

The HEN Post

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Public Policy Issue 2011

Fighting the Food Fight: An Overview of Food Policy Councils and the Role of the Food and Nutrition Professional

by Erika Hval

Introduction

Call it tempting, comforting, diet or delicious, there is certainly one thing that food is not: avoidable. Food and nutrition impact everyone, everywhere, everyday. Every level of our nation's food system—production, distribution, processing, consumption and post-consumption—have profound implications for our personal health, the economy, social justice issues and the environment.¹ Assembling a team of food experts to attend to these consequences would seem a daunting task, requiring at the very least professionals from the agricultural, labor, academic, environmental, culinary, public health, business, legal, policy and consumer sectors. Yet despite the diverse composition of such a group, comprehensive entities like these are, in fact, springing up across the country in the form of food policy councils.

Armed with extensive knowledge concerning the complexity and scope of their respective food systems, these councils work with policymakers to ensure food is prioritized on political agendas and that a variety of food-related sectors are considered when making decisions. Dietitians, and other health professionals, stand to contribute much to these councils as individuals who understand the negative impact that poor food policies have on the well-being of their patients. Dietitians stand to learn as much from other community food system participants as they contribute when participating in these bodies.

Ready to fight for good food? Here's what you need to know:

What is a Food Policy Council?

According to the Community Food Coalition's Food Policy Council Program, a leader in research and resources on the topic, food policy councils "bring together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop recommendations on how to improve it."² Mark Winne, author of *Closing the Food Gap* and *Food Rebels, Guerrilla Gardeners, and Smart-Cookin' Mamas* and head of the CFC's program, emphasizes the influence on actual policy that these councils strive to make within their defined jurisdiction. Less concerned with launching organizations or creating more programs (although these may be natural byproducts), food policy councils function more like a fictional "Department of Food" might.³ Food policy councils investigate operations and legislation related to food so as to influence its regulation in such a way that it would benefit as many individuals as possible while doing the least amount of harm.

What do Food Policy Councils Do?

A food policy council might conduct a regional food

analysis in order to obtain a clearer picture of how each sector affects and contributes to the food system, and then issue recommendations to policymakers about how to improve it. It might examine existing or pending legislature and suggest alterations so as to benefit the food system and all of its stakeholders.⁴ A food policy council in Iowa helped improve food stamp policy,⁵ while one in Alaska worked on strengthening a state product preference initiative.⁶ The work of a council differs depending on its location, size, composition and various other factors, but each strives to highlight the effects that policy has on food and to ensure that these effects are advantageous for the community as a whole.

How are Food Policy Councils Structured?

Food policy councils may operate within one or more states, counties, or cities. At times, cities and counties will join forces to create a larger regional council, but neighborhood-based councils have also been reported. Many councils operate under government statutes or resolutions, but some simply maintain written letters of governmental support or sponsorship. Still others have no official governmental affiliation and run a completely grassroots effort.⁷ Councils may also apply for non-profit status to assist funding efforts.

Each model has its advantages and disadvantages, especially when it comes to government affiliation. Operating under a government mandate increases chances that policymakers will pay attention to recommendations and oftentimes includes a small amount of funding, but these arrangements can impose limitations to the work that can be approved. Alternatively, the grassroots approach offers little or no limitations to the work that a council may undertake, but also carries no guarantee that anyone will listen to its suggestions. In addition, funding a grassroots effort can prove difficult.⁸

Food policy councils rarely provide full time jobs: most councils are volunteer-based; very few have one part- or full-time post.⁹ Registered dietitians (RDs) can and do hold these positions, leading with their keen awareness of how any of the various barriers to healthy food access can significantly harm citizens' health.¹⁰ Council leadership also presents an exciting learning opportunity for RDs, as the councils address many food issues that reach beyond the scope of nutrition and health.

