

Sustainable Local Food Systems in Europe and the Americas: Lessons for Policy and Practice, Carleton University, March 3-5 2011

Bridging the Good Food Gap: Three Jurisdictions, Three Responses

Lauren Baker, Toronto Food Policy Council

Initiatives working towards healthy, local, sustainable and equitable food systems can be seen to be bridging the “good food gap,” and are proliferating across Canada and globally. 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.

This paper examines three initiatives working to bridge the good food gap 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 Government's Food Levers: The Toronto Food Strategy

The Toronto Food Strategy (Food Connections: Toward a Healthy Sustainable Food System for Toronto) was endorsed by the Toronto Board of Health in May 2010. The report provides a vision and concrete action ideas to move Toronto towards a health focused food system. Local government food levers are identified.

Governance

In 2008, the Board of Health endorsed the Food Strategy project and a Steering Group of community food experts and senior city staff was convened. This group provided the vision for the Food Connection report. The implementation phase of the Food Strategy will be governed by the Toronto Food Policy Council and a city staff reference group.

Vision

A health focused food system that fosters food-friendly neighbourhoods; promotes social justice; supports nutrition and disease prevention; builds strong communities; creates local, diverse and green economic development; protects and sustains the environment; empowers people with food skills and information; nourishes links between city and countryside.

Implementation

An interim staff team is overseeing the implementation of the Food Strategy. Concrete initiatives are underway to work across divisions to develop policies that enable food communities, create food activities and embed food systems thinking through existing programs.

Towards Multifunctional Food Systems: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario

Sustain Ontario is the outcome of a two-year process led by the Metcalf Foundation (a private family foundation), which brought together diverse groups and organizations working on food and agriculture issues in Southern Ontario. These groups and organizations represented the health, community, farming, and environment sectors. The Metcalf Foundation wanted to explore the appetite for cooperative, integrated work with the goal of transforming food and agriculture at a system-wide level. Through the process facilitated by the Metcalf Foundation, participants identified a need for collaborative policy and advocacy work at the provincial level. In 2010, *Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario* was commissioned by the Metcalf Foundation as part of their Metcalf Food Solutions series.

Governance

Sustain Ontario is governed by an Advisory Council comprised of sector leaders that provides ongoing strategic analysis to guide the work of the collaborative network. The Steering Committee is comprised of five representatives from the Advisory Council and provides administrative support to the director. The co-chairs of Sustain Ontario work with the director to liaise between the Steering Committee and the Advisory Council, acting as spokespeople for Sustain Ontario.

Vision

Sustain Ontario is working towards a food system that is healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable. Drawing from the work of farm and food leaders across the province of Ontario, *Menu 2020* identifies ten ideas that provide an integrated framework for farming and food, which will contribute to health and economic viability along the food chain.

Implementation

Sustain Ontario has developed a proposal for an Ontario Food Act to forward the recommendations identified in *Menu 2020*. The Ontario Food Act is part of a broader provincial election strategy to engage political parties to address farm and food issues in their platforms.

Food Sovereignty Policy for Canada: The People's Food Policy Project

The People's Food Policy Project (PFPP) is a pan-Canadian network of citizens and organizations working to create Canada's first food sovereignty policy. Thirty years ago, a group of activists created the People's Food Commission (PFC). The Commission toured the country, holding hearings in 75 communities that explored how food systems affected ordinary Canadians. The PFPP starts where the PFC left off. It is based on the concept of food sovereignty. Proposed and developed by the global peasant movement La Via Campesina, the PFPP seeks to place decision-making power about food systems in the hands of the people themselves. It has engaged over 2500 people across Canada and developed ten discussion papers. A People's Food Policy is being written and will be launched in the spring of 2011.

Governance

The PFPP is governed by a small Management Team, a larger Steering Team, and works with an active Animators Team. The teams provide vision and direction for the project. Policy writing teams have developed the discussion papers.

Vision

The PFPP's vision is of a food system that reflects seven pillars of food sovereignty: focusing on food for people, building knowledge and skills, working with nature, valuing food providers, localizing food systems, putting control locally, and acknowledging that food is sacred. Each of the ten discussion papers provides concrete recommendations for federal food policy development.

Implementation

After the launch of the People's Food Policy in the spring of 2011, the project will enter an advocacy phase. Food Secure Canada will provide the organizational home for the project and working groups will form around specific policy issues and opportunities. Dialogue with policy-makers and diverse farm and food organizations will be started.

Lessons Learned

Each of the above initiatives has a distinct approach to policy making that reflects jurisdictional differences, policy frames and engagement processes. Lessons related to process, strategy and action for food systems renewal will be discussed and shared.