

HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM *Fact Sheet*

An Organization Dedicated to Innovative, Non-Emergency Solutions to Fight Hunger and Improve Nutrition

Thirty years ago, a group of concerned citizens and neighborhood organizations came together to search for long-term solutions to Hartford's food problems. Grocery prices were on the rise. Fresh produce was hard to find in the inner city, contributing to poor nutrition among local residents. Supermarkets were leaving Hartford for suburban locations. A closer look at these issues revealed that hunger and high rates of diet-related diseases in urban neighborhoods were not isolated conditions, but symptoms of more complicated problems in the food distribution system. Lasting solutions would also require a *system-based* approach.

From this initial working group, the Hartford Food System was created in 1978. Our mission has been to fight hunger and improve nutrition for disadvantaged members of our community through sustainable, non-emergency strategies. Partnering with many allies, we implement programs that improve access to nutritious and affordable food, help consumers make informed food choices, and advance responsible food policies at all levels of government.

We work closely with food assistance providers, but we also recognize that canned food drives and soup kitchens do not address why so many people need help in the first place. Our bedrock conviction is that emergency food assistance must be combined with real solutions to the underlying causes of hunger and poor nutrition.

Programs:

The Hartford Food System administers a range of projects, including a 24-acre vegetable farm that grows food for families and social service agencies in the region, an urban agriculture project in Hartford's inner city, a parents committee that is working to improve school meals, a food policy council, a coalition of small grocery stores, and extensive outreach and advocacy in Hartford's neighborhoods.

Holcomb Farm CSA

When we were given the opportunity in 1994 to keep a historic farm in operation in West Granby, we created a not-for-profit Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that produces fresh food for urban and suburban residents alike. Holcomb Farm CSA distributed more than 33,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables in 2006 to low-income individuals, with the rest of the harvest sold at market rate to offset the cost of the project. It's a sustainable solution that keeps farmland growing in Connecticut while producing food for those in need.

Grow Hartford

In 2004 we converted a blighted, overgrown lot in central Hartford into an urban mini-farm that grows fresh produce for the surrounding neighborhoods through organic methods. The site also serves as an outdoor classroom to educate members of the community about food and nutrition issues. Groups of all ages visit Grow Hartford to gain a better understanding of where healthy food comes from, while volunteers and a crew of summer youth harvest thousands of pounds of fruits and vegetables.



Youth participants from the Grow Hartford program harvest fresh vegetables at Holcomb Farm CSA, a project of the Hartford Food System.

Padres para el Mejoramiento de Comidas Escolares / Parents for the Improvement of School Food

More than 24,000 children attend Hartford public schools and rely on their cafeterias as an important source of food. Unfortunately, Hartford school meals are not as nutritious or appetizing as they should be. The Hartford Food System has organized a parents committee called *Padres para el Mejoramiento de Comidas Escolares* (which translates as Parents for the Improvement of School Food) to advance healthier school menus through grassroots advocacy and dialogue with city officials.

Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy

In 1991 the Hartford City Council created the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy at the urging of the Hartford Food System and other food advocates. Its purpose is to integrate all city agencies in a common effort to promote the availability of safe and nutritious food at reasonable prices to all residents, particularly those in need. The Hartford Food System provides staffing for the Commission and also serves as one of its 15 voting members.

Healthy Food Retailer Initiative

The Hartford Food System coordinates a coalition of corner markets and inner city grocery stores (also called *bodegas*) to increase the availability of healthy food. Since Hartford has only one full-size supermarket, small neighborhood retailers are a crucial grocery source for many residents. Thirty-one stores have joined the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative thus far, committing themselves to stock healthier items and replace 5% of their junk food inventories with regular groceries.

Accomplishments:

- Established the Connecticut Farmers Market Nutrition Program that now serves 160 farmers and over 50,000 Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program participants, lower income senior citizens, and emergency food pantry clients.
- Developed or assisted in the development of 65 farmers markets across the state.
- Co-founded the Community Food Security Coalition, Connecticut Farmland Trust, Connecticut Food Policy Council, End Hunger Connecticut, Foodshare, Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy, and the Working Lands Alliance.
- Established the Grocery Delivery Service for Homebound Seniors, which serves low-income elderly people in the Hartford region who are unable to shop for themselves due to illness or frailty.
- Improves access to healthy food outlets by advocating for transportation routes to supermarkets from disadvantaged neighborhoods, financing for new store development, and regular food price surveys and information for Hartford consumers.

Organizational Structure and Budget:

The Hartford Food System is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that is governed by a volunteer board of directors. We have a year-round staff of eight employees, as well as seasonal positions through policy internships and farm apprentices.

Approximately 45% of our annual revenue is contributed by foundations and corporate donors, 9% by government grants, 7% by individual donors, and 2% by religious congregations. Program generated income, principally from produce sales and share memberships at Holcomb Farm CSA, accounts for 34% of our annual revenue.

We are a United Way agency and donations to the Hartford Food System are fully tax-deductible. More information about our charitable activities and financial performance may be found at GuideStar.org.



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