

Quarterly Report to Health Canada Action for Food Security Project July-September 2001

The highlight and focus of our work for this quarter was the Sorrento Gathering, which took place at the Sorrento Conference Centre, September 6th - 8th. Our goals for this event were to demystify the idea of 'food policy' in order to facilitate collaboration between people working on community food security policy and leaders and participants in the CPNP and CAP-C programs; to bring together POP participants and leaders, food policy workers, and activists in First Nations and grassroots community food projects; and to consolidate the network so that these different groups would be able to support one another in their work.

Thanks to the hard work and open-mindedness of the people who attended as well as those who assisted in organizing the conference and acted as resources, we managed to achieve these ambitious goals. Comments in the evaluations included "a truly empowering experience," "opportunity to learn, share, and get enthusiastic," "informative and inspiring," "learned lots and made great connections," "a fabulous, engaging, FUN and connecting experience," "I am inspired by the support, enthusiasm and commitment of the network," "look forward to focussing and working to a more secure future." There were no negative comments.

This was made possible to a considerable extent by a special grant of funds from Health Canada Health Promotion and Programs Branch, which paid the costs of attendance for a number of participants and leaders from Pregnancy Outreach and children's programs throughout the province. The presence of infants and young children had its effect on the general tone of the conference and ensured that the voices of their mothers and the concerns they shared about the concrete challenges to personal food security were heard. It was also helpful to have a couple of people from POP programs which had not previously been involved in food security work.

The success of this conference took us a leap ahead in developing the network of support and relationships between POP programs and food security policy groups and projects. There is still, however, a huge job ahead of us in the coming months as we build on the energies unleashed at Sorrento to consolidate this network as the end of the Action for Food Security project looms on our horizon.

Food Policy of the Home : the Sorrento Gathering 2001, September 6th, 7th, 8th at the Sorrento Conference Centre

Summary:

On the first night, we introduced ourselves by describing our personal food policy. The question was "Why do I make the decisions I make about what I eat?" The purpose was to highlight our personal principles as a way of framing a consideration of how those principles should be reflected in food policy at the municipal, regional, provincial or federal levels. As we went around the circle, we began to see that many people's food policies changed over time, policies were affected by their background, their knowledge about the benefits or dangers of food, economic considerations, availability of food, spiritual beliefs, political beliefs, supporting local and sustainable, and much more.

It was amazing to hear the extent of commonality in the midst of intensely personal statements. People talked about their family histories, the distress they feel at the distance between their ideals about food

and the reality of their lives, and about their spiritual connections to food. We shared our feelings of anger at the waste of food (and tips on the best places to dumpster-dive), and at the deliberate targeting of unhealthy ‘fast’ foods to children. We noticed the tactics to associate these junk foods with happiness, fun, and ceremony. We agreed that food is a way of expressing love, in the growing and in the preparation and sharing of it. We also agreed that we need to take time: “slow food” instead of fast food, enjoy the experience, give food value by spending time on it.

In the workshops and debates that followed, these insights hardened into some clear policy positions, mostly related to an emphasis on local, whole, and organically-produced foods. We shared information about our projects, such as the Good Food Box, Community Kitchens, Community Gardens, and Pregnancy Outreach. There was a workshop on fundraising, one on genetic engineering and food, one on the Basic Pantry, and one on drying food in which participants made apple rings and fruit leather to share with everyone; they also heard a Native elder explain the ways in which foods such as salmon, roots, and berries have been dried in the traditional culture, and the importance of these foods to both body and spirit.

In the middle of all this we made bread. Just as women’s lives are punctuated by the needs of the family for food (etc.) so our day was framed around the making of bread, starting in the morning with setting the dough. We were afraid that this would be too distracting from the ‘serious’ work of the conference, but the opposite was true: it gave us a base of personal trust which considerably eased the process of debating policy positions and strategies for the next year.