Food policy council size varies, but often takes the form of 10-20 individuals with decision-making capacity heading the council and directing the remainder of the membership. Some councils create and focus on several specific and

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HEN NEWSLETTER DEADLINES AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submission Guidelines: The HEN Newsletter features viewpoints, statements and articles that provide perspective on domestic and international food security, food production and environmental food issues. We also publish descriptions of programs, community intervention, research, legislation, websites or curriculums of interest to our members. We especially seek submissions from our members. These viewpoints, statements and other information do not imply endorsement by HEN and the American Dietetic Association. Articles may be reproduced for education materials only. HEN Newsletter owns the copyright of all published materials unless prior agreement was made.

Submission Deadlines

Summer 2011 –
June 15, 2011

Fall 2011 –
September 15, 2011

Winter 2012 –
December 15, 2011

For more specific guidelines on article format, length, referencing and additional information that must accompany articles, see the HEN Web site – www.hendpg.com. Click on Members Area, enter your Member Number, click on Member Newsletter, click on DPG Newsletter Deadlines and Submission guidelines.



Message from the Chair

by Christopher Wharton, PhD

Hello HEN members, and welcome to a special edition of *The HEN Post* focusing on public policy. HEN leaders, recognizing the amazing number of important advances in food-related policy issues in the past year, decided to dedicate a newsletter to discussing what has been going on in Washington and elsewhere around the country.

This issue includes discussion of particular legislation passed or considered in Washington, how HEN has been involved there and elsewhere, and how ADA has been involved or has provided opportunities to its members. We hope you enjoy the articles herein, and please feel free to contact authors for more information.

This will be my last opportunity to address you in the newsletter as my tenure as HEN chair ends shortly. As such, I want to thank all of you for your excellent work in the areas of food security, hunger, sustainability, and the many other areas in which your commitment is so important. HEN members are at once passionate, vocal, critical, and supportive, and all of these qualities make HEN an indispensable DPG within ADA. Please keep at it, because the importance of what you do personally, professionally, and in relation to ADA cannot be overstated. I am

proud to remain a HEN member, and I look forward to HEN's advancement under the leadership of Alison Harmon, PhD, RD, your incoming chair. I would also like to thank Kelly Horton, MS, RD, past chair of HEN, Erin Bergquist, MPH, RD, LD, HEN secretary, Rebecca Liebes, PhD, RD, HEN treasurer, and Angie Tagtow, MS, RD, LD, HEN's HOD representative. Their hard work, insight, and professionalism helped move HEN forward in ways I could never have done alone. It is also particularly important to thank Bettina Tahsin, RD, LDN, CDE, and Sherry Lam, whose consistent work has kept quality *The HEN Post* newsletters coming your way all year long.

Sincerely,
Chris Wharton, PhD
HEN Chair

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effective task groups, others hold regular public meetings to encourage as many from their jurisdiction to join as possible. Many councils make use of both strategies.¹¹

The Role of the RD in a Food Policy Council

According to a recent survey of 31 food policy councils in the United States, over half of the represented councils report having at least one actively involved RD. Registered dietitians have participated in public meetings, steering committees, taskforce groups and council boards. Registered dietitians have also developed, implemented and led a few of these councils, professionally trained to understand the overall impact of poor food policies that significantly impair the health of communities.¹² As men-

tioned, food policy councils involve input from experts working in a myriad of food-related sectors and thus registered dietitians interested in a leadership position must be willing to take a holistic approach to their guidance and suggestions.

While paid posts elude many in the food policy council realm, some RDs do get compensated when in chief positions.¹³ Yet with salary aside, food policy councils provide a key opportunity for RDs to expand their leadership roles and responsibilities while gaining hands-on experience in a variety of relevant fields. Furthermore, the work of registered dietitians not only relates to the tasks and goals of food policy councils, but RDs are actually in demand. One hundred percent of survey takers reporting not having, or being unsure about having, an RD on their food

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HEN Members Release Report on Health and Resilience of Iowa Food System

by Angie Tagtow, MS, RD, LD, Owner, Environmental Nutrition Solutions and Susan Roberts, JD, MS, RD, Roberts Law Firm, PLC

