Recommendations for a New Hampshire Food Policy

May, 1979

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To: Producers, Consumers, Processors, Transporters, Wholesalers and Retailers of Food in New Hampshire

There is a quiet, but widespread, concern among the citizens of our state about the future availability of food at a price we can afford to pay, and at a price that is adequate to assure producers a fair return on their investment. This concern started to gain momentum in 1973 with the oil embargo and has increased with severe weather conditions, increased cost for fuel to transport food into the state and the shift in the use of good farm land from food production to other uses.

A New Hampshire Food Policy Study Committee was formed in April of 1978, bringing together representatives of various New Hampshire groups and organizations which have a vested interest in the food situation. At their first meeting, I suggested they pool their knowledge and develop a position paper which would outline the issues and make some recommendations as to what might be done to help solve same of the problems we face.

Even with the public presentation of the report, work to analyze the changing conditions must go on, and solutions to our food problems must continue to be sought. The real work is just beginning, and citizens must become involved and do their part if agriculture and agricultural interests are to be given adequate attention in the future development of our state.

I'm pleased that the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of New Hampshire has had a part in the preparation of this document. We've seen our role as a source of information used by the study committee in making certain decisions. We see our future responsibilities to include providing opportunities for increased public discussion of the situation, and working with consumers, farmers, legislators and others concerned with the various issues to consider alternative solutions.

I compliment the members of the New Hampshire Food Policy Study Committee for their efforts, and wish them continued success. What follows is a result of their study.

Best regards,

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Introduction

New Hampshire imports approximately 85 percent of the food consumed in the state. Food prices in New Hampshire average 10 to 15 percent higher than in other regions of the nation. This is because New England is at the end of the food and transportation supply line. The state and the New England region are without stored food surpluses, other than supermarket stocks, which would be needed in the event of a crippling storm or other natural disaster.

New Hampshire has major climatic and agricultural resource limitations on food production. Many of the commodities which the state is best suited to produce are highly energy- and technically-intensive, perishable, and seasonal. The state of New Hampshire, as well as New England, is heavily dependent on imported foreign energy resources.

Although New Hampshire lacks the resources to become totally self-sufficient, the people of the state should work to create an environment in which the New Hampshire agricultural industry and the citizens upon which it depends can work toward increasing their self-reliance.

Given this set of circumstances, it appears timely, practical, and mutually advantageous to the total food community to develop a set of goals and policies concerned with food production, marketing, storage, distribution, recycling, dietary composition, and quality.

This collection of statements will be known as Recommendations for a New Hampshire Food Policy.

What will a food policy do for New Hampshire's citizens? A food policy would designate long- and short-term goals to strengthen the right of all consumers to have a choice about the quality, kind, and price of their food. It would also work to improve the economic opportunities for present and potential producers and processors of food within the state. A state food policy should be a clear statement of citizen agreement and responsibility regarding goals which should be advantageous to all. A food policy should provide continuous developmental guidance to the end that the goals are successfully realized. Finally, a New Hampshire food policy will provide a process through which all those parties involved with that most fundamental of all human activities, eating, can participate on an equal level.

It is up to the people of New Hampshire to take a close look at how the food system in the state operates and affects their lives. From an educated viewpoint of fact and feeling, people can determine what food policy will best serve their present and future interests. No one group is responsible for the food in our cupboards. Rather, food is a community responsibility.

As a function of this common responsibility, this document has developed long-range goals for six broad food system areas:

- Consumer Needs
- Food Processing and Storage
- Land Use
- Transportation
- Agricultural Production
- Marketing

To achieve each food policy goal, objectives and action recommendations are put forth as possible solutions to be discussed and acted upon by the larger New Hampshire community. No attempt has been made to list objectives in a priority order. Each is important in working toward a food policy.

Consumer Needs

Today's consumer is faced with a food dilemma vastly more complex than that of his ancestors. Food production now operates on a nationwide basis and produces huge quantities of food in bewildering variety. The consumer is no longer making simple food choices.

The cost of food rises because of the additional steps needed to get food to the table and the increased costs of production. Food marketing costs now account for about 60 percent of our food bill.[1]

The consumer, increasingly aware of the relationship between lifestyle and health,[2] is becoming concerned about the safety of the food he eats. In one survey, 62 percent of those polled expressed concern over food additives.[3]

A large segment of New Hampshire's population suffers from problems resulting from the over-consumption of some foods.[4] Surveys show that, although most consumers are interested in nutrition,[5] many have incorrect nutrition information.[6] Most consumers are uninformed about the food system.

