

Area foodies, activists weigh in with a wish list for President Obama

By **Monica Eng**

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As the White House welcomes our first foodie president and a first lady who has publicly talked about buying organic produce and clearing high fructose corn syrup out of her cabinets, the Chicago culinary community is filled with hope.

To tap into what those particular hopes and dreams may be, we asked a handful of activists, chefs and farmers to give us their food-policy wish lists for the Obama administration. Here they are:

**Will Allen, CEO of Growing Power:
Expand urban farming**

"We want to ask the city and state and nation to allocate money [from the stimulus package] to develop urban agriculture. We need to change the current food system. Industrial agriculture has not solved our food problems. We have more hunger and food-borne disease than ever before in our country. "We need to pay attention to growing food locally to feed the community and developing local food systems that include urban farms where we can intensively grow foods for people to eat instead of huge fields of corn and soybeans."



**Jim Slama, founder and president of FamilyFarmed.org:
Make local foods part of the green jobs initiative**

"The administration is committed to creating new green jobs. Local food production is a tremendous opportunity to develop them. For example, people in Illinois spend nearly \$50 billion on food annually. If we could grow and process 20 percent more of this locally, it would add \$10 billion in new food sales for Illinois producers each year. This would create thousands of new jobs--in farming, processing, local food system infrastructure and farmers markets--in rural and urban areas, and add tremendous economic growth."

**Terra Brockman, a farmer and founder of The Land Connection:
Encourage new farmers**

"Less than 1 million people list farming as their primary occupation. ... In addition, the average age of these few million farmers is about 60. "When you look at the number of under-30 farmers and the number of over-60 farmers, you can see where this is heading. We need policies to encourage new young farmers to start farming. If we had a large initiative in this direction, it would be the gift that keeps on giving, as it would improve our rural communities' economic development while providing more nutritious foods, which will reduce health-care costs."



**Carrie Nahabedian, executive chef at Naha restaurant:
More truth in labeling**

"When there is a plastic bottle that is only supposed to be used once because of the chemicals used to make it, it should say that. And the onus for doing it should be on the bottle manufacturer, so when it gets to someone like Hi-C, it's all already on there. I want to see better food safety for children's products. I want to see stricter guidelines for organic, natural and sustainable labeling. I think it is too vague and it confuses the consumer. Why not specify what 'grass-fed,' or 'cornfed' or 'natural' means?"

**Rochelle Davis, founding executive director
of the Healthy Schools Campaign:
Adequately fund school food programs**

"This includes increasing the federal reimbursement rate to \$3.50 for lunch [it currently is \$2.59], providing grants to schools for kitchen facilities that allow the preparation of healthful meals, grants for training of school-food workers, a commodity food program that supports health and support for farm-to-school programs that bring the freshest, healthiest produce to schools."