“We all eat. Food is essential to our existence. It’s an important part of Iowa’s heritage and culture. Yet, we often take for granted the large systems that produce, process, distribute, make accessible and dispose of the food we eat.” (from *Cultivating Resilience: A Food System Blueprint that Advances the Health of Iowans, Farms and Communities*)

Today, Iowa’s food systems are challenged by: environmental threats of climate change, water shortages, and depleted soils; energy threats of decreasing fossil fuels and rising energy costs; health threats of increasing rates of obesity and, at the same time, increasing hunger; and economic threats of fewer farmers and increased control of our food by large corporations. In response to these growing problems, multidisciplinary discussions took place among food system stakeholders across Iowa about the future of food, resulting in the report *Cultivating Resilience: A Food System Blueprint that Advances the Health of Iowans, Farms and Communities*. The objective of the report is to measure the resilience and health of Iowa’s food system through a report card leading to recommendations for research, programs and policies to ensure a food system that supports healthier Iowans, communities, economies, and the environment. As the past chairs of the HEN DPG, we analyzed 14 indicators of our food system that cut across production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption, health and waste management areas. Five of the 14 indicators exhibited a healthy trend whereas nine indicators exhibited an unhealthy trend – designating the state of Iowa’s food system as “poor.”

According to the report, “Evaluating Iowa’s food system as a whole, allows a broad, comprehensive perspective on the complexities and interconnectedness of our food system. This report is critical for local and state policymak-

ers to guide them in making decisions that strengthens the health and resilience of Iowa’s food system.”

Three recommendations focus on strengthening Iowa’s food system and policy infrastructure at the state, regional and local levels. Twenty-eight recommendations offer specific, action-oriented strategies that restore health and resilience across Iowa’s food system sectors. The report offers a model to assist counties and municipalities to replicate the process.

This blueprint was presented to the newly formed Iowa Food Systems Council (www.IowaFoodSystemsCouncil.org) as a stepping-stone in examining Iowa’s food system through a comprehensive lens. This framework creates opportunities to broaden this examination and dialog; allows ongoing monitoring of the health and resilience of Iowa’s food system; engages diverse stakeholders; encourages public-private partnerships; and implements initiatives that assure more resilient and healthy food systems in Iowa.

The report is available at <http://www.iowa-foodsystemscouncil.org/cultivating-resilience/>

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation generously provided funding for development of this report. For further information, please visit the Foundation’s website at www.wkkf.org. The University of Northern Iowa Center on Health Disparities provided fiscal administration of the grant.

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policy council stated that they desired one.¹⁴ RDs looking to make a significant impact on the level of food policy will find themselves in an excellent position to become highly involved and respected within food policy councils.

Resources

Excited to support your own food policy council? Some councils actively recruit members, however many operate under such limited time and funding that it is difficult for them to do so. If you haven’t noticed a food policy

council in your area, that is no guarantee that one doesn’t exist. Councils are always looking for more dedicated members and most would love to be approached by an RD, especially if looking to get seriously involved. Take the next step with the following resources:

The Community Food Security Coalition’s Food Policy Program website maintains a comprehensive list of operating food policy councils and their contacts as well as a wealth of information about councils overall: <http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/>

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HEN MISSION

To empower members to be leaders in sustainable and accessible food and water systems

HEN VISION

To optimize the nation’s health by promoting access to nutritious food and clean water from a secure and sustainable food system

THE BENEFITS OF HEN MEMBERSHIP INCLUDE:

- Quarterly newsletter with occasional CPE articles and reproducible fact sheets.
- Access to the HEN listserv that provides the latest information and relevant conferences.
- Subscription to the *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* published by Taylor and Francis.
- Member-only access to articles and resources via the HEN Web site — www.HENdpg.org.
- Collaboration with food and nutrition professionals across the United States and the world.
- Opportunity to be nominated for HEN awards.
- Notices of related conferences around the country.
- Potential for national and international recognition when working on HEN projects.
- Eligible to vote in HEN Executive Committee election.

