

News

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OREGON FARM TO SCHOOL BILL WOULD BENEFIT HEALTH THROUGH JOB CREATION, STUDY FINDS

Health Impact Assessment Uncovers Unexpected Benefits, Continues Growing Trend

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WASHINGTON—A bill in Oregon that would provide incentives to deliver fresh local food to schools would improve the health of the state's residents and, at the same time, create hundreds of new farm-industry jobs over a five- to 10-year period, according to a study released by Upstream Public Health in Portland.

The researchers received a grant from the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, to conduct a health impact assessment (HIA) on the Farm to School and School Garden legislation, HB 2800.

An HIA is a study that explores the health impacts of a proposed project, plan or policy in areas that might not otherwise take full account of the health implications—like education, land use, agriculture or energy—and then makes recommendations to maximize the benefits and minimize any potential risks.

Farm to School and School Garden Legislation, Oregon HB 2800, as introduced

The bill would reimburse schools—equivalent to 15 cents per lunch and seven cents per breakfast—for purchasing Oregon food products and provide competitive education grants to schools to support teaching gardens and cross-curricular nutrition education activities that could help kids learn about local food production and increase their preference for fruits and vegetables. The funding for the program would come from the Economic Development Fund, which is a portion of Oregon's Lottery Fund.

"This report is especially valuable because it shows how health impact assessment can help policy makers find unexpected ways to improve health and, at the same time, provide economic benefits—something that is more important now than ever given the current fiscal climate," said Aaron Wernham, M.D., director of the Health Impact Project.

The researchers conducted interviews with stakeholders, reviewed existing research on the health impacts of Farm to School programs and collaborated with an economist to analyze the bill's impact on employment in the state.

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A collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts.



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The HIA concluded that HB 2800, if enacted as introduced, would:

- Create at least 800 new agricultural jobs over the next five to 10 years in both urban and rural areas of the state. Research shows that employment improves health because it helps people afford safe places to live, buy adequate amounts of food, pay for health insurance and cover health care costs.
- Have the potential to increase students' satisfaction with school meal offerings, which research shows can increase student participation in the federal school meals program. This program provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free breakfasts and lunches to children each school day. In 2009, 14 percent of households in the state—nearly 500,000 people, including working families—had to cut back on food or even regularly skip meals because of economic hardships. The legislation could mean more children in these families would get nutritious meals at school. Hunger can affect health by causing chronic illness and developmental delays.
- Have the potential for a small to moderate, long-term impact on childhood obesity by increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and increasing physical activity because more children are participating in school-based gardens.

"We found that this bill would offer the state of Oregon an economic benefit and, at the same time, provide a number of important health benefits—for example, shaping children's preferences for healthy food," says Tia Henderson, Ph.D., research coordinator at Upstream Public Health and co-author of the report.

The Upstream Public Health HIA is one of 13 demonstration grants funded by the Health Impact Project. The other HIAs address a range of decisions, including a light rail corridor connecting the Twin Cities in Minnesota and a plan to re-develop an old automobile factory site in Atlanta, which would result in over 6.5 million square feet of office space, hotels, shopping and parking facilities. The project is accepting proposals through June 1, 2011 for its next round of grants.

"This is a fast-growing field, with health impact assessments being conducted all across the country," said Dr. Wernham. "We are witnessing a rapid increase in demand—and support—for this important policy-making tool, including funding at the local, state and national levels."

For more information about health impact assessments, to submit a proposal or to see an interactive, searchable map of ongoing and completed HIAs in the United States, please visit: www.healthimpactproject.org.

The Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a leading national initiative dedicated to promoting the use of health impact assessments in the United States. Learn more at www.healthimpactproject.org.

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