Goal

- ***Assure an adequate, wholesome food supply, emphasizing locally-grown foods at reasonable cost.***

- ***Develop a level of public knowledge and understanding of foods and nutrition which will promote optimal nutrition, health, and well being.***

Objective 1
Coordinate state nutrition education and food assistance efforts to maximize their effects.

Recommended that:

a. The agencies involved in nutrition and food assistance coordinate their activities toward the stated goal.
b. The following subjects be added to nutrition education programs in addition to traditional subject matter:
- The contribution of locally-available, produced, and processed foods to the diet
- The relationship between nutrition and health
- Methods of food purchasing, preparation, preservation, and storage to maximize nutritional value and minimize waste
- The role of the consumer in the food system

Objective 2
Provide teachers and food service workers with accurate nutrition information.

Recommended that:
Health education, including nutrition, be a part of teacher educational programs.

Objective 3
Integrate nutrition education into the Food Stamp Program.

Recommended that:

State agencies with expertise in nutrition assist the Food Stamp Program in nutrition education.

Objective 4
Strengthen and maintain the systems for food quality and safety control.

Recommended that:

a. Safety and quality inspection systems expand to meet the increase in local food production and processing.
b. Food safety inspections of public food service establishments be increased.
c. Workers in food service establishments and institutions obtain training in safe food production and serving practices.
d. Food service establishments make available information on the identity of, and the ingredients in, foods which they serve.
e. The need for labeling regulations be examined as food processing and production increases in New Hampshire.

Objective 5
Encourage the growth and development of a coordinated consumer food cooperative system.

Recommended that:

a. Leadership be provided by the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture.
b. The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service assist in providing information and training for consumer food cooperatives.

Objective 6
Gather information on the nutritional status and food consumption patterns of the population of New Hampshire.

Recommended that:

The Division of Public Health Services of the New Hampshire Department of Health and Welfare conduct regular data collections.

Objective 7
Provide information on the nutritional contribution of locally-available produced and processed foods.

Recommended that:

The New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment Station develop and coordinate research.

Land Use

New Hampshire's agricultural land, like agricultural land throughout the world, is in demand for other uses. From 1952 to 1972, approximately 150,000 acres of New Hampshire's land in agriculture went out of production.[1] Housing, business and industrial development, and highways have rendered approximately 50,000 acres unavailable for food production.

Inadequate conservation on existing farmlands is causing deterioration of New Hampshire's soil resources. Erosion, compaction, and loss of organic matter decrease the productivity of these lands. However, there are still approximately 45,000 acres of best agricultural land which have reverted to forests or are idle. These acres could be returned to agricultural production. In all, 763,000 acres in New Hampshire are still potentially available for agricultural use.

Goal

- ***Preserve land that is presently in agriculture.***
- ***Expand agriculture to land capable of production.***

Objective 1
Encourage and assist private development and all levels of government to utilize soils poorly suited to agriculture.

Recommended that:

The office of State Planning and Regional Planning, with the assistance of agencies such as the Soil Conservation Service, the Conservation Districts, the Cooperative Extension Service, and others, research and develop an educational package which will provide communities with guidelines on needed land treatment to assist building on soils poorly suited to agriculture.

Objective 2
Encourage publicly-owned lands suitable for food production to be made available for commercial, small, and part-time farming and for community gardens.

Recommended that:

Conservation Commissions in each community assess the agricultural potential of the publicly-owned lands within their jurisdiction and publicize their availability.

Objective 3
Compensate landowners who voluntarily choose to protect agricultural lands permanently.

Recommended that:

Support be given to the passage of the Agricultural Encouragement and Lands Preservation Act and the continuation of the Current Land Use Assessment Act.

Objective 4

Encourage the revision of zoning ordinances to allow agricultural uses in residential areas.

Recommended that:

The offices of State Planning and Regional Planning develop and promote systems which will encourage agricultural production in residential, industrial, and business areas in the communities of the state.

Objective 5

Encourage good conservation practices on all agricultural land to insure long-term productivity.

