

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

A national, nonprofit, membership organization
1303 J St., Suite 250 | Sacramento, CA 95814
lgc.org | newpartners.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, February 10, 2014
Michele Warren, mkwarren@lgc.org, 916-448-1198 x308

Note for reporters: During the event, please check in at the conference registration desk outside the Centennial Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Denver Hotel to obtain a media credential.

Good Food and How to Get It to the People

Healthy food access and the design of healthier, more active communities highlights national smart growth forum

You are what you eat – that’s true for people – and as we’re learning to appreciate more and more – just as valid for the health and vitality of communities as a whole.

At the 13th annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference in Denver this week, many of the nation’s experts and leaders in the field of healthy food systems will highlight the dynamics of food systems and the health of the nation’s body politic.

The largest and most comprehensive smart growth/sustainable communities conference held in the U.S. each year, the New Partners event will be held February 13-15, at the Hyatt Regency Denver Hotel.

Across the country, how and where food is produced, processed, distributed and accessed has significant implications for the health and livelihood of residents, regardless of where they live. A special, pre-conference workshop (Feb. 12) on **“Advancing Healthy, Equitable Food Systems”** will examine how food systems have become increasingly important to the smart growth movement, as rural and urban communities reflect on development and plan for their future.

This half-day workshop will explore local and regional food systems through the lens of smart growth, with a variety of perspectives on fostering economic opportunities and community development through “good food” production, processing, distribution and access.

“This involves building the capacity of local governments to engage in food system development, including strategies for environmental and policy change at the local and regional level,” said Laura Goddeeris, a specialist from Michigan State University’s Center for Regional Food Systems, who will facilitate the workshop. “Communities around the nation are forging partnerships and identifying resources to increase access to healthy, affordable food for all while also creating economic opportunities and promoting responsible land use.”

The workshop will cover innovative models and practical guidance about the process, tools, funding, resources and implementation, including what have we done well and what can we do better to implement more healthy, equitable food systems.

The workshop is made possible by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems, through funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Food & Community program, and additional support by LiveWell Colorado and the Local Government Commission.

The Saturday morning plenary on **“Smart Growth: A Prescription for Healthy Communities and Vibrant Economies”** (Feb. 15) will explore practical, integrated strategies that can improve public health, while creating social and economic opportunity within a community. Healthier food and more physical exercise – and building communities for people, not cars – are among the best long-term prescriptions to ensure good health.

“At the core of smart growth lies the desire to make people and their communities healthier and more prosperous,” said Kate Meis, Executive Director of the Local Government Commission, which is organizing the conference.

By creating more walkable communities, good transportation networks and better access to healthy food, we can also generate new business, job opportunities and a healthier quality of life. We make it easier to walk and ride transit when we spend money on repairing roads and bridges. When access to healthy and locally grown food is improved, we amplify the impact of our spending and protect the environment.

“Given that the demand for health care will likely increase with current chronic disease and demographic trends, the most effective long-term way to manage costs and assure affordable access for everybody is to improve the health of our population in the first place,” said Kaiser Permanente Vice President Tyler Norris,

one of the plenary speakers. "We can reduce chronic disease by helping people become more active and eat better."

The plenary speakers include Denver City Councilmember Deborah Ortega; Mickki Langston, the Mile High Business Alliance's Executive Director; Khanh Nguyen, the Colorado Health Foundation's Healthy Living Portfolio Director; and Ismael Guerrero, Executive Director at the Denver Housing Authority.

Three other conference sessions also focus on access to healthy food.

Millions of Americans live in food deserts where fresh foods are not readily available on a daily basis. **"When Food Deserts Become Just Desserts"** (Feb. 14) will explore three initiatives that have addressed food deserts head-on and demonstrate that we can provide a more sustainable way of providing fresh foods to the entire population. Healthy food experts speaking at the session include Kevin Nelson, Senior Policy Analyst with the U.S. EPA; Mari Gallagher, President of the National Center for Public Research; Alphonzo Cross, Co-Founder of the Boxcar Grocer in Atlanta; and Laura Flamm, Virtual Supermarket Program Coordinator for the Baltimore City Health Department.

Healthy and accessible food is key to creating livable and sustainable communities. **"Smart Recipes for Smart Growth: Increasing Healthy Access and Local Food Systems"** (Feb. 14) will focus on local food plans and strategies that have connected residents to producers by using food trucks, developing incubators and regional hubs, and planting urban gardens. Urban agriculture, food hubs and local food districts are helping to improve the diets and overall health of residents.

On Saturday morning (Feb. 15), four practitioners will share promising examples of approaches and strategies, as well as specific planning and policy tools to cultivate food system transformation, focusing on the best illustrations of partnerships, programs and public investments in a session on **"Growing Food Connections for Sustainable Communities."**

"Urban and rural communities across the country are creating networks and connections to strengthen their food systems to sustain local farms, improve access to healthy food and increase community prosperity," said Julia Freedgood, Assistant Vice President of Programs at the American Farmland Trust.

LOCAL TOURS: The conference also includes 13 optional tours of local model projects, including one that explores the food system in Metro Denver. During one Thursday tour (Feb. 13), **"From the Roots to the Rooftop: Bringing Healthy Food to Denver's Communities,"** a variety of innovative approaches to growing, processing, distributing and selling local food in an urban community will be considered. Some are in food deserts and increase access to affordable healthy food in underserved neighborhoods, while others ensure that fresh local food can be enjoyed year-round, while also contributing to community prosperity and sustainability.

About the conference: The 13th annual New Partners for Smart Growth conference spans three days and covers cutting-edge smart growth issues, the latest research, implementation tools and strategies, successful case studies and new policies. Perhaps most importantly, the event also offers attendees the opportunity to network and coordinate with their peers as well as practitioners from many different disciplines.

With a dynamic mix of over 300 speakers and 80 sessions, the conference will draw a national audience of more than 1,200 elected officials and government agency leaders as well as developers, builders, bankers, realtors, and advocates and professionals in planning, transportation, public health, landscape architecture, architecture, housing, social and environmental justice, parks and recreation, public works, education and the environment. Each year, the forum showcases strategies and opportunities for greater collaboration among smart growth, equitable development and environmental justice advocates.

The conference has more than 200 sponsors and cosponsors, including the U.S. EPA, Kaiser Permanente, AARP, the National Association of REALTORS®, the Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Forest Service, HDR, and leading foundations, advocacy groups and professional organizations. For a full list of supporters and more details about the conference agenda: NewPartners.org

#