In the final session, we set our collective agenda for the next year. We agreed to work particularly with the health-care system to implement buy-local policies, and with municipalities to develop food policies, starting with ‘edible landscaping’ in parks and schoolyards. We agreed to continue to share our efforts (including fundraising information) through our listserv and agreed to ensure that those not hooked up would get the information as well. We also agreed to ensure that our work is documented to share with the rest of the community through our website <www.fooddemocracy.org>.

Opening Session: Thursday afternoon and evening

Everyone in the circle was invited to share their perspective on their personal ‘food policy’. Some quotes:

“We are losing touch with our food over the generations”

“It’s almost impossible to eat healthy on welfare”

“I set one good food goal per week in our home”

“I had a food vocabulary of 150 food items and she had only about 10”

“My food policy has evolved over time”

“Food tasted better when I was a kid”

“The strongest personal statement anyone can make is the growing and sharing of food in their community”

“We buy as close to home as possible”

“The table is the altar of God”

“I leave my body as soon as I go in there [Safeway]”

“I don’t want to fill my body with junk”

“I show my love in the growing and preparing of food”

“Chocolate is a food group”

“Good food for all people, not poor food for poor people”

“I realized ... I can’t afford not to buy organic”

Food Policy of the Home – Summary of Themes:

Tension between ideals and reals ... relative to circumstances

pressures: peers, advertising, time, money;

popular culture food products (fast, convenient, etc.) especially targeted to kids
guilt

Industry profits from people's addiction to certain tastes, the ceremony of fast foods (packaged lunch snacks – like a birthday present in your lunch), association with happy (McDonalds advertising, 'fun' food like stretchy cheese sticks)

Growing our own food and proud of it (part of family culture)

Local: both supporting local growers and local food stores /businesses

Nutrition: I am what I eat – teaching good food

Waste: dumpster diving – health food store dumpster is good, distress at amount of perfectly good food (and even flowers) thrown out, not marked down so people could buy it

Real /whole foods

Wild food

Food is a way of sharing and expressing love

Spirituality

Environment

Take time! "slow food" instead of fast food, enjoy the experience, give food value by spending time on it

We are all on a continuum between the real and the ideal, not to instill guilt but accept small steps

Hold the vision of food as the base for survival [or better, "thrival"] of community

Skills – those we have, have lost, want to gain, want to share

Food as a means of perpetuating culture, and also exposure to other cultures.

Need to make sure farmers make a living, preserve rural communities

Friday Morning

The morning began with bread making. We divided into small groups, each with a recipe and ingredients to start. Each small group had at least one member who knew how to make bread -- and several who were complete novices. Two groups worked with a sourdough starter, the rest used yeast to make a basic whole wheat bread, pizza dough, foccacia, and buns. At the break after the first set of workshops, everyone had a bread-making task. The pizza crew formed their pizza crusts and added a variety of toppings – these were then baked for our lunch. The sourdough groups had a second kneading and rising, while the others formed their loaves and buns. One of the gardeners insisted on picking herbs from the Centre's garden to enliven the buns. These were baked during the afternoon break, while the sourdough crew formed their loaves. Foccacia and buns were served for supper; the whole wheat and sourdough loaves were served as toast for breakfast. The exercise proved to be a great deal of fun, and very satisfying as well.

Friday Workshops

Dry It, You'll Like It: *how (and why) to preserve foods through dehydration*

Trudy Jack, First Nations elder from Merritt

Donna Antonishak, Community Nutritionist from Vernon.

Trudy led off with a discussion of traditional attitudes towards food. She showed samples of the key foods for her people: the bitter root which is eaten in the spring, dried salmon, saskatoon berries, and swamp tea. She explained that the traditional method of drying salmon with the spine in had been forbidden when she was a child so the salmon she brought to show was not done that way. She talked

about the way in which eating the traditional foods is the way in which she ‘plugs in’ to Creation, and so she emphasized the spiritual as well as the nutritional value of the foods.

