

Notes from the Sorrento Gathering
Food Policy: From Back Yard to Front Burner
Sorrento, BC * September 18-21, 2003

Opening Circle

The conference was opened by Jean Arnouse of the Little Shuswap Band. She offered an opening prayer and grounded our reflections in the context of food offering. She also noted that the sunflowers in the middle of the circle are respected by First Nations because every part of the plant is food – and it grows wild.

Everyone then spoke about their “Personal Food Policy”. As we went around the circle several themes were repeated over and over: eat local; respect the food and the land (avoid pesticides and other poisons); teach our children how to grow and to appreciate food. It was also clear that these are goals and a number of people cannot reach them because they simply do not have the money or resources to eat the way they would like. The theme of celebration of food was balanced by deep anger at people being deprived of the food they need and want.

Respect the land by giving back food.

- A West African story of why the sky is so far away: the sky used to be food that you could cook and eat, but someone broke the rule and cooked too much and then threw the rest away, so the sky moved away. It is a taboo to waste food.
- (from BC First Nations): I only take what I need, always leave something (tobacco or a penny or my favourite pin). What comes over me when I am picking the food is a rush of love which is going into the food and carries on right to the death of it, when it goes into the spirit world.

Food tastes better when there is love in it:

- First food should be breastmilk – learn the body’s cues.
- Share food with people you love
- Have fun with food: picking berries, carrots – carry the hype and excitement of junk food into healthy food
- If you don’t enjoy the food you won’t get the nutrients
- Growing up in the Philippines, I learned that food is for sharing
- It’s the sacred completion of life which has to do with death as well
- Learning from the strawberry plants what they want to do and how they want to be cared for

Food is the basis of health

- I need to eat less, live more lightly
- I am learning to eat more fruit and vegetables, to change my life-style to avoid diabetes
- Moderation, not deprivation – all foods can fit
- Not to go overboard, reading the latest thing and making radical diet changes
- Having grown up hungry I know how important it is to have food, period
- First Nations people are dying because their bodies can’t process the food

- Fear for the kids on the reserve and how the breakfast program can continue
- Acknowledge my heritage
- Family and friends living with cancer – not just nutrition but inner and outer health

Eat local:

- Look at food the way you'd look at a prospective partner – where does it come from? It will reflect its ancestors
- I want to know where it comes from and who it comes from
- It is difficult to be vegetarian in the North
- Look at the environmental impact of agriculture
- Never buy California strawberries!
- Farmers markets are my entry into another country
- Food delivery box invoice states how many kilometres the food has travelled

Engage in food politics:

- Watching families who were my friends going to the dumpster for food – and being “taught” to budget and cook – I have to ask
 - why in hell are we throwing good food out?
 - if our governments promise to catch people who are falling, why programs rather than adequate family income?
- Sometimes we have to buy no-time stress food
- The food bank saved my life, the community garden has fed my family
- I just read Fast Food Nation and didn't eat a hamburger for four months
- We need a new Diet for a Small Planet every decade
- Living in Brazil I saw peasants using high-powered poisons with no protection
- Teach the children:
 - My grandson knows when the thimbleberries are ripe and I think that's the best gift I can give him
 - My son gave me a shopping list over the phone: oranges, apples, milk
 - My daughter asked, 'why is there corn here, mom? corn's not in season!'
- There is a business case for food security: social, environmental, and economic
- Eating is a political act

Plenary: Food Security and Public Health – Chair: Joanne Houghton

Trevor Hancock: Food Security and Public Health

Trevor Hancock is working for the Ministry of Health Services on the development of core functions in public health for the new Public Health Act. He outlined the four elements of community health in terms of capital:

- *Natural capital* – the wealth of the earth itself, sustainable and healthy ecosystems, clean air, clean water;
- *Social capital* – the wealth of our interactions with each other and how we work together, what we and our predecessors have created in the way of formal social programs and structures (ie. the health care system, unemployment insurance etc), the constitutional, political and legal system of a country is a huge investment and is a form of social capital.

- *Economic capital* – should be subservient to the other forms of capital as it is the means to do the other things (once you get as a country past \$5,000 US income per capita, your life expectancy is not affected – you can do what you need to set up your social capital etc.).
- *Human capital* is the outcome of the other three forms of capital, individuals who are healthy, well-educated, innovative, creative, able to contribute to their society etc. One can maximize human capital by bringing the other three more closely together (eg. a community garden contributes to all four forms of capital).

True capitalists invest in all four forms of capital simultaneously.

The group brainstormed about how food security contributes to the four forms of capital:

Economic: local buying, community kitchens, local job creation, earning a living from the food business, community pride, less crime

Human: local buying, community kitchens (skill building, reducing hunger, education), volunteerism

Natural: local buying, land use (communal), less carbon dioxide (from reduced food transportation), gathering/seasonal, stewardship, recycling

Social: local buying, community kitchens (social networks), give and receive, retention of residents, community pride, volunteerism, less crime.

