



**Convergence Partnership Statement about
Passage of the Farm Bill and Programs to Improve Access to Healthy Food**
February 14, 2014

Last week with wide bipartisan support, Congress passed and the President signed The Agricultural Act of 2014 (also known as the farm bill). The bill includes the authorization of \$125 million for the national Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) and would, for the first time, officially establish the initiative at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The inclusion of HFFI is a significant win for community leaders from across the country seeking to bring healthy food and jobs to their communities. The Convergence Partnership has been working with local, state, and national healthy food advocates for many years to advance HFFI and other efforts designed to expand fresh food access in underserved areas throughout the U.S. The national efforts were led by PolicyLink, The Food Trust, and The Reinvestment Fund.

HFFI will help to revitalize communities by bringing in new, vibrant healthy food retail and by creating and preserving quality jobs for local residents. To date, the federal HFFI initiative and similar efforts in more than 10 states and localities have helped bring hundreds of millions of dollars in public and private sector resources—grants, loans, and tax credits—to healthy food access projects across the country.

The Convergence Partnership provided critical funding to develop and bring HFFI to the federal level. Convergence Partnership resources have supported national convenings of HFFI grantees for peer learning and networking, and have given grantees the opportunity to share their stories widely. Critical education, communications, research, and advocacy was done across the country by an array of stakeholders, from community food advocates, public health leaders, the grocery industry, and community developers.¹

In addition to its support for HFFI efforts, the Partnership, through the Food and Agriculture Policy Collaborative,² sought to advance three additional policy targets: healthy food incentives, strengthening regional food systems, and protecting and expanding SNAP (formerly food stamps).

Unfortunately, this farm bill includes a harmful \$8.6 billion in cuts to SNAP—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—over the next 10 years. The cut will mean a reduction in benefits averaging \$90 per month for 850,000 households, about 4 percent of SNAP households, according to the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#), making it harder to feed their families.

¹ Individual members of the Convergence Partnership have also supported food policy advocacy to expand healthy food access and ensure just and fair inclusion of all communities in the food system. These partners include Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The California Endowment, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and Kaiser Permanente.

² The [Food and Agriculture Policy Collaborative](#) is a partnership of national and local organizations working to promote the vision of healthy food and healthy economies through the advancement of four policy priorities: (1) Defending and improving SNAP benefits and eligibility; (2) Increasing consumer access to fresh, healthy food and creating jobs and vibrant communities through the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI); (3) Improving access to healthy fresh food and supporting local farmers and economies through healthy food incentives; and (4) Strengthening local and regional farm and food systems infrastructure.



A bright spot, in addition to HFFI, was the inclusion of the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grants, a new program with \$100 million to provide incentives for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables, based on programs such as Fair Food Network’s Double Up Food Bucks in Michigan.

The multi-year farm bill establishes the policies and authorizations for food and nutrition aid, agriculture, trade, and marketing programs, rural development assistance, and other programs. The bill addresses the issue of access to healthy food with HFFI, and other innovative programs that foster sustainable local food systems and incentivize the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets (Community Food Projects; Specialty Crop Block Grant; Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program).

Together, these programs are important steps in the journey to create an equitable food system—one that ensures small and disadvantaged farmers can produce and market in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable manner, that consumers have the resources they need to purchase healthy food for their children and families, and that all communities have ready access to affordable, nutritious food. A complete copy of The Agriculture Act of 2014 is available at <http://www.ag.senate.gov/issues/farm-bill>.

For more information on the Convergence Partnership and its efforts to make healthy foods available to everyone, please visit <http://www.convergencepartnership.org>.