

Farm-to-School Programs as a Strategy to Build Local Food Systems

Discussion Leaders: Ellie Rilla, Director of UCCE- Marin County and Ann Evans, Davis Farm-to-School, Davis and Co-Leader Slow Food Yolo

Tues, Dec 2, 2008

4-5 pm

23 participants

After everyone in the group introduced themselves, Ellie asked for volunteers to discuss how their farm-to-school programs work.

Jenny Huston, Director of Culinary Social Enterprise from Bay Area Community Services, discussed her program, the only **farm-to-table Meals on Wheels** program in the country. It is a food program for seniors and administered by state and federal agencies. Since it is difficult to fund programs for seniors, they are working on selling other products (social enterprise model where sales support the mission). Their mission is to keep disabled and elderly independent in their own homes.

They produce 1200 meals per day, most of which are home delivered and the remaining 450 meals go to congregate sites. Their costs are below national average. They buy products from many different purveyors for best products and prices (CAFF, Alba, Greenleaf, Cooks Co.) since single farms can't produce enough. They are working more and more with local food service distributors and less and less with Costco. Their aim is to get to 80-90% local, but can't completely be free from industrial. The easy part of this effort is the purchasing and the hard part is teaching staff how to cook (instead of using industrial food products).

Questions for Jenny:

- Publicly funded? Their main funding is from contracts (53%) through city and county so they are largely publicly funded

- Prices? Meal prices are \$1.65 per meal. Since 2007, most food program costs have increased 15.2%, but their Farm to Table food costs have only gone up 1.5%. She warned that Sodexo will tell you that a local food distribution will increase costs 500-600%, but that is not true. Jenny says your food cost will remain steady, but labor costs will increase.
- Homebound seniors prone to mental health/depression—any stories from field on improved health? Working with UCSF on mental health study and there are links between nutrition and mental health/health outcomes—some research being done in North Carolina.

Ann Evans discussed her eight years of experience with Davis Farm-to-School which is part of the Davis Farmers Market Association. Passed out handout and also referred group to website. The program consists of 12 schools, 9000 kids, 21% free and reduced lunch. They used a strategy of being a 3rd party support organization (outside the school organization akin to a football booster club). Their main Four Goals for the program turned into a MOU with School District in order for the school district to adopt it. They oriented their goals toward the daily routine in the school versus changing the actual curriculum.

For example, schools worked toward solid waste reduction, cut costs in half, and that got immediate savings and attention! They harnessed savings to fund the program and achieve sustainability (their 2010 goal). In order to sustain these programs, it helps to make the case for cost savings and foster a sense of ownership in the school district. Ann did caution everyone that this is the most difficult community organizing work she's ever done. Very slow work.

Questions for Ann:

- How to develop demand? After 5 years of working with the school district, they turned around and faced community, Slow Foods-Yolo, and others. After 2-3 years, they garnered enough community support to encourage the school board to survey the community about their parcel tax allotments. They asked about “farm fresh food,” got a major community response, and then allocated portion of parcel tax funds to the farm-to-school program (\$70,000 a year). It does cost more to do the programs so they seek grant funding etc...but the parcel tax actually helps it survive.

- How do you talk about it? They show, not tell. They connect it to the school gardens programs, and every 2nd grader gets a trip to a local farm. They convince the food service director (which is easier than convincing people who cook the food) and now they bring in a professional chef to give professional trainings once a month. They give the food workers a CSA box twice of month to help them learn, get excited about taste, and understand food better.
- Marin example: Chefs treat the cooks like kings and queens—get them the info, educate and gave them an incredible meal. Brought farmers to kitchens and they all had meals together.

Final Discussion

- Ann added that Slow Food-Yolo also raises funds and gives money to school district, plus free tickets to their events. She recommends that you get to know every food service director and chef by name—it's all about the relationships.
- Anything to add on local meat sourcing? Jenny uses Golden Gate Meats; they're a major wholesaler. Local, free range is now more available and although the prices are higher, the product is better. Tips for getting better meat: Start with county office of education superintendent, be patient, build relationships. Serve special meals to the school board.
- Nutrition education needs to happen with families to really help create these programs.
- Mario Moratorio, Farm Advisor in Solano Co, encouraged everyone at the table to look and see how these food systems actually work in your community. Most of Sonoma County uses Sodexo and they source in terminal markets. See what little piece of it you can substitute with a local source. As he understands it, it started in Davis with a salad bar (as substitution).
- Ann confirmed this point, but then after 3 years the district assigned costs to it, so Farm-to-School rebuilt the program to infuse local produce throughout school lunch, rather than keep it as salad bar only. The main food served in school lunches is salad, soup, pizza, pasta—see how you can rotate seasonal produce into that system so that a fall season pizza looks different than spring season pizza. That concept works well with food workers and continuing education opportunities. It provides agricultural literacy too.

Group brainstormed useful resources:

- ❖ SAREP
- ❖ Farm to School state website
- ❖ Farm to School curriculum
- ❖ Center for Ecoliteracy
- ❖ Sonopia
- ❖ Chez Panisse Foundation
- ❖ Community Food Security Coalition
- ❖ Master Gardeners
- ❖ LA Master Gardener Common Ground Program
- ❖ First 5 Commissions
- ❖ Head Start Nutrition Curriculum—more flexible than K-12, parent involving, good funding, learning to eat at that age—start early!