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An Account of the ADA Public Policy Workshop – Feb. 6-8, 2011

by Helen E. Costello, MS, RD, LD and Susan L. Roberts, JD, MS, RD

Each year, the American Dietetic Association convenes a Public Policy Workshop (PPW) in Washington, DC to engage, educate and mobilize nutrition professionals to educate our nation's leaders about the impact of food and nutrition on the lives of Americans.

This year, over 450 ADA members attended the three-day workshop which culminated with visits to members' respective senators' and representatives' offices.

The ADA Legislative and Public Policy Committee (LPPC), a volunteer committee of ADA members, had set priorities for ADA members to focus on in their legislative efforts, which are executed by the ADA PIA staff. These include Aging, Child Nutrition, Food and Food Safety, Health Literacy and Nutrition Advancement, Hunger Free Kids Act 2010, Medical Nutrition Therapy and Medicare/Medicaid, Nutrition Monitoring and Research and Obesity/Overweight/Healthy Weight. PPW is geared towards addressing upcoming legislation related to nutrition, the role of the RD/DTR in legislation, and the impact the legislation has on the people we serve.

Three pieces of legislation were the focus of this year's PPW: 1) reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, 2) support for the Healthier Lifestyles and Prevention America Act (HeLP America Act), and 3) reduction of health disparities through the Medical Foods Equity Act.

The Older Americans Act

The Older Americans Act and its nutrition titles support millions of seniors with meals, specifically congregate meals and Meals on Wheels. The consequences of undernourishment and dehydration are quality of life issues for the growing number of older Americans. ADA is asking Congress to support healthy aging by strengthening the role of nutrition in the Older Americans Act. Specifically, ADA is requesting authorization for a National Nutrition Resource Center that would identify innovative ways to increase cost effective food and nutrition services in food and nutrition programs serving older adults. ADA is also asking to ensure that programs hire qualified nutrition staff and increase the availability of nutrition screening, education and counseling.

The Medical Foods Equity Act

The Medical Foods Equity Act will require coverage for medically necessary food for patients with inborn errors of metabolism, such as PKU, that are limited by what they can eat. ADA is supporting this bill because it is an impactful nutrition intervention that prevents disability and has a clear cost benefit outcome. The cost of the supplemental formulas that are required to provide sufficient nutrition to patients with inborn errors is about \$7,000 a year. The annual cost of institutionalizing a patient affected by not having the formula is in the range of \$60,000 per year, or \$200,000 per year for an inpatient mental health facility. The impact of providing families with these preventive measures is stunning. The benefits of offering these formulas far outweigh the costs

of institutionalizing a severely disabled child or adult.

ADA is supporting this legislation

We encourage you to look at these bills, read ADA's positions on them and educate your legislative delegation. More information and messaging for these pieces of legislation can be found on www.eatright.org under the Public Policy tab. This information is useful when speaking with members of Congress about these issues, therefore making it easy for ADA members to advocate for legislation important to our clients and our profession. Whatever the practice setting, all food and nutrition professionals have a stake in advocating for these bills.

Other Topics

In addition to these two bills, the topics of food and beverage taxes and the farm bill were debated. HEN member and ADAPAC Board member, Nancy Becker, MS, RD, LD, moderated a debate on food and beverage taxes between Michael Jacobson from the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Richard Williams from the Mercatus Center which stimulated great conversation and debate.

Mr. Williams presented that the behavioral impact of a soda tax would have minimal effect on weight management. He argued that people make substitutes with other foods and that any proposed tax is not high enough to effectively change behavior. Mr. Jacobson presented a health argument for using the tax to reduce consumption. He highlighted the rise in soft drink and sugar consumption since the 1970's and its contribution to higher caloric loads in the American diet without adding any nutritional benefit.

HEN and LPPC member, Karen Ehrens, RD, LRD, presented on a plenary panel regarding the upcoming Farm Bill legislation. As the Farm Bill reauthorization approaches in 2012, many groups, including ADA are forming coalitions and preparing positions on the legislation. Karen is lead on the LPPC to review the current legislation and work on ADA's position. Her presentation outlined the scope of the bill as it relates to nutrition professionals and the importance of the titles that affect millions of Americans' access to nutritious food.

