

Good for Farming, Good for New Jersey

Beginning in the fall of 2007, all public schools in the state of New Jersey will conform to regulations that greatly reduce the fat and sugar content of foods consumed by school children. This means fewer soft drinks, fatty foods and high sugar choices in both vending machines and ala carte lines in the cafeteria.

Instead, the schools will make more fresh fruits and vegetables and healthier snacks available while better nutritional education will be taught. The department of New Jersey's Secretary of Agriculture, Charles Kuperus, has led the changes.

"There are really three components here," says Kuperus. "Eating right, more exercise and educating people about nutrition. That's really what it boils down to." Nutrition education is now part of schools' core curriculum.

The new regulations seek to benefit agriculture by emphasizing, in the order of preference, local, regional and then national food sources for these healthier products. The state sought to involve the food industry as well as agriculture in the process, which gave vendors and producers time to prepare for the changes.

"We are the point of the arrow of public policy leading an industry shift," says Kuperus. "Industry is shifting slightly behind us but not far behind us. They've seen the trends in the marketplace."

Major beverage companies have ramped up the number of 100 percent fruit juice drinks available, in addition to water and reduced fat milk products. One well-known snack cake company initially complained that the new regulations would significantly hurt their business, according to Kuperus. "Now they have a whole product line that meets the standards in New Jersey," he says.

In addition, agriculture is looking at value-added products that can be used year-round

Professional Background:

Charles Kuperus grew up in New Jersey on his family's dairy farm. Within three years after graduating from high school, he had started his own nursery and garden center. Before he became the state's secretary of ag, Kuperus served as commissioner of the New Jersey State Planning Commission.

Farm Bill Focus: Healthy diets, supporting local agriculture and farm to school programs.

Current Initiatives: "Healthy Choices, Healthy Kids," which removes foods of minimal nutritional value from vending machines, ala carte lines, school stores and fundraisers on school property during school hours.



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—CHARLES KUPERUS

in schools, such as quick-frozen blueberries and sliced apples—nearly a third of which were sliced and grown in New Jersey and neighboring New York.

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Likewise, the state has implemented the same dietary guidelines for the several million dollars worth of food that will be purchased to feed the poor.

This is part and parcel of what USDA heard when it held numerous "listening sessions" around the country in preparation for a new farm bill. "People are saying there is a need for conservation and changes in the nutrition programs," says Kuperus. "The USDA did a major service to this whole discussion and, really, to our job from an individual state perspective."



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Established in 1980, American Farmland Trust is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting our nation's farm and ranch land. AFT's mission is to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment. AFT works at the federal level to effect farm policies and with states and local communities to enact strategies to save their land.

Why Save Farmland?

We rely on our best farmland to feed America and much of the world. In addition,

- Farmland provides more than 70 percent of the habitat for America's wildlife. Developing that land puts America's biological diversity at risk.
- America is becoming more dependent on imported food, some from countries with less stringent environmental and safety regulations.
- When farms and ranches are pushed off the most fertile soil, farmers are forced to rely more on fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation to do what the best land does naturally. Farmland loss has visible environmental impacts.
- The cost of basic services (schools, fire, police and maintenance) skyrockets in communities across the country that sacrifice farmland to uncontrolled growth. Scattered development increases taxes and makes services more costly.
- Agriculture provides millions of jobs both on the land and in secondary services. Farmland protection is an investment in the backbone of our economy.

We're Saving America's Farmland—where the need is most urgent and where success can have the greatest impact through a three-pronged strategy of:

- Protecting the Best Land by advancing conservation easement programs that allow farmers and ranchers to permanently keep their land in agriculture.
- Planning for Agriculture by developing and implementing sound community planning that achieves a balance between sensible growth and thriving agriculture.
- Keeping the Land Healthy by fostering the best farming practices and guiding farmers and ranchers to adopt these practices.

2007 Farm and Food Policy Campaign

Convinced that strong federal farm policy is the key to saving farm and ranch land, AFT has launched an aggressive campaign aimed at policy change for the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill. We are working to transform U.S. farm policy to a system that links financial support to environmental stewardship and rewards farmers for producing healthy food, clean air and water, wildlife habitat and open space. A diverse and growing consensus is emerging among farmers, ranchers, conservationists, fiscal conservatives and public interest groups to create a new system. Our work on farm policy is rooted in our mission to protect farmland, ensure a future for agriculture and improve stewardship.

