

Sustainable Local Food Systems in Europe and the Americas: Lessons for Policy and Practice

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PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

8:45 a.m.: Panel one: Building links between European and Canadian policy experiences

Lost in a Corn Maize? Comparing the EU and Canada on central government support for sustainable local food systems

Peter Andrée (Carleton University)

Intended as an introduction to this policy workshop on local sustainable food systems in policy and practice and thus to raise questions for discussion, Dr. Andrée will begin by examining some of the ways that the European and Canadian policy experiences are, and are not, comparable. He will then give examples of various ways that the Canadian government and some major industry groups in Canada, despite their general orientation towards conventional productivist agricultural practices and exports, also work to support local and sustainable food systems in this county, and thus provide potential allies for the largely grassroots and small-business based “local food movement”.

Sustainable Place-Making in Europe and China: Towards a new spatial imagination for agri-food and urban-rural relations

Terry Marsden (Cardiff University)

There is now a vast body of research which explores the emergence of ‘alternative’ food networks and their particular spatial, social and economic characteristics. This paper attempts to put this work in a wider and more challenging contemporary context. In recent years, and especially since the global price rises in foods in 2007-8, we have seen a new ‘framing’ of food security, climate change, population increases, resource scarcity dynamics in ways which could continually marginalize such alternative movements. Alternative and ‘local’ food movements need to be seen in an increasing politically and spatially contested context, a context where the bio-economy is creating more legitimacy in its ability to ‘feed the world’. The paper will trace this new political and economic architecture with reference to empirical studies in Europe and China. It is argued that we need to re-conceptualise a more grounded and multifunctional notion of place as part of integrating the local economy, community and ecology. Sustainable place-making needs a vibrant and engaging sustainability science which challenges the assumptions of different shades of ecological modernization.

Bridging the Good Food Gap: Three jurisdictions, three responses

Lauren Baker, Coordinator (Toronto Food Policy Council)

The good food gap is the policy space that separates the farm income crisis from the health crisis. In Canada and beyond, farmers find it difficult to make a living growing food while consumers find it difficult to make the good food choices they want to make. The good food gap is the result of the historical and structural ways agriculture and health policies have been developed. Initiatives working towards healthy, local, sustainable and equitable food systems can be seen to be bridging the good food gap. This paper examines three such initiatives, working at three jurisdictional levels in Canada. The Toronto Food Strategy, Sustain Ontario – The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming, and the People’s Food Policy Project engage citizens to contribute to policy-making processes, creating new platforms upon which disparate issues can be connected and creative solutions proposed.

Local Food Systems and Public Policy: Opportunities and barriers from the Québec context.

Jean-Fred Lemay, (GRADES (formerly with Équiterre)) with Chantal Blouin (Centre for Trade Policy and Law, Carleton University/University of Ottawa).

Équiterre and the CTPL reviewed the agricultural policies adopted by federal and provincial authorities in Canada to assess whether they are supportive of local food systems. We found that even though there is no national policy to promote local food systems, provincial governments have been active with various programmes in this area. There is much variation from one province to another, but the existing programmes tend to cluster on the demand side, focusing on consumer education and marketing projects, even running some themselves (the origin labelling and promotion programmes). We see some programmes to support organic farming (transition programs) but very few focusing on processing and distribution.

The Quebec context is particularly distinct in the Canadian agriculture landscape. More than cultural or political differences, the province has developed a general reflection on the state of its agriculture (2007) and proposed different programs to support local food marketing chains. Consultations about agricultural policy will also to be completed this coming year. This presentation will point to the barriers and opportunities of this provincial context for the scaling up of local food system initiatives.

10:45 a.m.: Panel two: Comparative case studies from European and the Americas

Re-connection between Producers and Consumers in Europe: Markets, communities, knowledges, and policies.

Maria Fonte (University of Napoli)

While stressing the importance of different strategies of re-localisation, this presentation focuses on local food as a ‘re-connection between producers and consumers’. The strategies of interest are especially those implying collective action and community building. Among the obstacles to make this re-connection work are those linked to the re-constructing and valorising local knowledge of producers and consumers and the construction of a local provision infra-structure. What is the role of policies in removing these obstacles? Examples will be drawn from the European case studies of the CORASON project and from the Italian case of ‘Solidarity Purchasing Groups’ in Roma.

Agri-food Policy Renewal in the Golden Horseshoe: Synergistic policies for economic development, health, and environmental sustainability in an urbanized region.

