

## STATEWIDE SUPERMARKET SUMMIT KICKS OFF GOVERNOR CORZINE'S NEW JERSEY FOOD ACCESS INITIATIVE

NEWARK – A new statewide initiative aimed at spurring supermarket development throughout New Jersey's urban centers was launched today to further community revitalization, job creation and reduce health disparities in the state. The initiative is part of Governor Corzine's overall Economic Recovery and Assistance Plan announced in October.

"The lack of affordable and nutritious food hampers the revitalization of our communities and negatively impacts the health of our residents," Governor Corzine said. "Encouraging the development of supermarkets in New Jersey's underserved areas will foster economic growth, improve access to healthy food and health outcomes, and provide new entrepreneurial and economic opportunities for local residents."

The New Jersey Food Access Initiative, supported through a unique public/private partnership involving the New Jersey Economic Development (EDA) and The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), is designed to meet the financing needs of supermarket operators that want to locate within an underserved area, where infrastructure costs and credit needs are often higher and unmet by conventional financing institutions. The EDA recently approved a \$3 million investment to TRF to create the Food Access Fund, with the goal of leveraging additional public and private investment. The EDA also will utilize its other funding resources to support eligible supermarket projects, including long-term debt for fixed assets and working capital, incentives for capital improvement and employment creation and assistance for brownfields investigation and remediation activities.

To complement the statewide program, the EDA also invested \$1 million in a pilot supermarket initiative in the City Newark. In collaboration with TRF and Brick City Development Corporation, the City has launched its \$5 million Newark Fresh Food Program.

"By investing in quality food markets in urban, underserved communities, there will be tangible benefits to low and moderate income residents," said Don Hinkle-Brown, president of lending and community investments at TRF. "In underserved areas, you typically don't have nice big clean sites that are ready to go. You have brownfields, odd-shaped lots, small lots, historic buildings, all of which can make supermarket development more expensive. If we can take care of those front-end costs, it can be enough to encourage developers and operators to build in these areas."

According to a preliminary analysis by The Food Trust, supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, supermarket coverage in New Jersey is lacking. At 8.5 supermarkets per 100,000 residents, New Jersey trails the national (11.6 per 100,000) average. The analysis also shows that New Jersey's urban centers are categorically more underserved in respect to supermarket access.

"We know that the neighborhood you live in has an enormous impact on the choices you make, including what you eat, and your health. By encouraging supermarket development in neighborhoods that lack them, New Jersey is committing itself to improving access to healthy, affordable foods and giving everyone the choice to live a healthier life," said Brian Lang of The Food Trust.

Lang noted that Pennsylvania's Fresh Food Financing Initiative, a program launched by the State's Department of Community and Economic Development, in partnership with The Food Trust, TRF and the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition, has committed \$63.3 million in grants and loans to 68 stores across the State, resulting in the creation and retention of 3,734 jobs and over 1.44 million square feet of retail space. Lang also stated that recent studies published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine and the American Journal of Public Health found that fruit and vegetable intake increased by 32-percent for each additional supermarket in a community.

A 2006 report issued by the New Jersey Obesity Prevention Task Force found that more than half of all adults in New Jersey are obese or overweight and that the state has the highest incidence of obesity in low-income children aged two to five years in the nation. The report also revealed that New Jersey spent \$2.3 billion in 2003 for medical expenses linked to the treatment of obesity-related diseases, half of which was borne by taxpayers in the form of Medicare and Medicaid expenditures.

Over 240 attendees participated in the New Jersey Statewide Supermarket Summit in Newark today, where the initiative was formally announced. The summit featured a panel discussion on how the New Jersey Food Access Initiative can assist supermarket development, which included presentations on available financing from TRF and the EDA, an overview of how supermarket access impacts people's health from The Food Trust, and a discussion of incentives to construct green and energy efficient buildings from the BPU. A second panel highlighted the achievements, goals and challenges of developers and supermarket operators, and included representatives from Fairway Foods, Jack's Foodtown, A&P and the Wakefern Food Corp. The event also featured Brown's Family ShopRite President Jeff Brown, who discussed his success in overcoming barriers to supermarket development in the Philadelphia area.

