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Healthy Food Retail Study Group Recommends Development of a Louisiana Healthy Food Retail Financing Program

Effort to Promote Healthier Louisiana

Baton Rouge, La. – The Healthy Food Retail Study Group, established by Senate Resolution 112 during the 2008 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, released a report to the Louisiana Legislature outlining recommendations for a Healthy Food Retail Financing Program that would improve the overall health of Louisianans by increasing access to fresh healthy foods. The recommendations are based on information and testimony gathered from regional and national experts during a series of meetings on the issue.

The proposed Healthy Food Retail Financing Program, modeled after the successful Fresh Food Financing Initiative in Pennsylvania, would provide grants and loans to supermarkets, farmers' markets and similar food retail ventures to improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables in underserved communities in Louisiana. A one-time \$5 million investment from the state is recommended by the Study Group to help finance the program's grant and loan mechanism, delivery and evaluation. The state investment is expected to trigger additional funds from the private sector and federal programs.

Senator Ann Duplessis, the sponsor of the resolution which created the Study Group, plans to introduce legislation to make the Healthy Food Retail Financing Program a reality in Louisiana.

"I am extremely pleased with the work of the Healthy Food Retail Study Group and have full confidence in the plan we have proposed," said Senator Duplessis, chair of the Louisiana State Senate Commerce, Consumer Protection and International Affairs Committee. "When established, this program will stimulate economic opportunity and provide Louisiana families in need of good food options the chance to make healthy choices."

Reversing the epidemic of obesity among adults and children is a major health priority for Louisiana, which has the fourth highest rate of obesity in the nation. Studies show that people with better access to supermarkets and fresh produce have healthier diets and a lower risk of obesity.

"I think we can all agree that whenever possible we should look for ways to provide our citizens with the tools they need to live healthier lives," Sen. Mike Michot, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee said. "The recommendations from the Study Group are aimed at that end."

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry led by Commissioner Mike Strain would oversee the new Healthy Food Retail Financing Program. Commissioner Strain praised the collaborative effort of the Study Group. "It is important that both the private and public sectors work together to make healthy food widely available to our hard-working citizens, Strain said. "The new effort will also open up new markets for our quality, Louisiana-grown fruits and vegetables across the state."

The Prevention Research Center at Tulane University provided support for the coordination of the Study Group and the development of its recommendations. To download a PDF version of the report, please visit

www.sph.tulane.edu/PRC/StudyGroupReport.pdf.