Local Food Production – A Single Answer to Multiple Problems?  According to a recent article in the Sacramento Bee, just 1.3 percent of imported fish, vegetables, fruit and other foods are inspected, yet even those few government inspections regularly reveal food unfit for human consumption. Frozen catfish from China, beans from Belgium, blackberries from Guatemala, baked goods from Canada, India and the Philippines are among the long lists of tainted foods that have been detained at the border. Can the rash of animal deaths due to imported pet food be repeated in the human population?

At the same time, the national obesity epidemic has focused attention on unhealthy diets, particularly for those living in low-income urban neighborhoods, where a scarcity of grocery stores often makes it difficult and expensive to buy fresh, nutritious foods.

Concurrently, farmers throughout the state are finding it difficult to stay in business and increasingly are selling off their land to real estate developers. The result is something that air quality professionals, traffic engineers, environmentalists, and many California residents abhor — sprawl!

What if communities were to put measures in place that would increase the use of locally grown food? Could this begin to address these multiple problems at once?

Serving Locally Grown Foods in Government Facilities: Kaiser Permanente has recently begun to make use of locally-grown food in some of its hospitals. Schools in the Cities of Davis and Berkeley are among those serving locally-grown food to children. While we don’t know of any county or city-funded facilities making such an effort, it’s an idea worthy of consideration.

Expanding Farmers Markets: Establishing and supporting farmers markets can be an effective and flexible way for local governments to make fresh, healthy, and locally grown foods available to residents. Farmers markets can usually support themselves with vendor fees, which help minimize the cost to local governments. They are fairly easy to develop and do not face the stringent land use requirements applied to supermarkets.

There are numerous ways that local governments can provide critical logistical support essential to the operation of a farmers market. They can organize and manage a market at little cost. They also can support nonprofits and other groups that want to develop and run a farmers market.

Other measures include designating public land for a market, providing traffic control and parking, getting public works to prepare the site, provide water and electricity, collect garbage, and oversee cleanup. Promoting the market through city newsletters, official signs and banners and other means is also very helpful.

In Southern California, the market manager of the Santa Monica Farmers Market airs a live radio broadcast every Saturday. The program, called The Market Report, reviews produce available that week. Public access television channels might provide another venue in many communities.

A very useful strategy in low-income communities is to encourage participation by vendors that participate in nutritional food stamp programs such as the WIC and Senior Nutrition programs. Markets that accept vouchers from these federal programs can help income- and age-qualified residents buy products they otherwise would not be able to afford.

The City of San Francisco has worked with the State of California to enable food stamp recipients to use Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) payments at farmers markets. In the past, vendors were unable to accept EBT payments because the machines required to conduct the transaction are so costly. The City and State eliminated this barrier by providing a wireless EBT card machine at the Alemany Farmers Market. All vendors can use the machine, which allows more low-income residents to shop, and the market and vendors to sell more produce.

Direct marketing to local restaurants: An increasing number of restaurants are serving locally grown food. They need a central place where they can go to order what they want. In Howard County, Maryland, the County hired an agricultural marketer who helps farmers to sell directly to grocery stores, restaurants, and individuals.

Getting Started With A Food Policy Council: Local governments throughout the nation have been using food policy councils to look at the big picture, from economic development and agricultural preservation to healthier citizens. Councils are made up of different people from the community and different departments from state and local government working together.
According to Mark Winne who established the first Food Policy Council in Hartford, Connecticut in 1992, “It sounds so simple and simplistic, perhaps, but just sitting around the table with different interests in the food system creates new relationships that lead to new solutions... the movement really has been picking up steam...There’s been a lot of momentum in the last two or three years.”

The City of Los Angeles is providing $100,000 a year for food access programs, used to fund farmers markets, community gardens, and a fresh-food access guide. This idea was developed by the local Food Policy Council.

In Hartford, Connecticut, the Food Policy Council worked with local transit agencies to bring low-income residents directly to affordable food stores. They also monitor grocery prices to assure fair and consistent pricing policies. In Toronto, the council has developed school food programs and community gardens, and worked in other policy arenas to encourage local food production and improve food access.

**California’s Water Future:** According to the Association of California Water Agencies, California will be chronically short of water by 2010. Now is the time to determine where our water is used and what we might do to use less.

Outdoor water needs consume about half of all the water used in the home. A Public Policy Institute of California study last year revealed that 80% of that water is going to maintain lawns. The document, titled *Lawns and Water Demand in California*, outlines policies that can be employed to reduce this usage.

According to this report, evidence suggests that consumers are more sensitive to water prices than previously thought. Increasing block rate structures may be better than uniform rates at encouraging conservation and they have a built-in equity component. Larger lots and higher water use within an area are generally associated with higher-income households.

Many water utilities adopted block rate structures in the drought of the early 1990’s, however there has been little progress since then. The legislature passed AB 2572 in 2004 which requires utilities with 3,000 or more customers to install water meters over the next two decades. Since then, builders have been required to install meters in new homes, but utilities have not been required to read them. Cities can do much to speed up the implementation of this policy. For instance, the fast-growing town of Lodi aims to finish installing water meters over the next two decades. Since then, builders have been required to install meters in new homes, but utilities have not been required to read them. Cities can do much to speed up the implementation of this policy.

The City of Lancaster, for example, requires that new and refurbished landscaping feature vegetation that uses 25% less water than that required by the model ordinance.

However, some cities have taken this legislation seriously. The City of Lancaster, for example, requires that all public landscaping be drought-tolerant, and the Coachella Valley Water District recently adopted an ordinance requiring that new and refurbished landscaping feature vegetation that uses 25% less water than that required by the model ordinance.

Further, the Association of California Water Agencies reports that 40% of all water used comes from groundwater, but during a drought, groundwater usage increases to 60%. Capturing rainwater and allowing it to penetrate into the ground is of increasing importance.

For a copy of *Lawns and Water Demand in California*, go to the Public Policy Institute of California’s website at www.ppic.org. For a complete overview of water-conserving and water supply principles appropriate for implementation by cities and counties, take a look at the Ahwahnee Water Principles at www.lgc.org/ahwahnee/h2o_principles.html.

**Santa Barbara Invites Health to the Planning Table:** Several months ago, Santa Barbara Councilmember Helene Schneider facilitated the organization of a committee representing all the health providers in the County of Santa Barbara - from hospitals to neighborhood clinics. The goal was to get health professionals involved in Santa Barbara’s general plan review and other planning issues. Nonprofit organizations concerned with health issues including asthma and diabetes were also included.

With program guidance from the LGC, the group organized a dinner meeting. Over 60 health professionals attended. Speakers Dr. Alex Kelter and Judy Corbett addressed the link between land use and health. The City’s head planner, John Ledbetter, and director of transportation, Rob Dayton, also participated.

The result? City staff connected with health professionals, most of whom had never participated in the land use process. Some attendees pledged to work on the general plan update. Others vowed to bring the land use concerns of low income neighborhoods to the planning process. According to Ledbetter, “we never hear from low-income communities — your input will be invaluable.”