Recommended that:

Through the joint action of the Soil Conservation Service, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, the University of New Hampshire, and the Conservation Districts, an integrated program be developed that will help to:

a. Conserve the agricultural soils of New Hampshire

b. Develop practices that improve the productive capacity of agricultural soils.

Agricultural Production

With an estimated 6,000 people living on New Hampshire farms (and a total farm labor force which involved as many as 10,000 at the height of the harvest season[1]), New Hampshire produces 15 percent of its total food needs. The foods which are produced are limited by New Hampshire's climate, soils, and economic situation. Further, New Hampshire's food production relies on resources from outside the state, including petroleum products, machinery, and livestock grains. Clearly, New Hampshire cannot become totally self-sufficient. For example, approximately 250,000 tons of feed grain are imported into New Hampshire. This represents a land requirement of about 100,000 acres.

However, an unused food production potential exists in New Hampshire which, based on available land, could increase the state's food production above the present 15 percent. This could be accomplished through large-scale commercial production, small and part-time farm production, and home production.

Current New Hampshire Food Production

Product	Percent of State Requirement[2]
Beef	19
pork	6
poultry	19
eggs	116
cereal products	4
non-citrus fruits	118
vegetables	7
potatoes	16
liquid milk*	146

*New Hampshire produces more than 146 percent of its liquid milk needs. However, liquid milk accounts for only 42.5 percent of a person's dairy product consumption. The remaining dairy product consumption is met in part through the excess in liquid milk production. As a result, New Hampshire production meets only 62.2 percent of the total state need for dairy products.

Goal

- ***Recognize agriculture as an important industry in the balanced growth of New Hampshire.***

- ***Maximize New Hampshire's commercial food production and encourage small and part-time farming and home food production toward family and community self-sufficiency.***

Objective 1
Increase production by commercial farmers so that, as the opportunities arise for the New Hampshire producer to compete, the resources will be available to meet the demands.

Recommended that:

The State Department of Agriculture, University, and farm-related groups work with the suppliers of production inputs (seed, fertilizers, equipment, and services) so that there will me an improvement in the timeliness, selection, and price of these supplies and services.

Objective 2

Promote home food production so that those with the potential to produce food on their own property will be able to provide a portion of their food needs.

Recommended that:

Educational programs of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service be directed more vigorously to the home food producer and the suppliers of their production inputs, and home garden supply businesses be further encouraged to help the home producers by providing production information and other services.

Objective 3

Promote research on agricultural production methods which are less dependent on petroleum-based products.

Recommended that:

The Cooperative Extension Service, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Soil Conservation Service, and Conservation Districts encourage farmers to make the best use of manure and other organic waste and composting to improve the productivity of soils and to reduce production costs (further application should be made in the use of community organic wastes such as sewage sludge, leaves, brush, and garbage, so that this soil conditioning is safe and economical and is applied to the soil using proper techniques.)

Objective 4

Encourage the increased productivity of the small and part-time farmer and identify the ways these farmers can play an increasing role in food production.

Recommended that:

Increased attention be given to the needs of new farmers, whether large or small, and the special needs of the small and part-time producer by agricultural agencies at the state and federal level and by farm organizations in the areas of production, land use, marketing, and business management.

Food Processing and Storage

The food-processing industry collects raw products from the farm, changes the product to meet consumer needs and safety standards, packages the product, and makes it available to the sales channels. Ten percent of New Hampshire employment results from this manufacturing/processing.[1] Most food products undergo some form of processing (including packaging). The food-processing industry is highly centralized and specialized. Nationally, six or fewer firms in each of the major food groups supply more than ¾ of the meat, cereals and flour, canned fruits and/or vegetables, and soups available to consumers. Bakery products, milk, and fresh fruits and vegetables are centralized regionally among a relatively few large firms and numerous small bakeries, milk processors or retailers, and roadside stands.

More highly-processed foods are available today than ever before. The reasons for this include longer shelf life, consumer preference for "ready to serve" and "convenience" foods, working women, economics of scale within the processing industries, health and safety regulations, and changes in dietary preferences.

New England has extremely limited storage facilities dependent on a continuous flow of food products to the various food sales outlets. Modern homes with limited shelf space and consumers' buying habits further contribute to the storage dilemma. New Englanders have extremely limited processing and storage capacities. Depending on the season and food item, a family could expect to be without an adequate supply of food within a week to 10 days, should there be a major interruption, such as a weather disaster or an oil embargo, in the movement of food to the local store from distant production and processing points.

