

equitable food access

FOOD EQUITY: THE NOTION THAT ACCESS TO FRESH PRODUCE AND HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS IS NOT UNIVERSAL AND THAT SOME COMMUNITIES ARE AT A DISADVANTAGE IN THE REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM. OVER THE PAST 12 YEARS AND THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF OVER A DOZEN COMMUNITY PLANNING PROJECTS, SUSTAINABLE LONG ISLAND HAS IDENTIFIED THIS ISSUE AS ONE OF THE MOST COMMON AMONG COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE REGION.

In light of the severe economic downturn in 2008 and 2009, the need to address the issue of food security in LI's distressed communities became urgent and pressing. Since then, Sustainable Long Island has launched an assessment of the current food system on LI to identify challenges and potential solutions. Communities with limitations in resources, disposable income, language, and transportation often have restricted access to a variety of healthy food options.

Community-based youth-staffed farmers' markets

To begin to address this problem with tangible solutions, Sustainable Long Island partnered with local community partners and the Long Island Farm Bureau to establish youth-staffed farmers' markets in low-income communities, which have brought fresh, nutritious foods to these communities, historically underserved by food retailers and markets. The markets have provided jobs to local high school students in each community, promoted nutrition and education to residents, contributed to a sense of place, given community members' greater choice of fresh produce and healthy food options, and helped boost the local and regional economy. Simultaneously the markets have allowed farmers to devote more time to tending their farms rather than traveling back and forth; making participating in community farmers markets more appealing and financially sound for farmers.

North Bellport, Roosevelt, and now Flanders

Throughout the first year of the project (July 11, 2010 – October 31, 2010) North Bellport and Roosevelt residents had the option of purchasing affordable fruit and vegetables from high school students of the communities who ran the markets; each which were stocked with produce from six LI Farms, with more and more participating per year. Over 90 boxes of cabbage, 240 bags of corn, 748 bags of spinach, 870 bunches of beets, 3200 pounds of tomatoes, 3860 pounds of apples, and 5120 pounds of melon made their way fresh from the farm to North Bellport and Roosevelt resident's kitchen tables. More amazingly, 65% of total transactions came from EBT sales and WIC and Senior FMNP Checks, cementing the fact that access to fresh, affordable food alternatives is needed now more than ever in many low-income communities. In 2011 the project has grown as Sustainable Long Island provides technical assistance to both the North Bellport and Roosevelt markets, as well as a new one in Flanders; launched by the Town of Southampton!

What's Next?

Sustainable Long Island continues to expand its food equity program for the future. Along with the Long Island Index, we recently released an interactive food access map, which identifies where supermarkets are located throughout the region and gives reference to accessibility of these spots on Long Island. We've advocated at the Federal, State, and local levels for communities to "have a seat at the table" in food equity discussions to ensure equitable participation and long-term success, which ensures the inclusion of all community representatives. In addition, we've provided recommendations to the Low-Income Investment Fund on how to make the NYS Healthy Food Healthy Communities initiatives work for Long Island and to the LI Regional Planning Council on the Farmland Protection & Local Food Access section of the LI 2035 Plan. Sustainable Long Island has also convened our Food Equity Advisory Committee to discuss ways to address food justice on LI.

For more information on our food equity program, visit us at www.sustainableli.org!

