



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Governor Blagojevich calls first meeting of the Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force

Group will work to expand local markets for Illinois-grown fruits and vegetables

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich announced today a new state task force will begin work to create a comprehensive food production and distribution system to expand the availability of Illinois-grown produce. The Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force will meet this Wednesday, January 30 at 10 a.m. in the Illinois Department of Agriculture auditorium.

“Our state is one of the nation’s leading producers of agricultural products, but imports more than 90 percent of its food,” Gov. Blagojevich said. “If we could develop a system to satisfy consumers’ demand for organic and locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables and keep food sales in-state, we’d have a tremendous opportunity to improve the health of our diets and revitalize rural communities.”

The task force consists of 31 members and includes organic farmers, specialty crop producers, food processors and distributors, a consumer, a food retailer and representatives of the state departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Human Services. Its charge is to make policy and funding recommendations for expanding and supporting a state local and organic food system and for identifying obstacles to an increase in locally-grown and organic food production.

“Food travels an average of 1,500 miles before it reaches Illinois consumers,” Agriculture Director Chuck Hartke said. “Our challenge is to become more self-sufficient and to make Illinois produce more readily available, especially in inner-city neighborhoods where fresh fruits and vegetables often are in short supply.”

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The Illinois Food, Farms and Jobs Act, which Gov. Blagojevich signed into law on Agriculture Day at the 2007 Illinois State Fair, created the task force. Legislative sponsors of the act were Sen. Jacqueline Collins (D-Chicago) and Rep. Julie Hamos (D-Evanston). "This task force was born out of a grass roots, statewide coalition that was motivated to take new and innovative approaches to producing and distributing local and organic foods in Illinois," Rep. Hamos said. "I'm looking forward to seeing the policy and funding recommendations presented by this diverse committee of hands-on experts."

The task force will submit its plan to the General Assembly by Sept. 1, 2008.

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