

WORKING FOR A FAIR AND HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEM IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY

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Edie Jessup

Program Development Specialist at CCROPP & Co-Chair at Roots of Change

California's Central Valley is where much of the nation's produce is grown and where the greatest diversity of farmers live and work, but it is also a region where some of the most concentrated and entrenched poverty exists (Brookings Institute Report). Some of these rural communities have over 40% unemployment and the current economy is driving the fact that here in the Central Valley, the poorest congressional districts in the nation are suffering greatly from a lack of steady work. The Central Valley's primary asset is the agriculture industry that feeds the nation and world; however, the Valley has 40% food insecurity and 67% of adults are obese, while children suffer from chronic disease, hunger and poverty.

California's enrollment in **CALFresh** (food stamps) is at the bottom of the 50 states, and the Central Valley has significant barriers to using federal nutrition programs that could improve food workers and farmworkers health. Health outcomes in the Valley are poor, and much of this can be linked to diet. The entrenchment of food deserts and food swamps, sporadic emergency food distribution, multiple 'pilot' solutions to hunger, and a lack of connections between infrastructure make food access in the Central Valley a social justice issue that needs remedy.

Fresno County is iconic, and typical of all the Central Valley counties. It is the richest agricultural producing county in the nation and the poorest congressional district in the USA, with poverty and hunger at about 40% according to the California Health Inventory Survey. This paradox results in an abundance of food leaving the region, broken local produce distribution systems, rural corner stores that only sell cheap junk food and soda, fear of 'la Migra' (racism), compromised healthcare, and a lack of potable water and transportation access. In Fresno, 85% of school children qualify for free lunch, and 33% grow up in extreme poverty. One-third of children are obese, and 2/3 of adults are obese with a compendium of chronic diseases directly related to diet. Our food deserts are frequently food swamps, where there is 'food' available but it is often unhealthy and cheap. Fresno City and the surrounding metropolitan area have a population of over 500,000 and the outlying 14 incorporated cities and over 50 unincorporated areas total over 900,000 people. Significantly, Fresno County produces nearly \$5.3 billion from agriculture; however with only one large urban area, most of the county is very rural, as is the entire Central Valley.

Demographics in the Central Valley are changing due to the presence of new immigrants who come from agrarian lives in places such as the Punjab, Russia, Africa, etc. Less than 37% of the population identifies as being white and over 100 languages are spoken in our schools, while we farm in as many languages. Our residents are poor, undereducated, culturally diverse, and wanting to work hard to support their families. The economy and woes with water and air quality degradation in our agricultural areas have created a microcosm here in the Valley of the ecological, economic, and social issues that challenge our world. These statistics are supported by a decade of research from the California Health Inventory Survey (CHIS), the targeted reports of The California Center for Public Health Advocacy by legislative district, California Food Policy Advocates and yearly county nutrition profiles. Things are not getting better, but we know more about what is happening to people, particularly the disparities of health outcomes that impact people of color (reports from the Central Valley Health Policy Institute on Place Matters). The Valley's African American, Hispanic, Punjabi, Hmong farmers, and over 100 immigrant and agrarian peoples, highlight the sustainable ways we are growing food alongside great heritage farms. However, these farmers and farm workers are most impacted by poor wages throughout the food worker chain. The foundation for building neighborhoods where fresh food access is the norm for impoverished food workers, will be found in re-localization: re-creating regional food hubs and local purchases of healthy food by existing markets and institutions, and innovative entrepreneurial food work for emerging leaders throughout the eight counties. In the center of California we produce the 'goods': the food, necessary to create a sustainable, healthy and just food system.

Overweight & Obesity by Age Group, San Joaquin Valley and California, 2001, 2005 and 2007

County	Ages 12-17			Ages 18-64			Age 65+		
	2001	2005	2007	2001	2005	2007	2001	2005	2007
Fresno	14.1%	19.85%	24.7%	52.0%	55.7%	59.3%	55.3%	64.7%	66.2%
Kern	7.0%	9.68%	8.2%	51.4%	56.9%	60.4%	50.8%	62.1%	62%
Kings	16.3%	7.5%	17.7%	53.5%	62.0%	64.9%	58.0%	70.3%	68.7%
Madera	11.3%	4.8%	17.1%	56.3%	64.1%	67.6%	58.6%	60.8%	68.5%
Merced	18.2%	12.2%	17.1%	61.4%	66.8%	67.6%	67.2%	65.3%	63.6%
San Joaquin	17.0%	12.2%	15.0%	60.9%	71.6%	65.7%	62.3%	59.7%	64%
Stanislaus	12.9%	17.0%	17.0%	62.8%	67.2%	64.7%	53.4%	63.0%	57.7%
Tulare	7.6%	23.30%	20.7%	71.0%	66.2%	68.3%	56.1%	63.8%	62.0%
San Joaquin Valley	12.8%	15.5%	17.2%	65.1%	65.0%	64.3%	58.3%	63.0%	62.0%
California	12.2%	14.2%	13.3%	55.5%	55.2%	57.2	54.3%	55.7%	58.3%
Healthy People 2010 Objective	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%

Source: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2001, 2005, 2009
* Statistically unstable

What are we doing to solve some of these problems?

Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) cares deeply about advocating for and creating the food system that we want here in California based on the organized leadership of those without access to healthy food. CCROPP is working in the eight Central California counties as a regional initiative on public health through supporting healthy eating and active living for low-income residents. CCROPP fosters policy and environmental change so that low-income community members have access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities. CCROPP works on improving access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food for low-income people and for all of us. The Central Valley raises enough food to feed the nation, yet the very people who harvest our bounty are hungry and over the next decade the Valley is anticipating the greatest population growth in the state. Due to a lack of infrastructure, the current and future problems of poor health and environmental degradation in the place where most of our food comes from makes addressing Central Valley agriculture critical for the food security of our state and nation.

There is no scarcity of food, rather we have created a food security issue as we have lost local access to local food, and as a result, food workers are the first to be hungry and obese. If we do not change the policies and systems that create an increasingly obese population inflicted with chronic disease from diet, we all will pay for the costs of increasingly ill neighbors. Twenty communities in each of the eight Central Valley Counties do not have potable water and this is an agriculture related issue that has gained the attention of the United Nations. Eventually we will pay for the loss of farmland from unsustainable land use policies and risk losing the knowledge of how to produce our food, as development usurps broken farms. The conservative Central Valley political landscape defines attitude toward workers, access to wealth and water and land, and short term planning priorities.

The promise of new regional food access by the Regional CCROPP initiative working directly with low-income Spanish language leaders has produced 160 new advocates for change. The change CCROPP works for includes access to the healthy food they harvest, in their neighborhoods. Re-inventing regional food systems here in the Central Valley, and taking to scale new enterprise that aggregates and distributes healthy food to rural and low income urban neighborhoods will permanently change health in the Central Valley. The newly emerging Fresno Food Systems Alliance is a prelude of what is possible at the state and national level.

CCROPP is convinced that as new farmers' markets, farm stands at schools, and existing corner stores begin to carry local fresh produce, the health of the Central Valley will be impacted for the better. As the food landscapes in our own organizations, communities, and neighborhoods change through equitable policy, health will improve. The issues of equity and health of all our neighbors has to be a major focus of re-binding a broken food system. If the outcome of our current food system is unhealthy people, then we have made huge mistakes, and we must set them straight. We must restore a healthy food system to restore healthy communities. Those most impacted by malnutrition in the Valley are those working in the food system and it is these individuals that also have to become involved in repairing the region's food system.

CCROPP'S citizen job project is creating community support and leading the change in food environments for the nation through fostering environmental and policy change for those most in need. In an effort to develop strategies towards healthy kids and healthy communities, CCROPP is involved with [Leadership Development](#) funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. I urgently request that you invest in relationships, resources and common values with neighbors, farmers and all sectors of the food system to create a robust regional food system in the Central Valley to create a 'State of the Plate' that ensures our good health!

We can agree, I believe, in these food system values:

Justice and Fairness
Strong Communities
Vibrant Farms
Healthy People
Sustainable Ecosystems
Thriving Local Economies

The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) is the Central California Public Health Partnership's initiative to create environments that support healthy eating and active living in the San Joaquin Valley. The regional obesity prevention program is administered by the Central California Center for Health and Human Services and is housed under the College of Health and Human Services at California State University, Fresno. CCROPP is funded by The California Endowment and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

CCROPP Brochure:

http://www.csufresno.edu/ccchs/institutes_programs/CCROPP/publications/CCROPP_onepager8press_cropped.pdf

Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program: www.ccropp.org

Roots of Change Video: <http://rootsofchange.org/campaign/food-movement-rising>

California Center for Public Health Advocacy: www.publichealthadvocacy.org

California Food Policy Advocates: <http://www.cfpa.net>

Community Food Security Coalition: www.foodsecurity.org

The Paradox

- Within our valley lies one of the largest and richest agricultural regions in the world.
- Families still struggle to put food on their tables.

"It's ironic that those who till the soil, cultivate and harvest the fruits, vegetables, and other foods that fill your tables with abundance have nothing left for themselves."

-Cesar Chavez

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