

FLAG



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INCORPORATED

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New Report Says Federal Policies Discourage Farmers from Growing Fruits and Vegetables

ST. PAUL, MINN., August 3, 2010 — Federal policies discourage farmers from producing and marketing fruits and vegetables, according to a report released today by Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG).

As a result of administering farm commodity programs for many years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a rich body of knowledge about historical yields and prices for crops such as corn, soybeans, wheat, rice and cotton. This information enables the federal government and private businesses to offer loans and financing, as well as crop insurance and other risk-management tools, to farmers producing commodity crops.

However, similar yield and pricing information has not been collected for fruits and vegetables, and this lack of information poses a problem—especially for farmers who market their fruits and vegetables directly to retailers and consumers, rather than to wholesalers. Farmers who direct market tend to use a business model that relies on higher prices and lower volumes, but federal programs are based on farm business models that rely on lower prices and higher volumes.

“Farmers can help improve public health,” said Jill Krueger, a FLAG senior staff attorney and the lead author of the report. “Federal policies should make it easier for farmers who would like to produce and market fruits and vegetables. Now is the time to build consensus for policy change to improve existing programs as they are implemented and to prepare for the next Farm Bill.”

The report, *Planting the Seeds for Public Health: How the Farm Bill Can Help Farmers to Produce and Distribute Healthy Foods*, offers a legal analysis of the 2008 Farm Bill and explains key agriculture and nutrition programs that were enacted into law. The report was commissioned by *Healthy Eating Research*, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Key findings include:

- Fruit and vegetable farmers lack a safety net to protect them from natural disasters in a manner comparable to programs that are available for farmers producing major commodity crops, such as corn, soybeans and wheat;
- Crop insurance, disaster assistance, and loan and conservation programs are not designed to address the unique characteristics of fruit and vegetable production and marketing; and
- Nutrition program expenditures are not adequately directed to ensure children, including those from low-income households, receive healthy food.

In addition to providing policy recommendations to help farmers grow and distribute fruits and vegetables, the report emphasizes that many of the recommended changes could be made by the USDA without the need for additional direction from Congress. However, if such policy changes do not occur, Congress will need to make changes in the reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

The report also recommends that Congress and USDA explore possible changes to planting restrictions, which prohibit farmers from planting fruits and vegetables on land that is enrolled in the commodity program. It further recommends that farmers work with public health leaders and consumer advocates to make sure demand for fruits and vegetables will keep pace with the increasing supply.

The report can be downloaded at no charge from FLAG's Web site at: <http://www.flaginc.org>. A bound copy of the book is available for \$20 plus shipping and handling, and orders may be placed by calling FLAG's office at 651-223-5400 or by visiting the FLAG Web site at www.flaginc.org. Orders also may be placed directly with FLAG's online publisher, www.lulu.com.

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About Farmers' Legal Action Group

FLAG is a nonprofit law center in St. Paul, Minnesota, dedicated to providing legal services to family farmers and their rural communities in order to help keep family farmers on the land. For more information, visit www.flaginc.org.

About Healthy Eating Research

Healthy Eating Research is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The program supports research on environmental and policy strategies to promote healthy eating among children to prevent childhood obesity, especially among the low-income and racial and ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity. For more information, visit www.healthyeatingresearch.org.