population Decline (1980-1993)



## **Public Land, Community Farming and Gardening**

The State of Connecticut owns thousands of acres of land that are suitable for food production. Much of it is in large tracts suitable for commercial scale production, but many parcels are suitable for community gardens and smaller scale food production. Likewise, other units of government (local) control substantial inventories of land that allow people to produce a portion of their own food. Public land is not only valuable for food production, but yields many other benefits as well. Community farms and gardens can teach young children about plants, the soil, and the environment; give a mentally ill or retarded person a renewed sense of purpose and meaning; or provide a person making the transition from a corrections facility to the community with a chance to give something back to society.

Urban gardening is a popular idea; the demand for suitable plots is increasing. A Gallup Poll commissioned by the American Community Gardening Association found that approximately 300,000 U.S. residents are currently involved in community gardens, but an additional 6,700,000 people would participate in community gardening if land were available. Worldwide, urban agriculture is a rapidly growing industry, providing a significant amount of the world's food, according to a study published by the United Nations Development Program. The study found that in many cities where families grew some food crops, their children were as healthy as children of wealthy families and much healthier than children of urban families without agricultural plots.

There are several barriers preventing garden plot development to meet the demand. Determining that the state owns a parcel of land and tracking down that specific department in the state can take several months. After that, cutting through state regulations to make the land accessible to resident gardeners will take several more months. For example, it took 18 months for one community gardening organization in Hartford to secure a small tract of land owned by the Department of Mental Retardation. Additionally, there is very little assistance or information available at the state level for someone interested in urban gardening. Special city site development questions like soil toxicity, rodents, and site preparation are difficult if not impossible to get answers to.

"I grew up growing gardens. I've always liked plants. Community gardening is a good way to get out and do something for myself. It also helps me feed my family. Because I prefer organic gardening, I use companion planting and herbs to fight insects. I don't want to eat vegetables that are covered with pesticides." Esther Conyers, Hartford resident and a member of the Watkinson Community Garden.

## **Conclusion**

This report has presented a holistic framework for discussion about Connecticut's most vital necessity — its food supply. Identifying the state's long term food security as the goal, the report makes two important points. First, it suggests that there are numerous connections between the components of Connecticut's food system, as well as connections between that food system and other aspects of our lives including urban life, jobs and the environment. Second, the report identifies several ways that agencies of state government could positively influence the direction of that food system. In other words, existing relationships are described that should be considered by all the major food system stakeholders — policy makers, government officials, the food

industry, community and non-profit groups, environmentalists, and farmers. While the recommendations delineate a preliminary role for government in achieving food security, the report as a whole exposes a broad area of public concern that requires the participation of all food system stakeholders.

The report, however, describes only some of the relationships and issues confronting our food system. The recommendations, both administrative and legislative, address only some of the actions available to state government. Time, public dialogue, and further analysis will certainly reveal even richer ideas and more productive connections. By beginning the process now and taking a long term view of the food system, Connecticut lawmakers and the public may have the uncommon opportunity to take a pro-active approach to a set of problems that are serious now, but only show promise of getting worse. Food, with its natural ties to daily living and human health, farmland and the character of Connecticut's landscape, community and economic development, and the quality of urban and rural life, is a good focal point for the future.