

The Sorrento Gathering BC Food Systems Network Established

On September 10-12, 1999, an historic gathering took place at the Sorrento Conference Centre on Shuswap Lake. Thirty-five participants involved in community-level action related to food came from everywhere in the Province except the far North and the East Kootenays. They shared ideas and local initiatives, engaged in analysis and discussed policy options at the provincial, national, and global levels.

In keeping with the holistic perspective of their local organizations, participants emphasized the way in which food issues cross cultures, sectors, and age groups, and highlighted the need for food policy to link ministries dealing with health, agriculture, education, trade, environment, and women's equality.

The meeting concluded by founding the BC Food Systems Network – a recognition that policy analysis, information and support for sustainable agriculture, and action towards a healthy, sustainable food system is happening in communities all over the province. The Network will insist on a democratic process for policy development and encourage public policies that foster economic viability, ecological health, and social justice.

POLICY

The central question of the weekend gathering was, what would be the policy implications if BC were to “put food first” – if the creation and maintenance of a robust, ecologically sound agriculture and the provision of healthy food for the entire population were to become the central objectives of the provincial government, so that policy in all areas would have to be seen through the lens of food security?

FOOD SECURITY

Global agreements (which Canada has signed) state that food security is a basic human right. We define food security as a situation in which

(1) everyone has assured access to adequate, appropriate and personally acceptable food in a way that does not damage self respect. (2) people are able to earn a living wage by growing, producing, processing, handling, retailing and serving food. (3) the quality of land, air and water are maintained and enhanced for future generations, and (4) food is celebrated as central to community and cultural integrity.

HEALTH

We also took as a given that good food is the basis of health. This means also that people in need of healing, whether in hospitals, care facilities, or remand centres, require healthy food, not the cheapest available. By the same token, children (our future) require the best possible food, starting with breastmilk.

JUSTICE

The principles of democracy and equity require that good food is available to everyone, not just those who can afford to pay for it. Nor is it acceptable that BC's food policy is based on the exploitation of people of the environment in other countries. ***ECONOMY***

We agreed that without food production, there is no economy. Full cost-accounting reveals the

costs as well as the risks of a food system which is dependent on outside sources, long-distance movement of food, high-input agriculture, and poor population health. Food dependency holds political as well as economic dangers: any jurisdiction which cannot feed its people is at the mercy of whoever does.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH OUR FOOD SYSTEM

Some over-arching concerns were shared by the group. We are outraged at the level of hunger and malnutrition in a society where food is plentiful. In a wealthy society, social welfare payments which do not assure personal food security are unacceptable. We cannot rely on overburdened and understocked food banks; nor can we continue to implement support programs which leave out critical constituencies (eg. babies between 6 months and 5 years old).

The contamination of breast milk is an appalling symbol of one of the major problems in the system which we named as 'abuse of the planet'. Genetic engineering of food and seeds must be stopped.

The high level of corporate and external control of our food system, coupled with "free trade" agreements, is undermining local agriculture and food production. It also leaves us highly vulnerable to an emergency since we do not have control of our own food resources.

We are losing the essential arts of farming, gardening, foraging, identifying edible and medicinal plants, cooking, preserving and storing foods, and the cultures and community sharing that have accompanied them. The connection of food and food security to every sector and level of society is ignored as governments and ministries contradict or undermine one another's actions, and community groups are given no voice in policy-making.

We proposed some specific policies:

Sustainable/Local Agriculture

How to ensure that people farming ecologically can make a living:

Definition of "farm" to include subsistence farming/food production – exclude non-work horses

Land improvement (agricultural fertility and viability) is a public good

Wood lot management is a valid farm activity, indigenous plants are a valid crop

Organic production needs buffer zones – this is part of the farm

Regulation to allow multi-family farms

Maintenance of regional seed pool and exchange

Processing facilities including storage, canning, freezing, drying, packaging

Increased opportunities to sell locally produced/processed foods

Community and government support for farmer's markets.

Municipal policy to buy local to ensure high quality, emergency preparedness

Government & institutional procurement of locally produced foodstuffs ahead of anything else

Controls on contamination of food (chemicals, genetic engineering)

Reduced focus on trade vs. local markets

Recognition and support for all farmers, including conventional

Recognition that agriculture is the backbone of the economy; local healthy food producing a healthy population is an economic issue

Whole farm/whole food focus.

Food Access / Public Health

How to ensure that people who lack money to buy have access to healthy food and that healthy community life is encouraged:

Community gardens

Back-yard – and front-yard – gardens

School gardens

Food production food banks (i.e. collective growing for collective distribution)

Developing land base and facilities for people to have access to food growing and processing

Support for agri-food entrepreneurship

Community kitchens

Funding for equipment (eg. canning, freezing, cold or cool storage)

Access to land for native people on and off reserve for traditional gathering.