Lynne Magee and Karen Larson: Food Miles

Lynne and Karen are Environmental Health Officers in Prince George and Quesnel. They discussed the linkages between climate change and ozone depletion, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable forestry, reduced air quality, impact on water, desertification. Increase in “greenhouse gases” – CO₂ emissions – can be linked to increased food supply and demand from a growing population. They showed a speculative assessment of the emissions which could be saved if Prince George residents consumed local food. Using Health Canada statistics to estimate that one person eats 1108 in one year, and Worldwatch figures to estimate that each morsel of food arriving in Prince George would travel an average of 3750 km., they figured that one truck could transport food for two people. Given that one litre of diesel produces 2.45 kg of CO₂, and the average fuel economy of a class 8 heavy-duty truck is 2.45 km/L, they worked out that the total CO₂ emitted per year for a one way trip = 149,840,000 kg or 149,840 metric tonnes (that’s one-way) for the approximately 80,000 people in Prince George.

Trudy Jack: First Nations Perspective

Trudy is a member of the Boothroyd band. She began by noting that she has not previously made a food offering here because she is in someone else’s territory (Secwepmc). After Joan Arnouse in her opening ceremony last night gave her permission, Trudy made a food offering for everyone and shared the process with any of the young people who were interested. She was taught by her grandmother, a powerful woman, who would always take a little bit of her food and set it aside – to thank all the people who went before and who taught her. Her grandmother and other ancestors put something inside of Trudy so that she would survive everything. She did not attend residential school but as a child she returned home everyday from school with bleeding hands from being strapped at school.

Trudy has been working for over 20 years as an addiction counsellor. When she was 31 years old she had a vision and then all the elders came to her to teach her things. After her vision, her first job was to make friends with 10 white people – something that appalled her initially. When she brought her first white friend home to share dinner, the elders came by every day for a week, bringing her gifts to acknowledge the healing she had begun.

The elders give out names to children when they are sure they are going to stay with us. When they go to gather roots, they take the young ones. (Her community has stopped making cedar baskets to use for root gathering since the cedars are threatened.) Family discipline is built into the community because there are eyes everywhere; they let the children learn on their own and talk to them about their day, what they liked and what they didn't like. From life to death, they have ceremonies. They have a system for how they live and they live it. When her last parent died, they cut off her hair at her first braid, wrapped it and put it out and asked mother earth to be kind to her so that her year wouldn't be too hard, that she would retain all that her father taught her.

Donna Antonishak: Hungering for Change

Donna is community nutritionist for the North Okanagan and founder of the North Okanagan Food Coalition. She began by noting that food is essential to health; it is a basic need and a human right and yet food security is emerging as a critical population health issue in BC. Hunger is but one outcome of food insecurity – it affects all four areas of capital. Adequate food is essential for healthy outcomes of pregnancies. Even moderate levels of malnutrition for children can have diverse and long-term negative repercussions for children. 2.5 million Canadians, in 2001 were without adequate food. We have seen a huge increase in people without access to enough food and the basics of life. Not only are people not having enough to eat, they may also be choosing lower quality food due to financial stress.

A recent report documents that the stressful environment of poverty causes increased obesity that is not due to different food nor lack of exercise. Food quality is often sacrificed for food quantity in order to fill up. 174,000 women and children in BC lived in poverty last year. 30% of lone parent households are likely to live in food insecurity. The statistics are bleak in terms of costs of housing, support payments and the ability to feed oneself. The BC Dietitians in their annual food basket report for 2002 recommend that support payments are based on an assessment of both actual housing costs as well as the age and numbers of children; continued support for school meal programs, support for local food security programs and initiatives, support for breast-feeding by local governments etc. Recommendations from the 2003 Cost of Eating in BC will be released in a couple of weeks.

Barb Seed: From Vending to Dialysis Machines

Barb is a community nutritionist in the South Fraser and co-founder of Food for Kidz. The title is Lorna Medd's, who was unable to attend. Barb stated that both overweight and obesity in children has increased dramatically, and is associated with various health problems in children that used to be seen only in adults. Health care and lost productivity costs are enormous. It is important to approach this with dignity and respect and look at the society as a whole – not get into victim blaming etc. The environment has the largest impact on being overweight.

According to US stats, only 2% of children meet the recommendations for a healthy diet. Families influence both the eating and physical activity patterns of children. Families that eat together 5 or more times per week have healthier teenagers – both physically and psychologically. Children need consistent messages regarding food and nutrition – if the foods class teaches good nutrition but there are vending machines selling junk food; is the message followed through at home?

Safety issues affect activity levels in children. Healthy eating and physical activity are not the norm these days. There is a link between poverty and childhood overweight. Food is not a priority in our society. Individual intervention (diet counselling) doesn't address the core problem since this is a comprehensive, society problem. Bold, radical action is necessary in public policy to create the change needed.

Food Security Indicators Panel, Chair: Kathleen Gibson

Jeri Manley: happy that we are discussing food security indicators since those who work on food security know how hard it is to validate what they believe. The BC Nutritionists have produced the annual Cost of Eating Report which provides useful data on the cost of eating across the province. They price 65 different foods, not necessarily the cheapest but foods that represent consumer patterns of expenditure and that meet the Canada Food Guide to Healthy Eating guidelines. They have participation from all health regions and 125 stores across BC. They use a reference family of four, two adults, two children and use this reference group consistently so they can track it effectively from year to year. A Report Writing Committee is struck each year to create a report from the data, in collaboration with the Dietitians of Canada (BC). They also work with partners who endorse the report and assist with disseminating it. The report can be used as a resource for policy, lobbying, education. They are also able to produce data for 23 different scenarios which include factors such as pregnancy etc. In this year's report they have also included comparisons of what different families will have for disposable income after housing, food etc. Jeri circulated a pamphlet which suggests ways in which individuals can make a difference vis-a-vis food security in their community. The full report of the Cost of Eating in BC will be available on-line on Oct 6th.