PPW is a worthwhile learning experience that we encourage all ADA members to attend. The agenda was packed, but there was always adequate time to network and visit your congressional delegation with ADA members from your own state. We hope to see you next year in DC. Find more information about the PPW, LPPC and ADA's advocacy efforts at the ADA website at: <http://www.eatright.org/ppw/>

An online map of some food policy councils across the nation: <http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=100461870968053608340.0004729d8ff3817adc166&z=3>

Food Policy Councils, Lessons Learned is an excellent report providing comprehensive information on the characteristics of food policy councils and recommendations on how to continue improving them: http://foodsecurity.org/pub/Food_Policy_Councils_Report.pdf

Erika Hval is currently finishing her last undergraduate semester in Nutrition & Dietetics at New York University. She volunteered with the ADA PIA office last summer, and during FNCE 2010 and PPW 2011. She is a student member of the ADA and HEN, and is currently developing obesity policy research as part of an independent study.

1. For an excellent example of how each of these food system phases operate and interact to affect the overall well-being of a city, as well as policy recommendations that address many of the negative impacts, see "Food-Works: A Vision to Improve NYC's Food System." <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/44490530/FoodWorks>>
2. Community Food Coalition's Food Policy Council Program <<http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/>>
3. Ibid., Interview with Mark Winne: "[Food policy councils] let policymakers know what is going on in the community, make recommendations on other people's suggestions and proposals. They are also about relationship building, about showing how everyone is somehow involved with the food system. [These councils look at] how to make government work for food issues...and get food on the agenda."
4. Drake Law School on Food Policy Councils <<http://www.law.drake.edu/academics/agLaw/?pageID=foodPolicyQnA>>
5. Interview with Susan Roberts, JD, MS, RD and Co-founder of Iowa Food Systems Council: when speaking about the first, now defunct Iowa Food Policy Council, Susan mentioned that the council's food stamp recommendations for the state caused the government to "bring in new people and adopt "can do" attitudes; they started winning awards for improving—even did film a about it."
6. Interview with Diane Peck, MPH, RD and Alaska Food Policy Council coordinator: "As part of a CDC grant...we are looking at a statute for Alaska product preference; it's on the books but not enforced so we are trying to see how to strengthen it."
7. Community Food Coalition's Food Policy Council Program <<http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/government.html>>
8. *Food Policy Councils, Lessons Learned* <http://foodsecurity.org/pub/Food_Policy_Councils_Report.pdf>
9. Ibid.
10. Online survey results of food policy council directors across the nation developed and analyzed by the author as part of an internship with the American Dietetic Association Washington D.C. Office
11. Information collected from various interviews with food policy council directors as well as from the survey mentioned above
12. Online survey results of food policy council directors across the nation developed and analyzed by the author as part of an internship with the American Dietetic Association Washington D.C. Office
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.

CHICAGO TAKES IT TO THE NEIGHBORHOODS

by Bettina Tahsin, RD, LDN, CDE

The Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC) has been a strong voice in the development of various Chicago food policies since 2001. In fact, one of the organization's board members, Erika Allen of Growing Power Chicago, has been appointed by incoming Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel's to his Energy, Environment, and Public Space Transition Committee.

In 2010, CFPAC initiated the development of its neighborhood food policy councils to essentially translate food policy on a more personal, community level. Open to anyone interested in food issues, the neighborhood food policy councils are shaping up as a forum for putting food policy into action.

Since its founding in March 2010, I have been actively involved in the North Lakefront Neighborhood Food Policy Council. Our first year was dedicated to raising recognition of various programs and organizations such as the Northside Hunger Network and newly founded Glenwood Farmer's Market in the ethnically diverse Rogers Park neighborhood. We partnered with a local artist, Sarah Kavage of Industrial Harvest (www.industrialharvest.com), to build community bonds, empower food entrepreneurs, and raise money through bake sales using Sarah's commodity wheat.

