

MINUTES: A Public Discussion: Our Community's Food System

Assembly Room, Washington County Community College

DATE: Tuesday, April 23, 2013, 6:30-8 p.m.

1. Regina Grabrovac opened the meeting, introduced herself, stating that she worked for Washington County: One Community, a Healthy Maine Partnership Organization and has 30 years in local food system experience. She asked the question: why are we here tonight? She explained that Judy would be talking a bit more about that but for her piece. Washington County: One Community (WC-OC) wants to look at our food system as a whole in our county because we know there are a lot of things going on and *we see a lot of things being repeated. So we want to help and be part of collaborating , sharing resources and making sure we aren't duplicating* efforts. The most burning question: What do we want our food system in 10 or 20 years to look like. How much can Washington County feed WC residents? Invited attendees to sample Wicked Good Granola and take a look at local food display provided by Growing Concern.
2. Judy East shared format: information to convey and questions to ask. This is one of five discussions around the county. Invited attendees to attend as many meetings as they'd like. Drew attention to materials at each seat, asked audience to share and invite others. Goal connecting producers, distributors, consumers, and retailers and find out what are your respective needs and how can we grow the system. Judy pointed out GIS map, created by Heron Weston. Asked farmers to verify that they are on the map and that the information is correct and if not on map, add a dot to map and fill out an information sheet. Judy presented Local Food slide show. Judy introduced polling process with sample questions. Audience participated, polling successful, and Judy East shared polling results graphs.
3. Judy introduced slide: What is Local Food? According to Farm Act, 400 mile radius.
4. Benefits of Local foods: Judy reviewed health benefits, as well as economic significance. Introduced the term locovore and shared that Maine is 2nd in the nation for feeding ourselves. Another indicator is increase in state legislative bills. Farmers Markets nearly tripled since 1989. Reviewed Kevin Athearn's study, based on 7 schools in Machias area. If they moved purchase up to 50%. What if 10% of WC grocery purchased were switched to local farms? Switched to polling and asked what % of weekly food budget do you spend on local food May-Oct and asked the same question for Nov-April. All sessions from around county will be merged. Presented figures for impact on economy of spending 10% of food budget.
5. Polled audience on demographic distribution of audience. What is your primary hat?
6. Karen Herrick asked for clarification on farm/fish inputs role.
7. Lora Whelan asked how reporter should define role in polling. Judy answered consumer.
8. Can you define homesteader/grower? Judy explained that there's a gradation of grower preparing to sell. Polling showed most respondents 'chose consumer as second hat.
9. Elizabeth Sprague added technical assistance to support network list.
10. Judy then presented a series of slides outlining assets and challenges in each element of the food system. Asked participants: have we missed anything? Cited source of issues list: Elizabeth Sprague's 2009 study and GROWashington Aroostook's winter survey of producers
11. Elizabeth Sprague (ES)asked Judy to explain again what inputs are. Regina answered those things that are required in order to fish or farm. So your access to equipment, feed, fuel, seeds.
12. ES asked what about municipal/town/understanding of needs of famers. Ted Carter: Local Support. Judy stated it would be more under support system. ES I'm getting at do real estate agents know how to talk to a buyer buying next to a farm so that they don't wake up in the

morning and complain about tractor sounds. Or someone buying waterfront property do they understand water access issues. Awareness and practices and taxation.