Jay-Anna Major Briere: In Prince George they have developed a number of handouts which they use to raise awareness in the community about food security, including the Hunger Barometer and the Food Security Report Card. The Hunger Barometer is a one page, attention-grabbing tool that they use widely, especially with those who don't work in this area and are not familiar with the issues. The Report Card is accompanied by the grading criteria, these have been standardized across the four communities for which they have Report Cards in the north.

Cathleen Kneen: question of understanding “The Food Forces That Make You Sick, Fat, and Poor”. It is not true that ‘there's no money’ – there are a few people who are making lots and lots of money from the food system – but it is very unequal. The system is global so we are all implicated in it; we need to de-construct the food system so we can ‘de-couple’ from it. Example of the development of high-fructose corn syrup produced in a monoculture production system,

much cheaper than sugar, so soft drink manufacturers could super-size without raising prices. The increased use of HFCS plots on the same rising curve on a graph as childhood obesity. Need to look at all aspects, including schools, housing, transportation (housing is distant from essential services, housing structures do not foster community, kids are driven to school, etc.) This means networking and collaboration with others who work on other social structures not necessarily directly related to food security, as they are essential to addressing the systemic problems. We are continually pushed to see problems as requiring individual solutions rather than system change, for example the medicalizing of behaviour in Attention Deficit Disorder instead of looking at the lack of physical challenge to the kids in the school system.

Rochelle Eisen: would like to make a farmer barometer. Canadian farmers are younger by 5 years than conventional farmers on average. Canadian farmers are not going to be here much longer – loss of land, not getting cost of production.

Discussion:

Winnipeg food bank has created an ALL (Acceptable Living Level) Report that measures housing, food costs both in Winnipeg and in various regions in Manitoba. They found that inner city Winnipeg food costs are almost twice as much as in suburbia. (www.WinnipegHarvest.org) David Northcott raised the issue of who gets to decide what is in the market basket – do low income people have input into determining what is in it. Food Insecurity Vulnerability Mapping System of the FAO may be useful in terms of determining what indicators should be used.

- The BC report uses the cost of the food from year to year as a baseline indicator – there has been an increase of 9% since 1990 while over the same years the assistance income has decreased 6%.
- One important measure to include is the fact that fast food workers and farmers are the two groups who earn the lowest income. The true cost of production also needs to be addressed – all the externalized costs such as the fact that the global food system is the single largest contributor to greenhouse gases.
- Food security is not just an issue for the poor – should our food supplies get cut off there is limited supply in our communities.

First Nations Women & Food: Trudy Jack

All food is medicine. Children want to learn about tradition: story of offering of food for healing, her grandson learning at 4 years old.

I never train anyone for anything unless they ask. But when people have troubles we try to find an answer, to help them with that and the “medicine that they will need”. Food is emotional and nurturing.

We have a reason for all these gatherings: asking for help with sincerity – food is the best medicine to heal. But other people’s experiences are medicine as well. *Story:* Mother learning to ask for help on her death bed: she had trained all her children and grandchildren all her life but at 78 years old needed to learn the lesson of *asking for help*. In a gathering we bring all the “traditional” food first, then other foods (local grocery...). Then find a cook who is trained in

preparation for gatherings/prayer to be able to cook.

Story: grandchild insisting on prayer when older members have forgotten at a Public Place (inspiration of youth).

Food Offerings

1st in the year is the Roots offerings – first medicine that comes up

- Prepared for Special Day – ensures good harvest for season.
- Teaching boys (to become scouts) and girls how to gather, clean, prepare roots for offering.
- 2nd is the Berry offering
- Girls pick, boys scout & protect
- Preparation method – pre-menstrual girl serves, the power of woman with innocence of child 3rd is the Fish offering
- Thank fish, give offering to fish
- Keep all bones for calcium
- Use everything. The Right Way = Medicine Way

Story: Elders wanting to inspect the way she dried & prepared her fish that she was taught by her grandmother. They needed some belly parts for medicine & asked her for hers so her food can be medicine for others in need.

We have 4 Food Ceremonies; also Birth Ceremony, Death ceremony, Spirits (Lost souls) Ceremony. I have done many ceremonies and people ask me to pray for the; but I ask “are you sure you want me to?” What I am really asking them is “it may be more important for them to pray for *themselves*”.

It is important to understand how important you are. If I don't know where I'm from – I better dam well find out! Each of you is affected by me – once you affect others and it goes on and on until you are important (you stand up). I now speak all over North America and I talk about

- Standing up
- Letting your needs be heard. “You need to ask for what you need” or you get stuck

When I am asked to do a Prayer it frees me to do that for others. Otherwise I do my private prayers.