Our focus continues to be supporting local neighborhood projects while also educating ourselves and others on issues facing our community. One year after our founding, our neighborhood food policy council hosted a well-attended talk by author and activist Mark Winne, who reinforced that our mission is to educate and participate on the impact of food policies in the city and the region.



Members of the North Lakefront Neighborhood Food Policy Council with Mark Winne.

Our current focus is organizing around the city's proposed urban agriculture zoning regulations, inviting speakers to educate us on topics such as ordinances that serve as obstacles to restaurants sourcing local foods, and serving as a conduit for various organizations wishing to gather support for their efforts, such as the coalition forming to respond to Wal-Mart's proposal to build in the Lakeview neighborhood to help combat "food deserts."

To learn more about the Chicago Food Policy

Advisory Council and its neighborhood food policy councils, visit www.chicagofoodpolicy.org.

A powerful tool for raising the awareness of the positive impact of dietitians in food policy discussions is to become involved. If you are involved in your community's food policy initiatives and would like to share, please feel free to contribute to *The HEN Post*. Your fellow HEN members would love to hear from you.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization: A Legislative Success

by Jennifer Noll Folliard, RD

One of the American Dietetic Association's (ADA) legislative successes of the past year was advocating for the passage of the Child Reauthorization Act. The passage of this bill mobilized many groups who cared about childhood nutrition, including ADA, and demonstrated the power of lobbying for positive outcomes.

Most of the country's federal nutrition programs - including the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program and the Women, Infants, and Children Program - are governed and funded by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act (CNR), which occurs every five years. The cumulative impact of these programs is enormous, reaching over 30 million women and children daily. Massive grassroots advocacy by many individuals and intensive monitoring support and organization from the ADA facilitated the passage of the House of Representatives bill in March 2010 and the Senate's version in December of 2010.

The collective version of the bill was signed into law by President Obama, on December 13, 2010. Major highlights include:

- Increasing the reimbursement rate for meals (an average of 6 cents per meal)
- Requiring the USDA to set nutrition standards for both reimbursable meals and competitive foods (a la carte, vending, cafeteria etc.) in school settings
- Helping communities establish local farm to school networks
- Setting basic standards for school wellness policies

- Expanding support for breastfeeding through the WIC program
- Increasing access to nutrition programs
- Increasing program monitoring and integrity

This past January, the USDA released for public comment comprehensive and detailed changes to the nutrition standards regulating the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs. The public comment period for the *Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs; Proposed Rule* ended April 13, 2011 and the final USDA rules are expected to be released in 2012. As expected, the proposed rule closely follows the recommendations the USDA-commissioned Institute of Medicine's 2009 report: *School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children*. Changes to the School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs include but are not limited to:

- Significant sodium reduction over a 10-year period
- Increase in requirements for fruits (including only serving 100% juice)
- Increase in requirements for vegetables with specific requirements for dark green and orange vegetables

- Daily limit on starchy vegetables
- Transition, after two-year period, to 100% whole grain products
- Only 1% or non-fat fluid milk offered
- All manufactured products must indicate 0 grams trans-fat

These changes will impact the health of recipients of the Child Nutrition programs, as well as the practice of Registered Dietitians. Recognizing this, ADA reached out to the Dietetic Practice Groups, including HEN, to provide feedback on the impact of this proposed rule. The ADA is compiling the feedback they received and will prepare a formal comment.

To read the *Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs; Proposed Rule*, visit <http://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2011/01/13/2011-485/nutrition-standards-in-the-national-school-lunch-and-school-breakfast-programs>

To read *School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children*, visit <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2009/School-Meals-Building-Blocks-for-Healthy-Children.aspx>

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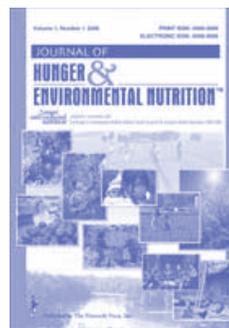
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Information about submission requirements is available at:

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1932-0248.asp>

Questions may be directed to Marie Boyle Struble, PhD, RD, Editor, at mstruble@cse.edu.

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