

First Lady Michelle Obama Highlights Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative
Pennsylvania Initiative is Model for Obama Administration Supermarket Program

Philadelphia, PA – February 19, 2010 – “Let’s move to ensure that all families have access to healthy, affordable food in their communities,” First Lady Michelle Obama said in her speech at Philadelphia’s Fairhill Elementary School today. “If anyone thinks it can’t be done, I urge them to come to Philadelphia and see what can be done. “

The First Lady, accompanied by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Secretary of The Treasury Timothy Geithner, toured The Fresh Grocer at Progress Plaza. The supermarket, the first to locate in the neighborhood in more than a decade, opened in December 2009 with financing that included funds from the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, New Markets Tax Credits and the 2009 Recovery Act.

This Pennsylvania initiative was created through a public-private partnership, to provide the financing needed to bring supermarkets to underserved neighborhoods. It is the model for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, an essential component of the First Lady’s Let’s Move! campaign to address the childhood obesity epidemic.

For more than a year, PolicyLink, The Food Trust and The Reinvestment Fund have been working with the Obama Administration and Congress on a national version of the successful Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative.

In his FY2011 budget proposal, President Barack Obama proposed the Healthy Fresh Food Financing Initiative, calling for more than \$400 million in investments in new and expanded supermarkets, farmers markets and other food stores.

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative would dramatically reduce the roughly 23 million Americans who have limited access to full-service supermarkets and create tens of thousands of jobs in these communities. The \$400 million investment, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of the Treasury, includes \$250 million in New Markets Tax Credit allocations.

“There is no question that low-income communities of color with poor access to healthy foods are getting hit worst by the obesity and diabetes crises,” said Judith Bell, President of PolicyLink, a national research and action institute that helped lift up the Pennsylvania model to national scale. “If we are to close this health gap, we must expand access to fresh and healthy food options in underserved neighborhoods. Both the First Lady’s national childhood obesity campaign and President Obama’s 2011 budget signal a strong commitment to bringing healthy food – and good, long-term jobs – to communities that have been without both for far too long.”

(For more information on the Pennsylvania and national efforts, please visit:
<http://www.trfund.com/financing/realestate/NFFFI.html>)

Since the PA program began in 2004, the state has invested \$30 million which has supported \$190 million in total project investment. These 83 projects have provided more than 400,000 Pennsylvanians with healthier food choices in their communities and have created or preserved 5,000 jobs and 1.6 million square feet of food retail space.

The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, championed by State Rep. Dwight Evans, was seeded with state funds and is widely recognized for its innovative design and purpose. It has served as a model for similar efforts developing in other states, including New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Louisiana and Colorado.

“The reason we have communities where there is little access to fresh food is because business owners closed grocery stores or didn’t want to invest in the first place,” Rep. Evans said. “But across Pennsylvania, we’ve met wonderful grocers who understand that their businesses are vibrant neighborhood anchors. The Fresh Food Financing Initiative provides expertise and funding, but it’s the business owners with vision and a willingness to invest in their communities whom I applaud. They’ve made the PA program a success and a model for the whole nation.”

Rep. Allyson Schwartz (D-PA), who introduced a bipartisan resolution in the House last year, is developing policies with other members of the House to address the problem of food access nationally.

“Our nation faces an obesity epidemic and children are developing chronic diseases like high blood pressure and diabetes at a growing rate.” Schwartz said. “In Pennsylvania, we have taken great steps toward increasing access to supermarkets that offer healthier food choices and, in Congress, my colleagues and I are exploring ways to create a national program modeled on the Fresh Food Financing Initiative. President Obama’s attention to this issue in his FY 2011 Budget and the First Lady’s trip to Philadelphia today to discuss her efforts to tackle this important issue go a long way toward our shared goals.”

Similar efforts are underway in the Senate.

“Nearly one third of children in America are overweight or obese. The efforts of the First Lady, President Obama and Congress to increase the availability of affordable, nutritious food in neighborhoods across the country are a vital step in addressing this childhood obesity epidemic,” says Yael Lehmann, Executive Director of The Food Trust, which conducted outreach to engage communities and store operators in the program. “Access to healthy food is essential to healthy children and healthy communities.”

“The US Department of the Treasury played a critical role in helping us attract the private investment needed to bring supermarkets to low-income communities where access to healthy food choices can be limited,” stated Jeremy Nowak, President and CEO of The Reinvestment Fund, which managed the PA program and raised the private capital match for it. “We are excited about what we can do together on a national scale. These investments drive the health and economic vitality of these communities, particularly during difficult economic times. Supermarkets not only improve access to affordable, healthy foods, they also bring much-needed jobs.”

For more information:

Questions about the success of the PA program and the financing model: Patricia Smith, 215-574-5898 or patricia.smith@trfund.com Visit: http://www.trfund.com/financing/realestate/HFFI_FirstLadyVisit.html

Questions about food access and health questions: The Food Trust deputy executive director John Weidman: 267-679-4460 (cell) or jweidman@thefoodtrust.org

Questions about the national Healthy Food Financing Initiative policy efforts: Judith Bell, President, PolicyLink, 510-390-8179 (cell) or jbelle@policylink.org