Story: her grandmother was passive, but when she walked out of the hospital she had done some healing and it had made her strong at 78 years old. She is strong not passive. “I pray I don't wait that long to find my voice!” I can't help anyone else unless I can help myself – it took time to find my voice. I've been trained in counselling and addictions, I work with others on their issues, but you need to know about what works for *you*. *Story:* my family “healing” me in their own way: All my life I was told to be quiet – “what you have to say is not important”. *But* – my family told me *I am important* and what I have to say is important and to *stand up*. Now I am the ‘crier’ the “speaker” – I have found my voice.

When I go into homes and there is no Food Prayer I ask if I can do one. Learn to let yourself get comfortable with food prayers.

How You Eat: Sometimes my spirit needs me to eat with my fingers and hand. When my spirit needs that I am feeding my Spirit. Children eat with their fingers – they are so pure. We learn others' ways and we get “schooled” and we forget where we come from.

I am free to do what I want to do and not account to anyone but the Creator. This I do with all my traditional foods first, and second food from farmers markets. First Nations people have special wisdom (gathering, hunting knowledge that is passed down). We know to take care of the land. Aboriginal people are *Caretakers of the Land*.

Prayers work – they help to call people together to pray for *us*. When unified in prayer, how can the Creator say No?

Community Gardens Roundtable

1. First a public meeting needs to be held, use press to promote
2. Set up a matching gardens with growers: people who have land to garden with people who want to garden, this will get people gardening right away
3. Ask for help from other organizations who share similar ideals, eg. horticultural societies, also ask for donations
4. Allotments (i.e. individual plots) vs. common gardens (everyone helps each other) – pros and cons of each
5. Decide who will coordinate / or do it by group
6. What to grow at first? focus on easy to grow foods, leafy greens
7. Water is important, make sure you have a good source, figure out how you're going to pay for it
8. Question: how do you learn to grow? – find people who have good gardens and beg for help
9. Suggestion: hold harvest festivals

Other workshops and roundtables from which we have no reports included:

Hands-on Canning – Darlene Tanaka, Bernardin Co.

Hands-on Seed Saving – Patrick Steiner

Hands-on Food Dehydrating – Donna Antonishak

Setting up a food pantry – Louise Lefebvre

Pregnancy Outreach Program food security projects evaluation

Conveying the Healthy Eating Message – Loraina Stephen

Genetic Engineering & Food Security – Brewster Kneen

Community Kitchens roundtable

The Good Food Box roundtable

School Food Programs roundtable

Food Banks and Food Security Partnerships workshop

David Northcott (Winnipeg Harvest): first food bank opened in Edmonton in the 1980s. Now we need to ask is this a pendulum swing or a paradigm shift – will things really get better and eliminate the need for food banks, or do we need to look at a new way of doing business? The situation among the non-profits is unhealthy and polarized and needs to be addressed. There are three sectors and the paradigm shift has to involve all sectors – we cannot lose the elements of both justice and charity. Food Banks across Canada are not homogeneous, and their programs can be very different. For example Regina food bank is actively involved in training people to become butchers and get certified so that they can get jobs in the food industry. Food is not the only issue; in September moms will not eat in order to be able to provide school supplies.

There is a structural problem with poverty and food insecurity in Canada. We have to do our homework and be strategic. Closing the food banks is a multi-generational project – we need a multi-decade funding commitment. The public doesn't understand the term food security. Language strategy: neighbours become voters when we talk to govt, consumers when we talk to business. Most of the food banks in Canada were started from faith communities – we need to keep them in the picture. In Winnipeg, they ask for food, time and money. They use approx. 180,000 volunteer hours to run the food bank, 80% of whom use the food bank. The volunteers can and do get involved in various related projects and can acquire skills and get certified. David feels that the paradigm shift is what will close the food banks.

Discussion: food security continuum – from emergency food, kitchens, garden on to food policy. David would add six elements: political, economic, knowledge, media, people, spiritual.

Diane Collis: works for the Vancouver Community Kitchen project which has been running for the past 7 years, working with community groups to help them start and support community kitchens. They have recently started an interactive website. Original partners: the Vancouver Health Board, the Reach Community Health Centre, BC Gas, and the Vancouver Food Bank (Pat Burns was E.D.).

About 2 years ago, the demand and interest in community kitchens became overwhelming and so they investigated acquiring their own kitchen since they were working out of a tiny office at the Reach Clinic. The Vancouver Food Bank moved into a new warehouse and offered the Kitchen project space and kitchen which they moved into last September. They kept speaking with other food security projects in Van about moving in together. Over the year they have used the site for a training facility and have offered workshops. Diane has found that the association with the Food Bank has opened a lot of doors to the project where things were donated free and delivered. At a meeting in May the Executive Director of the Food Bank announced that the other projects can move into the warehouse; however the building owner refused. The Board of the Food Bank has directed the Director to pursue this with the building owner but not at the expense of their relationship with the building owner. Diane believes that the Food Bank is limited by their mandate, emergency food provision and so could not take on, for instance, a good food box. She feels that there is a need for education of the Board.

Laura noted that the Kamloops Food Bank did change their mandate a few years back – she sold it on the basis of the fact that the people who donate money want to see other food security projects happening, not just emergency food provision, and this is in fact what happened. David indicated that they build partnerships and coalitions to undertake the political work that cannot be done by a charity. In 1988 they started “Grow a Row” which provides a large volume of food mostly from middle and upper income people.