With a strong understanding of the importance of this approach to food, the participants then had an opportunity to put some of this into practice, making apple rings and fruit leather. Donna brought a great deal of information, recipes, and materials as well as a dehydrator, and the group had a great time preparing the foods for dehydrating. They also enjoyed being able to share the dried apple rings and fruit leather with the whole group at lunch on the next day.

The Good Food Box : *a roundtable discussion for those running a GFB program and those interested in starting one.*

Notes from the discussion:

It doesn’t work for everybody. Decide on the capacity of the program: how many boxes can you manage? before broadening the target population. Most programs target those people who have barriers to accessing food and will refer more affluent requests to other programs.

There was considerable discussion about the mechanics of the Good Food Box, e.g. how customers make payment, content of newsletters, how to get space to do the boxes. Another big issue was maintaining volunteer commitment and different strategies to keep local food businesses supportive of the program. There was agreement to investigate collaboration on fundraising.

Resources

Vancouver’s web page: www.vcn.bc.ca/gfb/homepage.htm.

Toronto Food Share, Debbie Field, Executive Director, has a Good Food Box manual.
www.foodshare.net

Fundraising: techniques for fundraising from individuals and corporations, government, and community

Donnalyne Mackie, *Fundraiser for Alzheimer’s Association, Kelowna*

Laura Kalina, *Community Nutritionist Kamloops, Co-Chair, Kamloops Food Policy Council*

Susan Peach, *Coordinator, Nanaimo Foodshare*

Individuals and Corporations: Donnalyne told the story of her personal experience with ulcerative colitis.

She then demonstrated her technique by passing the hat around the workshop participants. She emphasized that the approach must be personal – when possible include a person who has been affected by the issue in your presentation – and provide an unforgettable experience for the potential donor.

Raising money from government sources: Laura Kalina described the process of getting funds for the Garden Gate project. She said they succeeded because they aligned their request to fulfill the strategic plan of the Health Authority and had a strong partnership with Mental Health. She also discussed promotion: they gave a basket of produce to contacts and potential donors with an action statement such as “Looking forward to discussing the fruit of our labours”. Laura is also diligent about giving ‘good news’ stories to the local media and so she now has a file of articles she can use in fundraising.

Raising money from community events: Susan Peach discussed their strategies to get funds for the Nanaimo Food Share Centre through a series of community events. She warned that it is essential to assess beforehand what the primary goal of the event is: education or fund-raising, and whether it is the best use of time. Throughout the event, constantly say who is benefitting, “This is a fundraising event for the Nanaimo Food Share. You can help by....” Thank sponsors. It is important to have a fundraiser who

likes the work. Get creative and give them their money's worth: for example, Susan described their Latin fest where they made maracas with prize slips inside – each one worth more than \$20 and some quite large – and sold them for \$20 each. (They also had Latin dancing, a pinata for the children, lots of food and fun things to do.)

Key point from all presentations: Ask for the money!

Resources:

Big Data Base on Line. It is costly to belong but is worthwhile info
Ken Wyman is the guru of Fundraising, email KenWyman@CompuServe.com

Food Policy: How do we get it adopted?

Dr Kay Wotton, *MHO for the Peace District*

Dr Lorna Medd, *MHO for Northern Interior Health Region*

Dr. David Bowering, *MHO for North Okanagan Health Region*

Kathleen Gibson, *Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR)*,

Victoria Paddy Doherty, Certified Organic Associations of B.C. and a farmer from Quesnel

Lorna Medd said that several years ago she attended a conference on Food Security in Vancouver which opened her eyes to the issue. She then took this awareness for food security and food policy to the then Union Board of Health. Because they were on board with the prevention model, they understood and supported the concept. Seed money was provided to Joanne Houghton to start a Food Security Organization, "Food First". When regionalization occurred, more acute care oriented folk were less receptive. However, NIHR has now included Food Security into the Regional Plan with a 0.3 FTE as the Food Security Coordinator. Lorna stressed that recommendations need to be ready when an opportunity presents itself. Cultivate allies such as Senior Public Health Nursing staff, Public Health Director, other community and acute care nutritionists.