Goal

- ***Have processing and storage facilities and services which will adequately serve the needs of New Hampshire's farmers, and have processing storage facilities which insure an adequate supply of food for New Hampshire throughout the year.***

Objective 1
Create a food processing industry in New Hampshire which meets the needs of producers and consumers within the local economy and complements the industrial growth of the state.

Recommended that:

Private industry and public institutions encourage the development of processing and storage facilities for all commodity areas; the consumer and food industry be encouraged to accept minimum processing, including packaging, which should reduce energy consumption and food costs and retain the inherent value of food; and energy-efficient facilities and methods for processing and storing of New Hampshire grown and consumed products be researched.

Objective 2
Expand livestock slaughtering and storage facilities in proportion to an increased production.

Recommended that:

State inspection criteria for slaughtering and meat and poultry processing be established within the State Department of Agriculture.

Objective 3

Fund and administer a pilot project for food processing to serve institutional needs and evaluate the transferability of this concept for application throughout the state.

Recommended that:

Community and home processing and storage facilities for the use of the family and commercial producer be established so that economies in equipment and energy consumption can be realized.

Transportation

At the national level, 92 percent of fresh fruits and vegetables are shipped by truck. Rail car shipments for these products continue their long, slow decline. Shipments of these products are exempt from Interstate Commerce Commission interstate regulations. Meat shipments have experienced sharp decline in rail service, and refrigerator cars have not yet been replaced by alternate equipment. The movement of meat is now largely through regulated Interstate Commerce Commission carriers.

Processed and manufactured foods are largely received directly from the processor to the wholesalers and retailers. Rail accounts for 40 percent of food transportation, and 60 percent is moved into the state by truck. Supplies are drawn nationwide and there is about a three-week supply in the "pipeline." Frozen, canned, and other processed foods come under the regulation of the Interstate Commerce Commission.

While most of the livestock feed and fertilizer shipments were once sent by rail, the dependence on this form of transportation continues to shift to truck. Adequate rail service is deemed extremely important in keeping feed grain rates reasonable. The Interstate Commerce Commission rate structure gives preferred rates to the Southeast compared with New England. The introduction of the "Big John" hopper cars and unit train lots and a 1963 court case have resulted in substantially reduced rates favoring the Southern areas ($4.50/ton Southern compared to $9.00/ton New England).

New England is without extensive storage capacity and is not able to take advantage of unit train rates. Conversely, a storage facility is uneconomical without such rates.

Other problems related to transportation include differing state regulations pertaining to truck weight and length limits and the inefficient use of smaller trucks in rural areas due to load limit restrictions on bridges.

Goal

- ***Provide efficient transportation of food and feed products from producer to consumer in a timely manner.***

Objective 1

Maintain and repair bridges and roads of the state highway system for transport of agricultural products to and from the farm.

a. Encourage State Public Works and Highway municipalities to inspect, repair, and adequately maintain bridges

b. Construct and maintain rural roads over state highways

Recommended that:

The State Highway Department review and identify rural roads, especially bridges, in need of upgrading to carry large truck loads, such as fuel, logs, grain, and fertilizer.

Objective 2
Work towards uniform truck weight limits and lengths in the New England region.

Recommended that:

The New England Governors convene a meeting of the various highway departments toward establishing uniform trucking regulations throughout the six-state region.(State-to-state variations are a needless and expensive barrier to lower costs and more efficient truck service.)

Objective 3
Correct the inequity of freight rates between the Northeast and the South.

Recommended that:

Our Congressional representation work for de-regulation of all trucking of agricultural and food products, including immediate relaxation of back haul regulations; further, our Congressional representation continue efforts toward obtaining equitable and non-discriminatory freight rates in New England.

Objective 4
Work toward the establishment of a grain storage facility in central New England for emergency use.

Recommended that:

The state of New Hampshire support efforts to establish a regional grain storage program that insures a basic feed grain supply at minimal cost, allowing unit train and/or water shipments into the region.

Marketing

After a product leaves the farm, it traditionally becomes involved in a process with four basic components: manufacturing/processing, wholesale distribution, retail distribution, and consumption.