Mary Swendson: related the experience of attending the Ryerson Food Security Conference with the Chief of the Wet’suwet’en Nation and looking at all the strange food in the supermarket. They pondered whether or not they were food insecure if they couldn’t buy lemon grass but did supply much of their food needs through their own efforts. Moricetown has 64% unemployment and Moricetown residents cannot access the food bank in Smithers more than 3 times a year. There was a recent study which indicates that there is \$11 million leakage out of Moricetown.

Moricetown Band Council has a buy local policy. 34% of the population that responded to a recent quality of life survey indicated that they do not have enough food 13 days out of the month. She talked about food security being culturally specific or sensitive – “lets make it cool to go out and hunt”. They have put in a funding proposal to see how they can use the residual heat from the mill to grow food in greenhouses. They are looking at entrepreneurial projects to address food security and community development. She is exploring ways to make the food bank sustainable.

Comment: work to educate Food Bank funders about going beyond emergency food provision.

First Nations Foodways: Theresa Ann Terbasket and Sandy Terbasket
following are excerpts from a handout prepared by Theresa Ann Terbasket for the workshop

Meat

All parts of the deer are used: the stomach is used for food storage. The intestine is stuffed with suet and berries. This is smoked the same as jerky and stored for the winter camp. The liver, kidneys, and tongue are considered delicacies.

Fish

Fish is served many ways; baked, barbecued, open fire roasts, canned, smoked and wind dried. Preparation once done only by the woman, is today shared with the men. The preparation of salmon involves tedious cleaning, and separating the parts used for different dishes. For example the fish heads are a delicacy and put aside for the elders. The roe was then cleaned and dried to be used in berry puddings and trail mixes. The Okanogans used the entire fish for food, like fish head stews and lung broth. Baked fish heads are said to be delicious. Dried fish eggs are added to stew pots and to berry puddings.

Local fishing areas are: O.K.Falls, McIntire Bluff, Oroville Wn., Osoyoos, Inkemeep, Trout Creek, Mission Creek, Penticton, Creek. There are campsites all along the valley that are no longer visible. The main source of salmon today is the Fraser River. With a permit we can fish in

specific areas depending on the band we are dealing with. We have to know how to use the equipment to catch it with, and how to clean it. Today we still fish and wind dry salmon for winter use. Any surplus is used for trade with other Nations for berries, roots, dried meat, canned and fresh fruit from the Okanogan Valley.

Plants

Siya. (Saskatoons in English)

Siya is harvested from mid-May to the end of June in the Similkameen Valley. The berries are picked when they are dark blue to black. Then you must clean them to before they are canned, frozen, or dried. Use jars according to size of family and amount used. Most families still sun dry berries for use. Store in big old mustard jars, they keep forever. Siya is used in trail mixes and for trading with other Nations for dried salmon, huckleberries, or anything one needs. Most fruits can be dried in the sun and kept well sealed in tight container for years.

Su'sum (Soapberries)

Su'sum are ready to harvest from mid-May to end of June, then raspberries, gooseberries, strawberries, and chokecherries are the last to be harvested, in late August to September. Huckleberries in the high-country are ready by mid-August to end of September. These foods are available in the wild.

To pick Su'sum you'll need a small tarp to cover the ground under the bush. Grab a branch in your left hand and using a stick hit the main branch and berries will fall onto tarp. Transfer berries into pail/picking basket before moving to next branch. In twenty minutes you'll have enough for a year. For best results freeze in ice cube trays before bagging. 1 cube is enough for 4 servings of Indian Ice Cream.

Spithun (Bitter root)

Spitlum is ready for harvest as early as May 10th when the siya are in bloom. The roots are actually little trees, they are low and have beautiful flowers later in the season. You use a digging stick to dig for the many roots. If they are ready the skin/bark comes right off. You need to dig many to feed a family one meal. The roots are then dried on reed mats, today we use cookie sheets. It takes 3 to 4 days to dry them, they may also be frozen. The elders enjoy the fresh spitlum any way it is prepared. Carbohydrates and minerals are some of the many benefits from this root. Bitter root is used in many dishes as thickeners. It can also be used for medicine.

Bitter-root, camas, sunflower roots, lily roots, and bulrush roots are all dried for use then pounded/powdered into flour to be stored and used for mixing other foods together, and as a thickener. There are many other roots used in this way.

Community-based Food Policy Councils Panel Chair: Linda Geggie

Linda introduced the concept of Food Policy Councils and described the motivations that often bring people to Food Policy Councils: access to food; health/nutrition; sustainability of farms; sustaining land base; land stewardship/biodiversity. Food Policy councils take all kinds of shapes

based on the motivations of those who participate.