Gleaning projects: excess farm produce, private and public trees and gardens, prepared foods

Support for breastfeeding and community infrastructure in workplaces, public spaces, malls

School gardens

Urban agriculture demonstration sites

CSA and box programs (include labor input to replace money)

Advocate for more realistic welfare rates

Public education (including in schools) on “lost arts” of growing, cooking, selecting, preserving food, traditional knowledge

Label all foods re production (eg. GE food)

Recognise that everyone has something to offer: eg. potluck meals, community gardens – not to segregate the poor

Food is central to culture and community – enjoyment is part of the process of feeding ourselves and one another

Horticultural therapy – growing is a healing activity

Involve youth

Support for dedicated volunteers

Education re: food skills, choices, growing, cooking, traditional knowledge

Encourage consumer food co-ops; worker co-ops – but also work with supermarkets, wholesale distributors, other retailers

In general, the Network agreed that policy should cross jurisdictions to provide the framework within it is easier for individuals to make good choices. The motto should be partnership among Ministries, various levels of government, and the civil society organizations which are taking leadership in food security work. This does not mean handouts but legitimacy, support and resources for the work of local food systems groups, to ensure a rural voice in decision-making.

The group also agreed to develop a “toolbox” on why we should put food first, along the lines of “Ten Reasons to Buy Organic”, as a resource for local groups. A resource library will be developed, housed at FarmFolk/CityFolk and/or the Spicer Centre. Some resources have already been acquired by the Community-Based Food Policy Project (Cathleen’s project). Shannon is working on an update of Laura Kalina’s “Food Security in Canada” book; LifeCycles has completed an urban agriculture resource guide (available on the IDRC website). Resources can be shared by mail.

A press release will be drafted and checked with the network, for distribution by local groups to their local media.

How are we going to organize ourselves as a provincial network?

E-mail list/network to share information (can get feedback and sign-ons).

Entry fee is a paragraph of what each group/individual is doing. Ensure that we are networking with other people that are not hooked up to pass on information.

Cathleen will set it up.

Press release to announce this network and invite participation.

Either FF/CF or Spicer Centre may eventually host the listserv.

Make sure to include timeframes with communications that request response, critique, sign-ons

Homework: think about/write down what kind of statement (to Select Standing Committee) we want to create in our own communities; share them with Cathleen who can send them out to the group.

Jen and Jody will work on the toolbox and bounce it off to the group.

Jody to develop website (include descriptions of groups). To be hosted through Spicer Centre?

Connect to Agri-Food Policy Points:

Clerk of Committees Office: www.bcmaff.gov.bc.ca for electronic copy.

Minister's comments are on the web under Legislature - Select Standing Committees - Agriculture.

Following Naramata Conference: ministry put issues in this document to put out to the public.

The Select Standing Committee is an opp. to deal with food security and rural communities issue (these 2 objectives dropped from planning process so far).

The minister seems to be on a good path: we can help by supporting his message.

Be aware of these issues in presentations made to the Select Standing Committee.

We can circulate Statement of Principles by email. (these are on their agenda, so we need to pay attention to them and address them)

For example, the definition of farm (for tax status) and delineation of who has access to funds for farm organizations are key issues that we need to address.

Who and what classifies as a farm is a strong point:

Subsistence farming needs to be recognized.

Wood lot management isn't considered as a valid farm activity. This has encouraged some farmers to log their properties to maximize value. (indigenous plants aren't considered a valid crop).

There is also a problem with wealthy people maintaining minimal or even unrelated (ie. race horse racing) agricultural activities to keep their status.

Valuing subsistence food production? Valuing land improvement (agricultural fertility and viability).

Organic farms also need buffer zones (this needs to be seen as part of the farm).

Invite farmers who stand to be affected by a new definition of farms.

Important to support conventional farmers too. Support local where you can't get organic.

Whole farm/whole food focus.

Ministry of Social Development/income assistance issues (need to be careful in valuing food production activity as it could then come off checks).

The \$10,000 also makes it difficult for new growers.

Kathleen and Herb will be dealing with the issue, and can circulate their work to the group.

Environmental stewardship and wildlife are portrayed as a burden (wrong perspective)! Linda noted that the responsibility does need to be spread beyond farmers.

Small-scale and organic farmers are providing extension services now (we're doing it ourselves). This needs to be recognized. Core funding to organic growers' associations? (eg. publications of manuals, etc.) At the same time, need to be careful with separating the certification body from the organic growers' association (marketing, education, etc.) These are separate functions.

FarmFolk/CityFolk (Kathleen and Herb) and Don Roht are developing statements that they will share.

Allies/Alliances

Major newsprint is not picking up on the issues (ie. when Corky Evans makes strong statements, it's not being heard). Use local press, radio, etc. Use newsletters of grassroots organizations. Offer to speak to their clubs. Also put out to supportive columnists. Share food to engage them.

Share press releases and other communication tools out among our groups (insert local connection or quote).

Announce ourselves, who we are, what we're promoting, and why. Send out to local councils, retailers, etc. Make short presentations to city council, ask them to be involved.