Kathleen described mapping of food sources, or bioregional mapping as a way of identifying sources of food and creating awareness of gaps in the system.

David commented that while it is the job of the MHO to safeguard public health, food as the basis of health is often overlooked. He is continuously getting educated. He feels that with the new government, the determinants of health are in jeopardy. He sees the regional health board members as allies with a certain amount of power. Get on their agenda but be aware of what else is going on; if there is a crisis issue they will not be open to hearing about long-term prevention strategies.

Kay Wotton noted in the Peace region the Community Nutritionist, was primarily responsible for most of the community development related to food. Dawson Creek Foodshare was strategically placed to receive Community Based Research Money from the Vancouver Foundation, since the foundation wanted to fund someone who already proved that they were working together. She gave an example of researching the benefits of mentoring.

Discussion: Laura Kalina said that it took a few years to constantly give the good news stories and then ask for a food policy. She suggested that if the hospitals and even long-term care facilities purchased 20% of their produce locally, it would create a market immediately. Rose pointed out that management companies, particularly ARAMARK, are being very aggressive all over BC. They make their money through the savings on national buying programs but would have to accept a 20% local clause in a contract if the health authority insisted on it.

Implementation: Individual MHOs have some flexibility to address food security, but the issue of food actually was not included in the Annual Report of the Provincial MHO, although air and water were.

Another health-related issue is the lack of consistency amongst regions as to what could be sold at a Farmer's Market. Paddy Doherty noted that although the Minister of Agriculture was on the Select Standing Committee and heard the demands for food policy there has been no action on this; the focus seems to be de-regulation and reducing barriers for business.

There is great pressure from the drug companies to look at only medication rather than prevention. Suggestion that we gather data on the cost benefits of eating well. Some methods were suggested using the DASH diet as an example, and it was noted that the diabetes prevention projects are working on healthy eating as disease prevention.

Saturday Morning

Building Community Organization

Rose Soneff, Williams Lake described their work in developing a community coalition around poverty.

Her key points:

utilize existing resources: clothing, tools, toys, skills (eg childcare), food
bartering – people are already doing this, it should be named as such
communication: bulletin boards, networks
transportation: car pooling, free bikes?
build relationships in the group: nourish culture, have fun!
build independence
partners: benefactors, solicit gift certificates, relationships like Kamloops dollars at farmers market for the food bank

Action Agenda for BC Food Systems Network

The final session of the conference went back over our collective notes about what we had discussed and pulled out a number of areas where we could agree to take action over the next year:

Buy Local Campaign:

Health: work with people in the health system, link food and health, work on food service contracts for “20% local”, link with other health-related issues, eg. activity (recreation), poverty. Collaborate with the Diabetes Prevention initiatives.

Municipal policy: focus on the economic development /diversification benefits and raise the prominence of agriculture as generator of wealth and anchor of community; emphasize this means that farmers have to be viable.

Community-Based Research (working in partnership with universities, farmers, health units)

Collaborate on Fund-raising

Share information about events through the Network:

Breastfeeding Moment, October 6th at 11 a.m.– local publicity

Community Nutritionist Council meeting November 7th will have Wayne Roberts from the Toronto Food Policy Council as speaker.

BCAPOP conference: keep Food Security on the agenda

Cost of Eating (to be released in time for World Food Day, October 16th)

We committed to ensuring that people who are not on the Internet will receive information on paper, generally from a contact person in their community. A number of people volunteered to provide briefing notes to the network, for example, for the Buy Local campaign, nutrition information on superiority of local foods, and suggestions of arguments you will get and how to counter them; on charitable status, how to work with food banks and other charities, and the

charitable model in general; on action strategies for the labelling of genetically engineered foods, information and suggestions for letters, including support of Bill C-287 (on mandatory labelling of foods derived from genetic engineering).

A committee was struck to organize Sorrento 2002, gratefully accepting Trudy Jack's offer of a presentation on Native food culture.

Cathleen Kneen
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