(from the flip-chart)

Issues for Food Policy Councils

- access
- health and nutrition
- sustainability of farmers
- sustaining land base
- land stewardship
- biodiversity

Existing Councils /organizations:

- Kamloops Food Policy Council
- North Okanagan Food Action Coalition
- Nelson Food Coalition
- Food For Kidz /South Fraser
- Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR)
- South Okanagan and Similkameen Food Coalition
- Food First Prince George
- Dawson Creek Food Share
- HEAL initiative (Northern BC)
- Nanaimo – Food Link
- Nanaimo Foodshare
- Nicola Valley Food Forum
- Lower Mainland Food Coalition
- Masset Coalition
- Hazelton-Upper Skeena

Herb Barbolet: The experience of Emilia Romagna. Emilia Romagna, Italy, has one of the most successful and vibrant community based co-operative movements in the world. The university of Bologna offers a course on co-operatives. The region has approximately 4 million people and has tens of thousands of co-operatives. They believe that without competition you can't have co-operation and visa versa. They form co-ops among themselves to address marketing, finance, research, distribution. They have service centres that help them develop their products while still competing with each other. There are only five companies in the region that employ more than 50 people. They have set up systems to ensure that they can work collectively while maintaining their own standards. Quality, specialisation are priorities – people don't want to grow their businesses beyond where they can control the quality. The municipal and regional governments supply funds to support social service centres that also are centres where the patients also participate in creating high quality product. The unemployment rate there is 4%.

Denise Weber - The experience of Belo Horizonte: Denise and Barb Seed went to Brazil as part of an urban food security course through Ryerson. Many of the initiatives in Belo Horizonte are similar to what we are doing here, such as food boxes, vitamin supplements for pregnant women, they monitor the costs of 45 foods and non-food products; they are facilitating access to

grocery stores in low-income neighbourhood that include price controls on 25 basic items; there is a 'popular restaurant' program which offers low cost meals. What is unique about the programs in Belo Horizonte is the role of government. Food Security is its own municipal department which is looking at ways to leave the charity model and move into something more sustainable. Each of the 50 states in Brazil is mandated to have a Food Security Department; the

Secretariat for Food Security was formed from staff from those who had worked in the area previously and had a broad base of expertise. An advisory council was also formed for the Secretariat which had broad representation. The council was disbanded in 1998 due to political and personality challenges. The entire city budget is open to public input and discussion and includes the Food Security Secretariat. They have agro-ecological experience centres. There is a national food security program with a zero hunger program which is available to any municipality which has a food security advisory council. The challenge is to keep citizen input, not to create a system that is too vulnerable to changes in government and political will. If there is government accountability the work will keep going.

Kathleen Gibson - Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable. CR-FAIR has been around for about 10 years. It grew out of concern about food hunger and food access issues in the community. They are under the umbrella of the Community Social Planning Council in Victoria. The Steering Committee includes members from LifeCycles, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, the Vancouver Island Health Authority, and the Community Social Planning Council. They are currently working on expanding their membership so they can work on establishing a food policy at the regional/municipal level. They are organizing a series of public forums on food access issues. The first of these led to the creation of a resource directory for food service providers in the community.

CR-FAIR is also working on a baseline food security assessment for the region (drawing on the Community Food Security Council tools in the USA). All their work on the Mission and Vision in their pamphlet helped clarify what they really are doing – "it gives them a place to stand". One of their funding sources is a check-off arrangement with Thrifty Foods, a locally owned grocery chain. Originally the funds were provided for CR-FAIR to do consumer education around "Buy Local." The key is to find a section of the food chain where a tiny amount can be siphoned off on large volume of items.

Tim Louis: City of Vancouver Food Policy Task Force. In 1999 two COPE members were elected to the 11 member council and so couldn't really implement their ideas. Tim attended Wayne Roberts' lecture that caused him to connect with the topic of food security. His particular concern is employment, and what he learned from Wayne was that if we went back to the diet we had in the 1970s, overnight, with no government subsidy, we would create 30,000 jobs. He realized that food policy is therefore about many things. Recently COPE members became the majority on city council; every year the West End Farmers Market came to request a motion to ignore a bylaw they were in violation of; the new Council said, why not change the by-law. In fact, they decided to go further and create a Food Policy Task Force which will, we hope, recommend to Council that a Food Policy Council be created.

In response to question: Still uncertain how to make it larger: one way is linking with other municipalities through the GVRD, second is a patchwork of a variety of municipalities; the third is to work through the regional health boards.

Discussion:

- CNC (Community Nutritionists Council) is currently working on a paper on this topic, and our next step is to ask for regional food policy councils filtering into a provincial council.
- Toronto has the Health Board within the City which results in a down-grading of issues such as land use. We are hoping for linkages between health boards and municipalities. Toronto has the 24-member citizens council which is part of a strategy of robustness – surviving political changes. There would need to be councils at all levels, starting with the local. In BC we have strong grass roots but our weakness is at the government level, regional and provincial.
- We could also look at the foodshed as a model for organizational base.

Laura Kalina - Kamloops Food Policy Council. In 1989 Laura had just moved to Kamloops, and the Food Bank approached her saying that they couldn't feed their people by the 3rd week of the month. They did a needs assessment of the food bank and they came up with a range of ideas such as community kitchens, community gardens (in partnership with the city). They received \$15,000 from Healthy Communities, and did a big action research project on community kitchens. They realized that they needed to move to food policy work in 1995 and put on an event with all sorts of people in attendance and formed a community food policy council. A big part of what they do is networking, with a core group of 10-15 people and many people who come and go. They developed a food policy and started meeting with the health region and made a point of presenting to the health region for a couple of years without asking for anything so that when they finally asked for the region to adopt the food policy it was adopted. After several years of meetings, the Social Planning Council also incorporated elements of the food policy into the City's social plan.

