

Rural Communities and Local Food Systems

Discussion Leader: Carol Fall, UCCE Trinity

Tues, Dec 2, 2008

4-5pm

Attendees:

Carol Fall, UCCE Trinity (facilitator)
Ellen Tyler, Food First Berkeley (note taker)
Sean Mooney, Full Moon Farm Lake County
Alida Cantor, CIRS Davis
Jennifer Hargrove, Council Gov't Sacramento
Wayne Kesslen, Shamban Organics Shasta County
Debora Giraud, UCCE
Stephanie Larson, UCCE Sonoma County
Marian Parso, UC Davis Community Development
Brenda Dawson, UC Small Farm Program
Ariuno Lerozo, UC Davis student
Erin Derden-Little, CAFF Humboldt
Aden alleyeh Sougal, UC Davis student
PattyBruder, Mendo Food Futures
Cyndee Logan, Mendo Food Futures
Dan Desmond, Penni Rarel Lake County
Doug Bennett, SEANC Shasta County
Cindy Fake, UCCE Placer-Nevada
Holly King, Fresno

Challenges Facing Rural Communities:

- Getting potential buyers to invest into the concept of local and consent to the higher price
 - Kids and young adults (in college) get it- tap into this market
 - Another market is people who are health conscience including cancer survivors
- Many farmers/ranchers can't produce meat locally; therefore increases in transportation lead to increases in costs.
 - Even with a traveling butcher, you still need a place to hang and wrap
 - "Shares" not legal, even though some buy live animals and have farmers "teach" them to cut
 - How to buy silos or other food processing infrastructure?
- How to make local foods affordable and accessible outside of the high-end market?
- How do you decide what to pay workers and how much to charge customers

- Cindy Logan and Carol Fell talk about how they sell direct to the farmers markets and sell out. This led to discussion about how to increase supply & incise new farmers to contribute to the local food system. Consensus was that direct sales are most profitable so we need to develop more contacts between farmers and buyers including grocery outlets. Cindy pointed out that small farmers must get together to have any consistency to offer grocery buyers & that grocery markets are hard to sell to anyway because produce is always the loss leader in sales. If produce is then sold cheaper at the farmer's market, no one will buy it at the grocery store. Wayne says you have to charge a consistent price at the farmers market- if you undersell you hurt yourself then when you want to enlist the support of your grocer.
- First we need to build demand, and then produce what people want/need.

Defining Sustainable and Local

Stephanie Larson begins talking about her USDA cut & wrap USDA meat CSA and defines sustainable as local in Sonoma County. Others agree to the county standard. "Buy Local" is a concept- it means as close to home as possible- there is a tier system depending on what the product is. Cindy says we need to get producers that are exporting their goods to reinvest locally FIRST. Wayne is interested to see figures about how much produce is exported out and THEN imported back in! Consensus that what Safeway and WalMart are calling local is neither local (often their definition refers to being produced in CA or even in the US) nor supportive of local economies. Local needs to be defined within the context of a larger education about why local matters. We need to define local in terms of the farm a product comes from or a farmer that grows that product. People respond to the person to person connection.

Marketing Local

Carol Fell brings up successes from the "Eat Local Challenge." Patty says it really seems to bring awareness about what the state of a local food system is. It shows us that we don't have grains or beans. Also, it builds community solidarity. Those who participated in the challenge said they continued to buy those products and find it is easier to eat locally now. It is a great educational tool. Erin and Alada point out that another result of the challenge was that consumers demanded better labeling from their COOP so they could know where exactly their food was coming from. Also, communities were left with tangible results from resource and recipe books put together.

Erin asked about creative partnerships and mini-movies and stories to use as marketing tools and also to show congressmen and women and to build solidarity among ranchers and members of the community and institutions.

Inspiration

Cindy talks about the AG Futures Project and setting up the expectation that producers will work together

Aden talks about how in France labels give a step-by-step history of processed goods and the role of the state in issuing labels.

Deb points out that this is starting to take hold in California with counties and regions

Cindy says in France and Japan there are bar codes for tracking products

Wayne warns not to get ahead of ourselves. In the US we have two generations of people who don't know what unprocessed food looks like. We don't know what to do with fresh produce.

Holly King says in Fresno the Food Systems Alliance is bringing stakeholders together to change policy. This is powerful because of having multiple groups- the retail sector doesn't want competition from produce markets, but they have to work together now.

Where to Go From Here

Wayne brings up an idea to establish a local investment fund (micro-loan) from the local philanthropists within the community to expand local agricultural land use, to start gardens, to go organic. "Local money for Local means."

Cindy says building community and trust is so important- one way to do this is to eat together- it is one of the most intimate things we do. The group talked about the idea of a community kitchen to add value to produce.

Carol says that sometimes rural people don't want to go to the market because they have their own gardens. This is good, but we should coordinate so people aren't all growing the same things and set up a means to barter.