



2011-2012 POLICY GOAL FACT SHEET

Advocate for the allocation of \$10 million in capital funding to the Illinois Fresh Foods Fund.

Background: Many communities across the state have insufficient availability of fresh foods because there are few or no grocery stores nearby -- commonly referred to as food deserts. One study in Chicago found that communities that have no or distant grocery stores, or have an imbalance of healthy food options, will likely have increased premature death and chronic health conditions¹. In some rural Illinois counties, grocery stores may be non-existent or miles away from where people live. In many Chicago neighborhoods, particularly in minority communities, grocery stores are very inaccessible, while fast foods are much more prevalent. Residents in underserved areas have little choice but to eat what is available, often foods high in calories and low in nutritional value at fast food restaurants or convenience stores.

Solution: In the 2009 Illinois Jobs Now! Capital budget bill the Illinois General Assembly approved \$10 million for the Illinois Fresh Food Fund to help eliminate "food deserts." The funds, administered by the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, are designed to draw more grocery stores to the neediest areas of the state. Public funds can be used to leverage private-sector contributions, enhancing the State's capacity to attract healthy food retailers to communities most in need. The Illinois program is modeled after a similar effort in Pennsylvania that, since its launch in 2004, has helped finance 70 new supermarkets or grocery store renovations².

Urgency: The delay in issuing bonds to fund the program, and the recent appellate court decision calling into question the constitutionality of the capital budget raises concerns among advocates that the program may be in jeopardy. Advocates are continuing to work with the administration and develop alternative strategies to implement the Fresh Foods Fund if necessary. The Federal government is developing plans for a nation-wide fresh-food financing initiative and those states with existing mechanisms to put such funds to use may be in a better position to benefit from the program.

Action: Provide your organizational support. Supporters will be kept informed of developments, and will be engaged in any advocacy necessary to ensure that the full allocation of funding is utilized to allow communities most in need to have access to fresh food sources.

IAPO stakeholders developed a State Obesity Action Roadmap and 2011-12 Policy Agenda following year-long efforts to engage communities across the state in identifying bold solutions to Illinois' obesity epidemic. Visit www.preventobesityil.org for more information and to become an endorsing organization.

The Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity (IAPO) is a statewide coalition comprised of a broad range of stakeholders working for a state-level response to the obesity epidemic. The IAPO works to shape and advance solutions to reverse dangerous obesity trends. IAPO supporters believe that Illinois must respond to the obesity epidemic by developing coordinated systems, policy improvements and investment on the scale of the problem.

¹ Gallagher, Mari. *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago*. Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group. 2006 http://marigallagher.com/site_media/dynamic/project_files/1_ChicagoFoodDesertReport-Full_.pdf

² Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. *Illinois Approves Spending for Fresh Food Fund*. 2011. <http://www.rwjf.org/publichealth/digest.jsp?id=10962>