



## Keep Your Eye on These Food Policy Bills

JUL 7, 2017 *By Amber Stott*

Since 2012, there has been a [significant spike](#) in the number of food policy legislation and ordinances passed at the state and local levels. We live in a state where 18 percent of our [landfills contain edible waste](#) and [60 percent of young children eat fast food weekly](#). So it's no

surprise that policymakers are taking aim at a broken food system to improve the health of California youth and the planet.

Chef Brenda Ruiz, president of the [Sacramento Food Policy Council](#), stays abreast of multiple bills at once to educate advocates that volunteer with the council. She credits a mobilizing community for the recent burst of activity around food legislation and believes policy is the key to lasting change. The council encourages local residents to participate in the political process so their views end up reflected in the laws.

Some Sacramento advocates recently shared with *Comstock's* which state legislation and local policy they're currently watching:

## **SCUSD Policies**

Ruiz is among the many advocates (including myself) who have provided public comment to Sacramento City Unified School District, which is taking bold steps to improve student health. In June, SCUSD announced a timeline to build a central kitchen by 2021, a facility that will expand the district's farm-to-school program by allowing more entrées to be prepared from scratch using locally-sourced ingredients. The effort is funded by Measure R, which passed in 2012.

The SCUSD school board is also expected to approve [a new school wellness policy](#) to eliminate the marketing of junk food during school hours. Cookie dough sales for prom, for example, would have to be replaced with products that meet nutrition standards, or wait until after school to be sold. Because federal law already prevents schools from distributing items that don't comply with nutrition standards,

the policy heightens the district's commitment to teaching healthy habits to students.

### **AB 841: Restricting Junk Food Marketing in Schools**

In May, I gave testimony at the Assembly Education Committee on [AB 841](#) which echoes this cry to remove unhealthy advertising from schools. If passed, AB 841 would make it law for schools to do exactly what SCUSD is already doing voluntarily, and prevent schools from marketing unhealthy foods and beverages during the school day. That means team uniforms, vending machines and score boards in schools would have to replace logos or slogans of any drink or edible products that aren't healthy.

Dennis Cuevas-Romero, government relations director for the American Heart Association in Sacramento, believes policies such as these are important to protect students' health. "When kids grow up and start to get molded, they're very persuaded by what they see," he says. Ideally, he would like children surrounded by healthy fruit and vegetable options at school: "These habits will live with our kids for the rest of their lives." In a state where 2 in 5 [children are overweight or obese](#), this legislation targets one of the culprits of poor diets. In May, AB 841 passed out of Assembly and moved to the Senate Education Committee for consideration.

### **SB 782: California-Grown Fresh School Meals**

State bill [SB 782](#) seeks to establish a grant program to incentivize schools to purchase more California-grown products. The funds would

create an economic win for farmers, while also improving student health with more access to farm-to-fork fare.

In May, the bill passed out of the Senate and goes to the Assembly Agriculture Committee for discussion.

### **SB 732: Improving Farmland Conservation Planning and Policy Development**

In good news for farmers, [SB 732](#) would add \$2 million from the Governor's proposed budget to incentivize local governments to preserve agricultural lands. According to Jeanne Merrill, policy director at California Climate and Agriculture Network, the funding puts more power in the hands of city and county governments, who already hold the authority to protect these spaces by incorporating them into their general plans. Merrill says the bill also creates a framework for what open space may look like.

This bill passed out of the Senate in May and in late June moved from the Assembly Agriculture Committee to the Assembly Local Government Committee.

### **AB 1219: California Good Samaritan Food Donation Act**

Melissa Romero, a policy associate with Californians Against Waste, is rooting for [AB 1219](#) and AB 954. She believes both will have a dual outcome of reducing food waste and increasing donations to food banks. AB 1219 will clarify existing laws to make it easier for businesses to donate unused food, such as items that wind up in grocery store dumpsters or leftovers from catered events. The law ensures that facilities donating food to charity would not be liable for

any injury from consuming that donation. “That silence and ambiguity causes potential donors to throw out food,” Romero says.

AB 1219 passed out of the Assembly in May and was ordered to the Senate, where it passed out of the Health Committee in June and moves to the Judiciary Committee next.

### **AB 954: The Food Waste Reduction and Date Labeling Act of 2017**

Similarly, [AB 954](#) would improve date labels on edibles, creating clarity around food safety, and making it easier for consumers to know what food they should toss and what can still be eaten. Romero believes this law would reduce the amount of consumable waste in landfills, and possibly increase donations to food banks.

**AB 954 received a passing vote in the Assembly in May and will be heard next in the Senate Health Committee.**

Romero views policy as a path to building informed consumers, and improving current conditions for people and the planet. “One day we’ll get to a point where less food is going to landfills,” she says, “and I hope we get there sooner than later.”