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Premier Chicago Food Show Spotlights New Illinois' Jobs, Economic Development *Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Act of 2007 May Pass in Spring Session*

CHICAGO, IL – A major focus of the 2007 FamilyFarmed.org EXPO—a program of the Chicago-based environmental nonprofit Sustain—is jobs, economic development, and the Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Act of 2007. If passed, the legislation will be a major tool to make Illinois a leader in the production, distribution, and sales of local and organic food. This is the third FamilyFarmed.org EXPO and it has become the leading event in the Midwest connecting local and organic farmers with trade buyers and consumers.

The FamilyFarmed.org EXPO embodies the local and organic food industry in Illinois, a major economic engine with over \$500 million in organic food sales alone in the state. Sustain research indicates that there are currently over 3,000 jobs in the sector and nearly 2,000 new jobs are expected in the next two years. The capital development numbers are also significant. Just six of these natural products companies are expected to invest over \$50 million in Illinois in the next two years.

In 2006 Sustain and FamilyFarmed.org released a feasibility study funded by the State of Illinois and the United States Department of Agriculture that examines the current state of organic food production, processing, marketing, and distribution in Illinois. The Report, *Organic Harvest, An Action Plan for Local, Organic, and Family Farmed Foods*, indicates that Illinois and Chicago are the epicenter for a \$2 billion market for organic food, most of which is grown and processed far from the Midwest. “We are excited about the opportunity to create even more jobs and economic development by growing more food right here in Illinois,” says Sustain president Jim Slama. “There is a strong movement now working together to make that happen.”

Sustain has played a leadership role in building a coalition of farmer, NGO, political, and other stakeholders to advocate for public and private investments in key infrastructure necessary to build a regional organic food system. Other coalition leaders include the Evanston Food Policy Council, the Illinois Farmer Consumer Coalition, and the Illinois League of Conservation Voters. The Evanston Food Policy Council solicited the support of State Representative Julie Hamos, who became the lead sponsor of the Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Act of 2007 (HB 1300), which aims to make Illinois the Midwest leader in local and organic food and fiber production. It authorizes the creation of an “Illinois Local and Organic, Food and Farm Task Force” that will be charged with developing a plan to support an Illinois local food system.

By retaining food dollars within the Illinois economy it will benefit family farmers and local communities while creating jobs and economic development, both urban and rural. “This legislation is a way for farmers, consumers, and businesses to benefit by producing more local and organic food right here in Illinois,” says Hamos. “It’s an exciting opportunity and we believe there is strong momentum to pass this in the Spring legislative session.”

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