13. Unidentified: CSA as an input. Specifically, if I want this couple's product, they would be asking for money at the front end. Judy explained it's a retail issue.
14. Working capital was mentioned. Regina clarified that access to capital is on support system.
15. ES added health insurance to inputs issues.
16. Judy moved on to Production/Harvesting assets & issues.
17. Ted: The challenge is in finding new farmers.
18. ES Does food safety requirements belong here? ES reviewed whether it's an asset or challenge based on the role you are in.
19. Processing slide. Ted introduced certification from pesticide control board for those who sell over \$1,000.
20. Anne Perry: Re; marine processing, preservation of resources. Resource not being overfished.
21. Judy moved to Processing assets/challenges slide. Highlighted CCLC and CBRC. Regina noted that most of our schools have community kitchens. ES mentioned that schools close and are allowed to sit and go unused. Unidentified: challenge is figuring out affordability of using commercial kitchens. Unidentified: Referred back to the earlier comment that the Labor of Love commercial kitchen is unaffordable. He stated that it's a very nice kitchen. No one could comment on the specifics of use cost. ES I think we could benefit in terms of processing by more, a broader range of processing capacity, you know like, for example...I'm thinking of being able to process different kinds of things, different kinds of fish, being able to freeze as well as cut, do value-added, keep the value-added closer to home. Sally Erickson mentioned using commercial kitchens for training and certification.
22. Judy moved to Distribution /Wholesale assets and challenges. Judy mentioned GIS mapping. Tora Johnson's GIS Lab students analyzed: Identify best distribution hubs throughout Maine based on where farms are, farmers markets are and where some existing hubs are. That analysis will take us outside of Washington County and we will need to coordinate with Heart of Maine RC&D and some of the other activities that are going on. Judy also talked about the soils suitability and geo-parcels maps. Integration of soils, parcels and land cover data to find out: What's available as farm land? Clearly, it's completely voluntary with regard to land owners, but in terms of analysis, it tells us where the farmland is. ES: I think it's a good idea to map where things are but I guess that locating certain parts of distribution networks it seems to me are driven by many other factors other than just how far a food hub could be away from a farm. Judy: Certainly..by population centers. ES Well, there..Politically friendly local governments. How far ..you know there are point systems assigned according to how far animals are moved from where they are raised to the processors and if they are a certain number of miles away, the points given to that process starts to go down...you know..the conditions of roads...it just seems that there are more soft considerations than just miles and numbers of people. Judy: We can factor in additional factors because it's a modeling exercise. Judy invited ES to be a part of modeling exercise by working with the students. ES It would be interesting to include spending in that, too. Ted: Once you leave seafood and blueberries, there are very few wholesalers in the county. So maybe you want to focus more on the retail: ES: I also wonder about..I'm not sure about refrigerated trucks. I'm not sure..I think it's the way the vehicles are used. Judy: In my experience, that's not the case. There aren't enough refrigerated trucks. ES There might be an opportunity for a number of growers to share a truck.
23. Judy moved to Consumer Demand slide. Judy introduced group to www.gro-wa.org site, showed farmers markets, buying clubs list. Anne Hopkins noted that the address for the Eat Local Eastport Buying club needed to be updated, since the club moved. Results of meetings will be

posted on website. ES: Is this institutional demand as well? Ted: WIC is not an issue. Until WIC goes to an EBT-like system with cards, etc, it's not an issue. ES There's a big challenge in institutions' ability to work that cost of buying local foods into their budget. Judy noted that was on the slide. ES Affordability and dealing with large..for local to fit into large distributors and practices. Sally: It's important to note increase health costs with worse food. If you don't factor that in, the cost looks very high. Judy opened polling to determine where group participated in local food system as a consumer. Sally asked for clarification on buying club vs. pre-order. Distinction is pre-order is direct with one individual farmer. Unidentified asked where there was a CSA. Regina responded Tide Mill in Edmunds, Garden Side Dairy on Hatch Knoll Farm, and Salty Dog in Milbridge does CSA.

24. Judy moved to Nutrient/ Ecosystem Management Assets and Challenges slide. Karen Herrick questioned composting industry. Judy: Coast of Maine in Marion where they're using seafood products to create compost products. Ted: Mark Wright in Columbia Falls has a huge composting operation but the problem again is cost. Most farmers can't afford that. Karen added access to composting products as a challenge. Ted added the cost of trucking compost as another challenge.
25. Judy moved to Support System Assets and Challenges slide. Judy shared that Harold Clossey of Sunrise County Economic Council indicated that their initiative for making small loans and grants in the amount of \$10,000-20,000 to producers has been capitalized and that money is now available. It's a Washington County Fund.
26. Judy polled group on questions from Alan Majka, UMM Cooperative Extension, with regard to workshops he may offer.
27. Judy polled group re: biggest issues. Also asked did we miss anything? Heron added price to distribution issues.
28. Judy polled group : How do we support or expand production. ES added labor. ES: One thing I found in both studies is that farms grow to the extent that their families can handle it. Ted Another issue is insurance. The cost is out of gross. Regina added health insurance.
29. Judy polled on storage issues. Group wanted to be able to choose multiple answers. ES: All of these things go to distribution.
30. Judy shared a definition of a food council. Mentioned that one of the things that may come out of this series of discussions is the formation of a food council. She polled the audience yes/no whether they'd like a food council. Regina: This is not to create another organization. This is to create an umbrella, a coalition. ES: I'm not sure I understand. Could you define community food council, just briefly. I know we'll discuss it. I hope we get a chance to do some discussion. Judy: A way to bring all of the players together in a forum in a way to make sure that we're looking at all aspects of the system and all the players in order to work toward an environmental sustainable food system, in a way that is socially just so that it pulls in food pantries, a coordinating place for policy direction, models for towns. Regina: It can be defined according to community interests. Regina: A way to help address the gaps cohesively. It's not one organization that's doing it, which is great, but nobody knows that they're doing it. Lora Whelan Do you envision it being funded somehow with a staff person? That seems to be a necessary component. Regina: Yes. Having a paid staff director seems to be an important component of that and it's also been identified by farmers that we need someone to think about the food system as a whole. That's coming from the growers. Unidentified: Is this a non-profit or a profit organization? Judy: Nonprofit. They are the most successful when they are supported politically. If they are supported by state or county agency; it's a way to access staff or financial assistance. Regina: HMP had an opportunity to look at CFC system. We are looking it as a county-wide system. Regina: We see it as a way to get it going. How long the funding will last, no one knows.