Having a policy in place has certainly helped: after the health region adopted the policy the KFPC used that to leverage the region to grant them a long-term lease on the land to develop a training centre, and to get support from the city council. The Garden Gate training centre teaches people, mostly mental health clients, to farm organically. The garden produced 20,000 pounds of food from one acre last year.

Another important element is their partnerships; they got some people on the food bank board after 3 years of work. The food bank now has a building purchased through the SCIPI fund which will also house the food policy council and their projects run by volunteers. They are just starting to figure out what the partnership/new organization will look like but it was formed to reduce redundancy in meetings etc. They are using the language of the Health Authority which enables them to buy in more easily. Working together one can see positive outcomes.

Policy round-table / brainstorm

Introduction from Kathleen Gibson:

There are three tiers in the agri-food system:

1. *industrial- commercial* – single commodity – export – well-established programs – on government radar
2. *small-scale business* – many/multiple commodity – emerging – small – mix of programs – hardly on government radar
3. *community* – marginal – vulnerable populations – sinking – no programs – not on government radar

Comments:

- seek allies and champions inside the Ministries
- legitimize the issue
- develop a groundswell of support
- use issues like BSE scare to emphasize local agriculture leads to food safety
- start with the vision of a BC food system
- April 11: join with labour to push the social safety net
- new Public Health Act – get food security into public health
- Federal: Healthy Living strategy
- small business economic impact – research and promote
- people are looking for a simple issue, eg. gas issue; what's in it for them?
- Ag Ministry: stability of rural communities
- costs go down for policing, mental health care
- suggest cow as 'mascot': must be fed well, no shit in the water
- food safety leads to right to know
- school food: issue has resonance: pop etc. in schools; 15-minute lunch; obesity
- indicators: develop 6 indicators of food security; publish 4 times a year with demand for action, call for a Provincial Health Officer report on food security
- more effective to discuss goals and objectives rather than indicators (positive approach)
- call for Food Sovereignty!

Fundraising Workshop Notes

Resources: Linda Geggie, Sarah Chilvers (Vancouver Foundation), Denise Weber and Connie Chapman (Health Canada)

Fundraising has become even more of an issue because of the cuts to health, education, and welfare. The issues are how to develop sources of money and also how to develop political will. Groups are looking for sustainable funding, and ways to use project funding to do core programs, advocacy/education.

Handout on Grant Writing Basics: Common Problems

- duplicates existing project
- lacking expertise in key areas
- poorly conceived idea, too vague
- lack of long term capacity to sustain
- key people not consulted
- no connection to the target group

- poor track record – accountability and credibility issues
- poor timing
- wrong strategy to address issue
- questionable impact

Vancouver Foundation

- giving 3-year project funding
- usually on a declining balance and only 50% of project's cost
- transparent, time sensitive, fast open decision-making
- cooperative projects are key groups that are appreciated
- VF wants to talk to people and then send a letter of inquiry in
- 'in kind' is recognized and valued and there is a subjective valuing
- VF has advisory committee to assist in the project reviews, listed on web site
- application deadlines: September, January, April: project to staff to board with advisors for decision
- responds to needs of community
- Grant Area: Sustaining Enterprising Non-Profits
- *Reflections: collaborative /cooperative approach works*
- 'NISHA' collaboration tool kit and partnership agreement templates at
<www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/multicult/pdf/multiph3.pdf>
- understand and establish appropriate relationship with funder; they become your allies and advocates
- have a positive and constructive approach looking at challenges and impact in the community

Brainstorm on funding sources:

- Justice Canada community mobilization fund (not so keen on food projects)
<www.prevention.gc.ca/en/apply/cmp/index.html>
- Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program (CEDTAP)
<www.ontario.coop/starting/cedtap.htm>
- United Way, Partners in Organizational Development, partner with early childhood development ("Success by 6")
- Northern Health Authority's Funders database available on CD – contact Cathryn Wellner
- Federal government – different pots of money in different 'silos', eg.
 - Environment Canada - Eco-Action (families), climate change focus
 - Health Canada: Population health, Canadian Diabetes, CPNP
- people on reserve have other funding sources, eg. FNIHB (collaborate with Band Admin.), Aboriginal Agricultural Fund
- Status of Women Canada <www.swc_cfc.gc.ca/funding/wpguidetx2_e.html#fin>
- Youth action support <www.eya.ca/yaec/>

Challenge to the group: share what we are doing to fund raise so that we can help and not compete with one another.

Food Security and Community Economic Development workshop

Tanis Dagert: Poor People's definition of poverty

- lack of access to basic infrastructure & services
- poverty has psychological impacts: powerlessness, dependency, shame, etc.
- poor rarely speak of income
- poor people maintain sense of their own worth via cultural identity, solidarity, etc.
- focus on managing assets as a way to cope with vulnerability
- social fabric – 'insurance' is breaking down due to isolation & lower social cohesion

Assets: (have versus have-not approach)

Financial

- income
- credit
- savings

Personal

- self-esteem
- spiritual
- motivation

Social

- family & friends
- networks
- political

Physical

- resources
- tools
- food
- shelter

Human

- skills
- ability
- health etc

Social entrepreneur is a non-profit manager who pursues a vision of economic empowerment through the creation of social purpose businesses intended to expand assets /opportunities for those on the margins. – Roberts Foundation, 1996: "We work to empower people to empower themselves."

