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## CONGRESS PASSES FARM BILL WITH BROAD BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

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For Immediate Release

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### **Congress Passes Farm Bill With Broad Bipartisan Support**

**Includes National Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) To Expand Fresh Food Retail In Underserved Communities Across The U.S.**

#### **For Immediate Release**

**February 5, 2014** -- New York, NY - Yesterday with wide bipartisan support, Congress passed The Agricultural Act of 2014 (also known as the Farm Bill), which for the first time will officially establish a national Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) at the United States 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. PolicyLink, The Reinvestment Fund, and The Food Trust, along with local, state, and national healthy food advocates, have been working for many years to expand fresh food access in underserved areas throughout the U.S.

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Representative Marcia Fudge (D-OH) worked with Committee Leadership Sens. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Thad Cochran (R-MS), and Reps. Frank Lucas (R-OK) and Collin Peterson (D-MN), to include the \$125 million HFFI program authorization.

Expanding access to healthy food is a key strategy within a multi-faceted approach to improve the food environment and advance community well-being. And supermarkets and grocery stores that provide access to healthy, affordable food are a necessary step toward that well-being. In many low-income communities, supermarkets not only improve access to healthier food options, they also bring much-needed jobs and spur economic revitalization.

To date, the federal HFFI initiative and similar efforts in more than 10 states and localities have helped bring hundreds of millions in public and private sector resources—grants, loans, and tax credits—to healthy food access projects across the country. The bill passed yesterday creates a federal framework for HFFI to continue to support the many efforts currently underway across the country to improve access to healthy foods and grow local economies through small business development and job creation. HFFI will foster

solutions that are locally determined, encouraging strategies that create public-private partnerships and build from the ground up.

"The Healthy Food Financing Initiative is critical to providing access to healthy foods in food deserts and low-income communities across the country," said Senator Debbie Stabenow. "There are far too many people who have to travel many miles just to get to a grocery store. Passing the Farm Bill will help provide access for the more than 29 million people across the country who want and need to have access to healthy food for their families.

The Agricultural Act of 2014 is a multi-year bill that legislates policies and authorizes programs for food and nutrition aid, agriculture, trade, and marketing programs, rural development assistance, and other programs. The Farm Bill unfortunately also includes harmful cuts of \$8.6 billion to SNAP—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—over the next 10 years.

HFFI will help to revitalize communities by bringing in new, vibrant healthy food retail and by creating and preserving quality jobs for local residents.

"This initiative holds great promise to improve the health of residents in low-income communities," said Rep. Marcia Fudge. "Studies have shown consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables increases with improved access to those food items. However, better access to nutritious foods only tells half the story of what the Healthy Food Finance Initiative (HFFI) can do. Public-private partnerships and increased

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investment in food retail revitalize our communities economically, and spur job creation in underserved pockets of our cities and rural communities. The combination of benefits is exciting and I'm so pleased that HFFI is included in the farm bill."

The HFFI legislation is modeled after the highly successful Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative. Launched in 2004, that program used a public/private partnership to leverage \$30 million of state seed money into \$190 million of total investment—creating or retaining over 5,000 jobs and opening 88 new or improved fresh food retail outlets throughout the state. The program has since been replicated in New York, Illinois, New Orleans, California, and New Jersey.

Rep. Allyson Y. Schwartz said, "The Healthy Food Financing Initiative will make an enormous difference in the lives of thousands of Pennsylvanians and the 29 million Americans who don't have access to healthy foods. This public-private partnership will create solid, good-paying jobs across Pennsylvania while boosting local economic development and strengthening our neighborhoods. By providing healthier food retail options in urban and rural areas, we can ensure Pennsylvanians have the opportunity to live longer, healthier lives and save billions in health care costs nationwide."

The addition of HFFI, along with other measures that foster sustainable local food systems and incentivize the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets, will significantly strengthen nationwide efforts to remove barriers and improve access to nutritious foods at affordable prices. However, the SNAP cuts will hurt millions of Americans who rely on the program to feed their families and can adversely affect our nation's economic recovery. USDA research shows that each \$5 of federal SNAP benefits generates nearly twice that in economic activity.

Yesterday's Farm Bill reauthorization, which was approved by the House of Representatives by a vote of 251 to 166 and the Senate by a vote of 68 to 32, represents a significant milestone for communities across the nation currently struggling without adequate healthy food access. A complete copy of the Agricultural Act of 2014 is available at <http://www.ag.senate.gov/issues/farm-bill>.

For more information on the national Healthy Food Financing Initiative specifically, please visit the Healthy Food Access Portal at [www.healthyfoodaccess.org](http://www.healthyfoodaccess.org).

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#### Quotes from Partners

"Our three organizations applaud the Congress, for their bi-partisan leadership and commitment to improving community health by improving access to healthy food," said PolicyLink President Judith Bell.

"Supermarkets and other healthy food retail represent more than healthy food choices - they are also about creating jobs, supporting community businesses, and revitalizing neighborhoods. The incorporation of HFFI into the Farm Bill is a powerful step towards creating equitable and sustainable access to fresh and healthy foods across America."

"We are thrilled that Congress has endorsed HFFI as an effective means of revitalizing communities," said The Reinvestment Fund CEO Don Hinkle-Brown. "Beginning with the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative on which HFFI is modeled and continuing with our new ReFresh collaborative, TRF works nationally to increase food access investments in low-income communities. We know from our ten years of experience financing healthy food access projects, that supermarkets and grocery stores create jobs and anchor the economic growth vital to building healthy communities."

"We applaud the members of Congress who fought hard to prevent harmful cuts to the SNAP program and supported new innovative efforts to improve access to healthy food," said The Food Trust Executive Director Yael Lehmann. "While this bill is far from perfect, it provides new opportunities to connect with local farmers, create jobs in underserved neighborhoods, and build healthier communities."

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PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by Lifting Up What Works ®. [www.policylink.org](http://www.policylink.org), Contact: Judith Bell, President, [judith@policylink.org](mailto:judith@policylink.org)

The Food Trust, founded in 1992, is a nonprofit organization working to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food. [www.thefoodtrust.org](http://www.thefoodtrust.org), Contact: John Weidman, Deputy Executive Director, [jweidman@thefoodtrust.org](mailto:jweidman@thefoodtrust.org)

The Reinvestment Fund, a community development financial institution, invests in distressed markets and conducts research on policy issues that influence neighborhood revitalization & economic growth. [www.trfund.com](http://www.trfund.com), Contact: Patricia Smith, Senior Policy Advisor, [patricia.smith@trfund.com](mailto:patricia.smith@trfund.com)