Harriet Friedmann (University of Toronto)

Specific policy shifts can incrementally move the agrifood system towards a tipping point in which a creative agrifood sector contributes to: (1) skilled jobs across the urban-rural divide; (2) prevention of chronic diseases afflicting people and health systems; and (3) renewal of waterways, soils, and carbon cycles. The starting point is to understand that in an urbanized region such as the Golden Horseshoe, food markets are no longer driven by agricultural production but by urban demand (consumers, retailers, processors and food services). The way forward for government is to create incentives across the agri-food sector to pursue synergistic solutions to otherwise intractable problems.

Insights from Cuba: Viva la revolución agro-ecológica!

Patricia Ballamingue (co-author with Lorelei Hanson) (Carleton University)

Cuba is often cited as an exemplar of ecologically sound food production – a system designed to meet local needs and adapt to emerging circumstances, such as those associated with peak oil. This presentation draws on primary data collected during a 2010 field trip to Cuba, involving 26 site visits to urban permaculture, organic agriculture and food preservation projects in Havana, Sancti Spiritus, Santa Clara and Matanzas. It will identify select aspects of Cuba’s eco-agricultural reform that would be worth emulating in the context of building sustainable local food systems in North America and Europe. Biophysical aspects might include: an intensive focus on soil fertility; biological pest control; productive re-use of waste; holistic animal husbandry techniques; use of appropriate and accessible technologies; intercropping and companion planting. Social aspects might include: the privileging of vulnerable sub-populations; horizontal diffusion of knowledge; eco-agricultural practice as resistance; and a broader societal paradigm shift.

1:30 p.m.: Panel three: Trade agreements and sustainable local food systems: Help or hindrance?

Real Restrictions or Just Trade Chill? Do trade agreements substantially limit development of local and sustainable food systems?

Rod MacRae (York University)

The common view in policy and business circles is that the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and the Canadian Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) significantly limit the policy and programme instruments that can be applied to local and sustainable food system development. I would like to explore the degree to which this is true. The session will hopefully identify what governments can do within the frame of these agreements. My preliminary reading of the AoA and AIT suggests that, although there are some restrictions, Canadian governments have far more latitude than is typically acknowledged, and more substantial drivers can be put in place than currently exist without triggering trade disputes.

The Impact of Trade Agreements on Local Food Systems: Lessons learned from trade and health
Chantal Blouin (Carleton University)

Analysts examining the impact of trade agreements on health systems have raised concerns about the risk that trade rules would negatively limit policy space available to adopt measures to protect and promote public health. However, when a detailed analysis of the current state of trade commitments relevant to health services are undertaken, the impact of trade agreements was revealed as limited, though not insignificant. The presentation will highlight the similarities and differences between trade and health vs trade and local food such as the presence of a public health exception at the WTO and the unique structure of commitments in services.

Implications of the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).
Phil Rourke (Centre for Trade Policy and Law, Carleton University/University of Ottawa)

This presentation will provide an analysis of Canada's current bilateral trade negotiation agenda, with a specific focus on the Canada-EU CETA negotiations, and their possible implications for local food systems strategies and on agriculture more generally. The presentation will use the experience of the Canadian wine industry after the implementation of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement to illustrate options available to develop local food systems under a more liberalized trade environment.

3:00 p.m.: Panel Four: Building partnerships between municipal governments and civil society

Current Trends in North American Urban Agriculture: opportunities for municipal governments and NGOs.
Karen Landman (University of Guelph)

While urban agriculture is not a new phenomenon in North American cities, there has recently been a rapid increase in this activity, contributing significant changes in local food systems for some urban neighbourhoods. Based on a 30,000 kilometre road trip through parts of the United States and Canada, this presentation will offer an overview of urban agriculture trends, including Community Gardens, Student Farms, Urban Farms, Urban Planning and Design, Academic Research, and Urban Agriculture as Hobby, particularly for children. While offering alternative sources of food production, urban agriculture is primarily about community and social development, increasing capacity, and building skills. Municipal governments and NGOs have an opportunity to foster and direct these activities to strengthen neighbourhoods and increase quality of life in urban landscapes.

Food Hubs: Growing community based solutions for sustainable, local food systems.
Alison Blay-Palmer (Wilfred Laurier University)

Food systems are increasingly linked to social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities as indicated by growing interest in farmers' markets, foodprints, and the diabetes crisis. This paper will report the findings from three research initiatives that assess local, sustainable food systems through different lenses. First, indicators from the *Food Counts* sustainable food systems report card project will be used to draw attention to weaknesses and strengths associated with food system dimensions at different scales. Next, best practices for successful sustainable, local food communities identified through an Ontario-wide review will be presented as alternatives to address gaps in community food systems. Third, by contextualizing this research in the sustainability policy realm, solutions emerge to support the creation of more robust communities of food. One of these opportunities – the community food hub – will be elaborated.