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Community Leaders and Residents Launch New Community Fruit and Vegetable Garden in East Oakland

Oakland, CA, [June 11, 2008] – In a continuing effort to increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in East Oakland’s low-income neighborhoods, a collaboration of community partners, including local residents, educators, faith-based leaders, public officials, and a diverse group of community-based organizations, unveiled plans today for a community garden and a monthly produce drop at the Lockwood Child Development Center (CDC). The announcement was made during the *Network for a Healthy California (Network)—African American Campaign’s 2008 Consumer Empowerment Forum for Change* held at the Center, 1125-69th Street in Oakland.

The Bay Area Forum will showcase the efforts of empowered African American consumers working in collaboration with a variety of community partners to change the landscape of their neighborhoods by increasing the availability of fruits and vegetables to support healthier lifestyles.

The raised garden beds will feature a variety of fruits and vegetables including tomatoes, eggplant, collard greens, oranges, lemons, peppers, lettuce and herbs. Lockwood parents and neighborhood residents will plant, maintain and harvest the garden. In addition, the California Fresh Fruit Initiative, a farmers’ collaborative from the Central Valley, will also provide a monthly produce drop at the CDC as another way to increase fresh fruit and vegetable availability.

“The new garden beds are in response to CDC moms who told us that one health-related change they wanted for their community was the availability of fruits and vegetables,” said Jamilia Ashworth, a community organizer with the UC Cooperative Extension’s Nutrition Education Training Academy (NETA) at the CDC. As a Champion Mom, Ashworth hosts nutrition education workshops on healthy eating and living at the CDC to educate parents on the importance of incorporating fruits and vegetables in their daily meals.

“During these tough economic times, community gardens also offer neighborhood residents a way to feed their families healthy foods and stretch their dollars while at the same time empowering them to be Champions for health-related changes in East Oakland,” added Ashworth.

The Consumer Empowerment Forum for Change comes on the heels of a recent *African American Campaign* survey of 1,732 African American adults in California. The respondents – primarily women (87.8 percent) from low-income households (71.8 percent) – were very aware of the potential negative health impacts overweight and obesity can cause. While nearly all (94 percent) agreed that being overweight or obese can cause serious health problems like diabetes, cancer or heart disease, only one-third were eating the daily recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables for good health. Local neighborhood collaborations are working together to seek solutions like increasing the availability of fruits and vegetables so that health outcomes improve in low-income African American communities.

The Bay Area Forum For Change is presented by *The Network for a Healthy California—Bay Area Region African American Campaign* at Acts Full Gospel Church, East Oakland Deliverance Center, Healthy Oakland, Inc., and the Santa Clara Public Health Department in partnership with UC Cooperative Extension Nutrition Education Training Academy in Alameda County. The collaboration of community Champions includes, Alameda County Supervisor Nate Miley, the Alameda County Public Health Department’s Nutrition Services and its Maternal, Paternal, Child & Adolescent Health Programs, California Fresh Fruit Initiative, Dairy Council, Green Stampede, Home Depot, Kaiser Permanente Educational Theatre, Oakland Housing Authority, Oakland School Board Trustee Christopher Dobbins, and the Oakland Unified School District.

The *Network* works with more than 300 different public, non-profit and business partners throughout the state to empower low-income Californians to consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables and enjoy physical activity every day. Principal funding is from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Stamp Program, an equal opportunity provider and employer. For more information, visit the *Network*’s Web sites at www.networkforahealthycalifornia.net or www.cachampionsforchange.net.

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