Types

- individual owned micro-enterprise
- group owned enterprises /co-ops
- organization owned to create employment
- organization owned to earn revenue to run programs

Principles

- the goal is the development of livelihoods – i.e. all assets
- holistic approach
- focus & specialise
- be flexible – evolve as needs change
- help people to stay focussed

Robin Cyr (Community Futures, Salmon Arm)

It is important to understand what a sustainable community is. We need to get local people involved in sustainable community development - it is a local issue. Minimum wage jobs **do not** sustain people or communities.

Communities are spread out – centres are often a long way from housing. We use a lot of energy to get to the grocery stores and other services.

We need to look at how we are developing our communities in North America – this may be difficult to do.

Abra Brynne (Foodshed Animator, West Kootenays)

Abra promotes supporting the local food system and tries to provide the tools to do this:

- grow our own food
- develop a local food system
- work with area farmers telling them where they can sell their goods
- educate farmers and food processors about products and what it takes to get them into the market.

This could include:

- identifying crops that can be grown in an area
- identifying when you can grow certain crops
- identifying what crops are in demand
- identifying suggested wholesale prices
- listing businesses receptive to buying locally
- advising on post-harvest handling
- educate consumers about how food is produced

We spend 8-11% of our disposable income on food. People living on low income spend 30-35% of total money on food. Our food system is heavily subsidized by our road system, our tax system, our environmental system, etc. – and the food producers themselves. There should be a way to make a link between food producers and those who can pay – farmers should not have to give away their goods.

People need to eat so food businesses are an opportunity, but there are problems: distance to markets (farmers spend much time driving their goods to markets); ability to set the price (possible in Victoria where the demand is greater than the supply, but not in other areas such as Nelson); getting local product into large stores. One option may be web-based marketing.

It is important to know what the market will sustain – to look at what is on grocery shelves and see what people are buying. Packaging is also an issue – glass is fragile and plastic is not recyclable in the Kootenays; a challenge for farmers to make their product look like the consumer wants it to. Does the packaging make it easy notice the product? Is the packaging reusable?

Direct to consumer: The Good Food Box is a decent ‘drop’ for farmers. For example: 100 Good Food Boxes would purchase 500 pounds of potatoes. Good Food Box is a not-for-profit enterprise. Volunteers do the packing so should not compete with the for-profit programs. In Nelson, the Pregnancy Outreach Program chose to use organic produce. They got lots of food for \$10, and proved to be supporting local farmers. In a CSA - (we don’t have many farms that do this) people have a share in farms and the produce. This could be a family farm. It would create a connection between the farm and the community – trade labour for food maybe. A challenge is a big lump sum paid up front (Spring time). Sometimes home delivery works better, and there are a number of such enterprises now.

We still need to educate consumers to support local farmers. Often consumers do not think about what it costs the farmer to produce his/her goods. Also, a lot of buyers don’t want (or have the time) to call each farmer for what is available and prices. For example: a restaurant owner has no time to “find” produce. A farmer’s advocate can help farmers be pro-active and hook up with potential buyers.

Closing session: Planning discussion

The hallmarks of the Network are its diversity and provincial reach. It is essentially a network of relationships; while we may collaborate, for example in signing-on to national or international statements or initiatives, each member of the Network speaks for itself.

Common issues to be addressed in the next year:

1. **the ‘coming cuts’ in April 2004** – what kind of coordinated response can we mount? Are there actions we can take before that date to stop the cuts or at least reduce their harm?
2. **school food:** this includes support for school meals, the quality and source of the food served, and the issue of junk food in schools and in school fundraising programs
3. **food security defined as a core function of Public Health**
4. **development of food policy councils** (municipal and related to Health Regions)
5. **networking**

- Cost of Eating report – due out October 6th – share media strategy
- identify indicators – or targets /goals for action
- plan for national Food Security Network meeting in Winnipeg in March 2004

Reference Group

Role of the reference group is to respond within the given time-frame to questions and concerns from the coordinator and generally to guide the process of the Network until the next Sorrento Gathering. Reference group volunteers:

Terry Schuster – Bella Coola
Mary Swendson – Smithers/Moricetown
Herb Barbolet – Vancouver
Hope Kelly – Castlegar
Cliff Stainsby – BCGEU, Victoria
Kathleen Gibson – Victoria
(added later): Donna Antonishak – CNC, Vernon
Laura Kalina – Kamloops
Representative from BC POP (Jenn Cody – Merritt)

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The Growing Green Policy and Law Reform Project
HEAL – Healthy Eating Active Living
Health Canada Pre-Natal Nutrition Program
Western Economic Diversification
The Sorrento Centre

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This report was compiled from notes taken by Abra Brynne, Loraina Stephen, Kathleen Gibson, and several others. The effort was theirs, any errors are mine.

– Cathleen Kneen, Coordinator, BC Food Systems Network

*For more information on the Network, see <www.fooddemocracy.org>
or write to our Coordinator for an update on action strategies at
S6, C27, RR #1, Sorrento, BC, V0E 2W0*