The nationwide trend is toward fewer and fewer people making more and more of the wholesale decisions. For New Hampshire, this means an increasing loss of flexibility, less competition, and possibly even higher costs to the consumer. The marketing chain is becoming more concentrated and the decisions rest with large firms outside the state. In general, many of the farm products produced in New Hampshire flow out of the state to be returned and sold by a retail chain that purchased the food elsewhere. For example, a farmer from Litchfield, N.H. may sell produce to a farmer from Dover, N.H. This transaction may take place in Massachusetts. Milk is produced in Sullivan County, processed in Boston, then sold in Concord, N.H.

Retail food industry people believe that there is no great problem in the sale of locally grown products, at least to independent retailers. They feel that if there are problems, they are primarily a matter of communication between the two groups.[1] Other states have begun to facilitate alternative marketing channels which meet the desires of consumers and producers. These programs appear successful in providing economic and social advantages to the citizens of those states and in reducing, to some degree, their dependence on products imported from other areas.

Since New Hampshire produces only 15 percent of its food needs, 85 percent of New Hampshire food is imported from other states and foreign countries. With an alternative food marketing system, more New Hampshire products could be internally marketed. This would strengthen the New Hampshire economy.

Goal

- ***Enhance the food marketing systems in New Hampshire by facilitating the access of consumers to products produced in New Hampshire and the New England region to benefit the producer, the consumer, and the general economic welfare of the state.***

Objective 1

Assist those sectors of the food and fiber system in New Hampshire (consumer through to producer) to be fully aware of their role in the system by:

Describing and understanding the present system;
Describing and understanding the limitations and problems of the system;
Describing and understanding the opportunities for improving the system.

Recommended that:

The State Department of Agriculture begin immediately to provide an Annual Food and Fiber Report of the marketing system in New Hampshire that measures and assesses the system, analyzes the weaknesses, and provides reasoned and practical alternative solutions to the problems. (This will consist of input from New Hampshire producers, New Hampshire consumers, and other buyers and sellers such as wholesalers, retailers, cooperatives, and institutions.)

Objective 2

Provide for a more efficient and economical marketing system by promoting and instituting alternative marketing outlets and institutions which will enhance the system's ability to serve the food needs of New Hampshire consumers and producers.

Recommended that:

A program promoting and advertising New Hampshire-grown products be immediately instituted by the State Department of Agriculture. (This department will have the responsibility of coordinating the available resources at the University of New Hampshire and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to facilitate the establishment, operation, and maintenance of producer cooperatives.) Specific tasks will include:

a. Working with wholesale/retail, hotel, and institutional marketing channels to determine how producer cooperatives can market to these groups economically, efficiently, and competitively;

b. Providing technical assistance in the production, financial, and marketing areas;

c. Providing the environment which brings together the producers to form the cooperatives;

d. Assisting these cooperatives in becoming economically self-sufficient and independent of governmental control and involvement. (This is the long-range objective.)

Objective 3

Continually assess and evaluate the problems and efficiencies of the system and continue to examine and present alternatives and solutions which will make for the most efficient and economic marketing of food products in New Hampshire.

Recommended that:

The extent to which state laws work to erect marketing barriers and eliminate or reduce competition by New Hampshire producers in New Hampshire state institutions be examined; quality premiums be evaluated and implemented when economical.

Summary

Clearly, the formulation of a food policy for New Hampshire is a complex enterprise. A comprehensive food policy would necessarily involve every segment of the state's population in a cooperative effort. The elements of an effective food policy, from considerations of nutrition and consumer needs to the re-examination of land use, agricultural production, food processing and storage, transportation and marketing, require the informed participation of New Hampshire's citizens for effective implementation. With the cooperation of all state agencies and institutions involved in the farm-to-consumer process, each stated goal can be reached. The objectives have been carefully researched. The action recommendations provide guidelines for meeting those objectives.

New Hampshire has a proud agricultural history. It is reasonable to expect that, given a new direction in the consideration of its agricultural industry, New Hampshire could produce more of its own food needs. This would result in optimum use of its land as well as nutritional and economic benefits for its citizens.

A decision should be made on a state food policy. In order to accurately reflect the needs and goals of New Hampshire's citizens, this decision must be made by people themselves based on an informed study of each element of the question. The report of the New Hampshire Food Policy Study Committee, Recommendations for a New Hampshire Food Policy, should serve as the source of the decision as to whether or not to implement a comprehensive food policy. The ultimate decision rests with New Hampshire's people.

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