Food Policy: The Farm Bill and Our Food Environment

Urge the House of Representatives to Pass a Healthy Farm Bill

The current food environment in the United States is made up of high-calorie, high-sugar, nutrient poor foods, including sweetened drinks, fast food, and highly processed foods, that have led to the highest obesity rates in the world. The effect of this food environment on the health of adults and children is becoming more and more evident. The Farm Bill plays the largest role in U.S. food policy and in shaping our food environment.

Passed every five years, the Farm Bill impacts what foods are produced, available, and how they are marketed. It also includes food assistance programs, namely the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formally Food Stamps). The current Farm Bill heavily favors the production of principle commodity crops that are made into processed foods and feed grain.

The 2008 Farm Bill ended in September 2012. The Senate passed a new bill in June 2012, but the House has still not voted on the bill passed by the House Agricultural Committee. Under the pressure to curb the threat of increased dairy prices, a one-year extension bill was passed this January to allow the House until September 2013 to pass a bill. The extension has been widely criticized and does not address many issues that would help create a healthy food environment. It is speculated that the House will begin to work on a five-year Farm Bill at the end of February or beginning of March.

Letter to House Representatives:

As a physician-in-training, I know that the food we eat impacts our nation's health. I urge you to work towards and support the passage of a **healthy** Farm Bill. The main principle of the Farm Bill must be the relationship of food and ecologically sound agriculture to public health. The development of policies, programs, and funding must be driven by the goal to improve the health of citizens of this nation.

This can be achieved through programs that increase the availability and proximity of affordable, healthy, and culturally-relevant food to rural, suburban, and urban populations. We need to protect our core programs that fight hunger and food insecurity. This includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). I urge you to work to improve the benefit level of SNAP participants, and incentives that promote fruit and vegetable purchases so people are able to afford adequate diets. This can further be achieved by supporting SNAP use at farmer's markets, Community Supported Agriculture shares (CSAs) and other farmer-to-consumer venue as well as by enhancing SNAP Nutrition Education.

A healthy Farm Bill supports sustainable agricultural practices that protect our environment and the future of our air, water, and soil. Food security is improved by strengthening small and mid-scale farms, and by developing strategies that promote interdependence, local innovation, and community development and self-reliance in both rural and urban settings.

I hope you will approach policy decisions by addressing the impacts they will have on all of our food system, including production, processing, distribution, waste management, consumption, and marketing. I hope you will work toward a healthy Farm Bill that focuses on the public health of our nation.

Get Started and Find More Information About Letter Writing Campaigns at: http://www.amsa.org/AMSA/Homepage/About/Committees/Grassroots/LetterWritingCampaigns.aspx