Be theatrical and use engaging/shocking tactics.

Initiatives/Strategies/Fundraising

Cathleen's work has been funded by Health Canada, Vancouver Foundation, and Rural Communities.

She may also be funded through Health Canada to work on food security issues with Pregnancy Outreach Programs. (her work is likely to be funded for another year)

Vancouver Foundation is interested in community kitchens.

Talk to Vancouver Foundation about partnering with local foundations.

Vancouver Foundation is also very interested in funding enterprising non-profits.

VanCity is also interested in organizations finding ways to support themselves over the long-run. This means that they are open to funding longer-term projects if they look like they will become sustainable.

New fund being announced in Sept/Oct. through a consortium of funders that worked with 11 non-profits around the province doing enterprising or cooperative development activities to support pilot projects (organizational and project transitions) and see how they as funders can support community economic development in a more sustainable fashion.

Based on their findings, they have established a fund where they will match \$\$ up to \$10,000 for either business plans (up to \$5,000) and management/organizational development (up to \$5,000).

To go to their orientation session in January/February, you have to pay \$500 (to show commitment and planning of board and staff which is a strong indicator of strength).

Have to match \$10,000 with additional cash donation. (although this can be fundraised through other sources)

CEDTAP (Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program) is one potential funder.

Funds technical assistance (ie. strategic/business planning, etc.). Run out of Carleton University through McConnell family Fdtn money. Food Front Consumer Co-op in Victoria received CEDTAP money. Community organization needs to write a proposal. 20% matching funds (cash) required from community. 80% goes to CEDTAP service provider (they have a list of people across the country). Pacific Coast Savings Credit Union funded the other 20% for the community contribution.

Industrial Adjustment Fund (IAF): joint provincial/federal program.

Enterprise Facilitation coordinators will be available in some communities to assist with enterprise development (through Sirolli Institute, funded by the government?)

Foundations are using the language of Sirolli's "Enterprise Facilitation" model. ("Ripples through the Gambezi")

SFU CED Centre is at www.sfu.ca (then go into CED Centre).

Ian MacPherson at UVic is creating cooperative development resources/information/support.

United Way: Partners in Organizational Development (POD) is a funding program to help organizations work with management and organizational development. \$5,000 pool to support proposal development.

United Way in Toronto strongly supported some work in Ontario. Look to United Way as potential funders for food security work.

Partner with food banks, Salvation Army, food banks, etc. Food-producing food banks are one option.

Share mission statements that were successful to acquire charitable status (some organizations have been turned down).

Real Estate Foundations.

Private donations from personal friends have supported the work done by the biotechnology circle.

Planned giving is also important as much of the money is with the older generation. (there is a province-wide movement growing to encourage estate planning and planned giving)

Partnering with local organizations that are empowering and supportive (and have charitable organizations) is a good strategy.

Don't be afraid to get political support (it can move things like charitable status faster).

Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security has a Community Services Fund (about \$40,000 max. per project). LifeCycles' Garden Training Project works with people on income assistance to improve self-sufficiency and self-esteem and community service. The ministry has been very supportive and like the projects. Linda can share LifeCycles' proposal. Community kitchens, canning/preserving, etc. would all be potentially eligible.

Youth Service Canada funding (Human Resources Development Canada) is re-allocating money to distribute proportionally (around the province), which means that many areas that aren't currently accessing YSC funding will have more access. Linda can also share Youth Service Canada project proposals. The \$\$ is for youth skills development and community service through youth teams (can use for education, building, community development, etc.)

Multi-year funding is more common. Think strategically about project and partnership development.

Partnership makes your work and your likelihood of funding stronger.

Think about sister city pilot projects.

Look at provincial and federal health dollars (angle proposal to health focus: self-esteem, etc. are legitimate). Regional health boards may fund community organizations that are doing health-related work.

Approach Pregnancy Outreach Programs as partners.

Sustainable Communities money.

Ministry of Environment BC E-Team funding (youth environmental projects).

Environment Canada also has a community projects fund (EcoAction 2000).

Real Estate Foundation: land use and environmental stewardship (esp. urban).

Sometimes community colleges can be supportive.

Craig will talk to Jan Pullinger to see what the new Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives, and the Voluntary Sector.

Membership is an important aspect to develop.

Silent auctions are good fundraiser (esp. with a local, organic dinner).

Fundraising techniques provide untargeted money.

Casinos are good money-raisers. You have to register with them as a charity and apply. Bug your agent with your file (you can get through if you keep in touch).

Encourage Select Standing Committee to support food policy work.

Community Way concept.

Other creative ways to engage private sector support.

Look to coop sector, credit unions, and other corporate philanthropy, support, and volunteer programs.

Rotary, Lions, other service clubs. (youth, children, poverty issues are very poignant to them).

Check-off programs: Thrifty's is adding a levy to produce to support the food policy group in Victoria (idea came from Michael Mockler, Thrifty's produce company).