ES: Need more information. Anne: Too early to ask. ES: I hope this doesn't sound really cynical. There is so much to be done and so many opportunities for good work in food systems that I guess that I would want to see some real skin in the game to actually continue to accomplish the improvements in the system if in fact a CFC is organized. Since I moved back here, I see work for example being done in fighting poverty that really just make it easier to be poor. I would really hope that there is an extraordinarily clear expectation that with coordination comes great responsibility for implementation, within a set period of time so that it's not just another funding stream. Judy Just that observation makes this question worth asking. Lora: So many organizations have changed direction according to where the funding is coming from. Sally mentioned that a county-wide organization would require a lot of travel. She would rather see an Eastport council and then a yearly retreat for all the councils. Judy suggested a virtual connectivity may be what serves the purpose. Greg Bridges: Not to knock all this, but this is, what, the third meeting we've been to this spring about brainstorming how to change all this it seems like a lot of times..these type groups...they are self-serving to the point where. The only thing that seems to improve is the study and the participants who get paid for doing the study. The biggest problem I see is that there is a diversity of farms in Washington County. We need to do better marketing to consumers. They need to make it easier to buy local food. Instead of coming up with another organizer, it needs to be an entrepreneur who figures out how to change peoples' minds. Richard: Any farm that's going to sustain itself has got to look at Boston markets. It's a part of the infrastructure that we need to look at. Wholesale to Boston is more money than retail in Calais. Anne Perry: There's an opportunity to learn from each other. She identified Maine Fresh as a model. ES: I also think that in initial discussion that it's important to take the time to talk about the fundamental definitions that are used when this starts to get framed. For example, Local. She gave examples of varying definitions. If you include Boston, Boston is an East coast distributor, so it could have come from anywhere in the country. Judy clarified that the 400 mile radius is what is grown in that area. ES said group should be asked what they think local food is. ES gave more examples. Richard East: There are some farms who are 15 miles from the nearest city. Ted Carter: The biggest problem is that we don't have enough growers. Period. End of Discussion. No more discussion needed. How do we attract all these young growers from Waldo County, Union, how do we get them up here? The financial part is tough. He shared his sales records. It's going to be local. Any discussion needs to be how do we grow our population base. We need 12-18 farms of 5 acres. Ted shared a handout he created outlining the crux of our food production in this area.

Unidentified: Are the farmers markets on different days throughout the towns?

Ted: Yes

Unidentified: So, a farmer can rotate throughout the towns on multiple days.

Ted: Yes.

Judy polled group: was meeting useful.

ES: I guess I would like to have more time just for discussion. I'm going to try to attend all these meetings, because the results are place-specific. What I'm interested in what's in the room and who's in the room.

Ted: Condense it. It took the whole time to get through the presentation.

Judy: Is it useful to talk about the parts of the food system?

Regina: We hadn't anticipated it taking so long.

Richard: Will you also have results posted by individual meetings?

Judy: Yes. We will have it separate and merged.

Regina: Since the CFC was a difficult piece, how could we more efficiently keep track of the whole system. SO if it is not a CFC, how do we do it?

Karen: In terms of identifying challenges, where does the part come in when we work on solutions.

Regina: We want to compile results and identify next steps.

Regina thanked everyone and solicited additional comments.