PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

GROWING A COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM

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The food system context

The food and agricultural system in the United States has changed dramatically in the last half of the twentieth century. The dominant trend has been toward industrialization, with increasing centralization in production and processing operations and with farmer control over production, marketing, and labor decisions being replaced by corporate control (Welsh, 1997). As a result, farmers' share of the food dollar has declined from the 41% they enjoyed in 1920 to only 9% by 1990 (Smith, 1993). Due to the impacts of industrialization and suburban development pressures, we lose thousands of farmers annually. Rural communities nationwide are deteriorating socially and economically and consumers have gradually lost the knowledge about where their food comes from. In areas of high poverty, such as inner cities and remote rural areas, many people are not able to access fresh, locally grown food.

What is a "community food system"?

In the face of these trends, a movement toward more community-based food systems is gaining momentum. A "community food system" is one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, and social and nutritional health of a particular place [Figure 1]. It is a long-term goal toward which many communities are striving. Across the country, communities are initiating diverse projects that develop connections between different parts of the food system. One of the most central aspects of these projects is increased participation by local residents in working on multiple food system issues such as:

- improving access by all community members to an adequate, affordable, nutritious diet;

- supporting a stable base of family farms that use production practices that are less chemical and energy-intensive, and emphasize local inputs;

- generating marketing and processing practices that create more direct and beneficial links between farmers and consumers, and to the extent possible, reduce resources used to move food between producers and consumers;

- developing food and agriculture-related businesses that create jobs, re-circulate financial capital in the community, or in other ways, contribute to the community's economic development;

- improving working and living conditions for farm labor such that farmers and farmworkers can be fully contributing members of the community; and

DEFINING A COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM

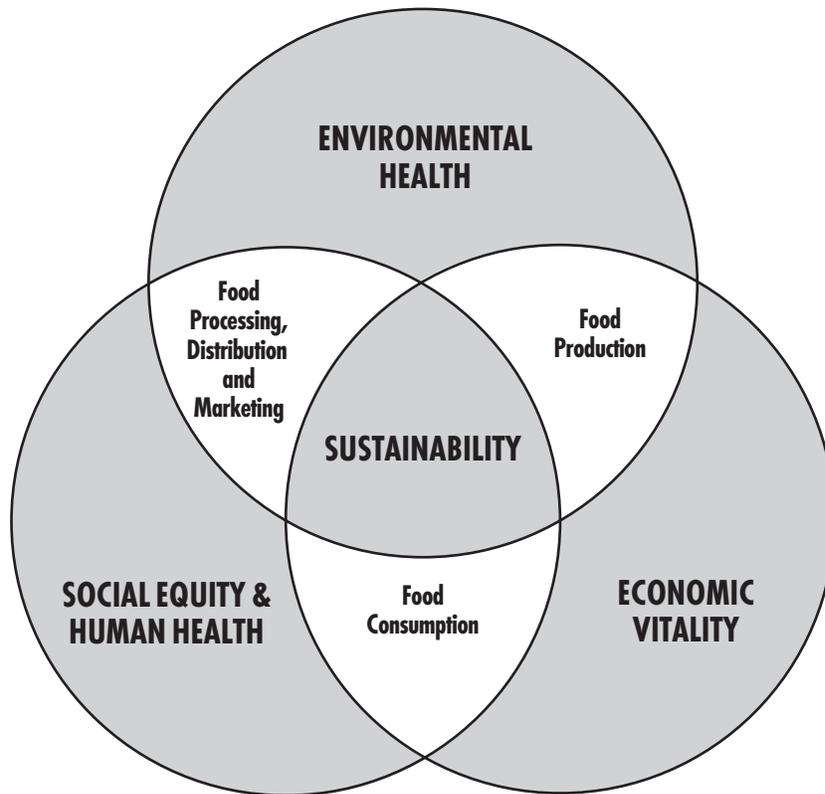*Guadalupe Gardens farmer and family at Tacoma Farmers Market.*

*Photo by
Steven Garrett*

Figure 1. Goals of a Community Food System

- creating food and agriculture policies that promote local food production, processing and consumption.

The appeal of a community food system is that it offers farmers an opportunity to reclaim a larger portion of the food dollar through innovative direct marketing, local processing and other value-added activities; consumers develop opportunities to reconnect with their food supply; and communities gain opportunities to strengthen their social and economic health by creating meaningful jobs and recirculating social and financial capital locally.

Examples of projects that are contributing toward community food systems include:

- An urban farm being developed by members of the Southeast Asian community, the Rural California Housing Corporation, Small Business Development Center, Cooperative Extension and local farmers in Stockton, California. The farm will provide affordable produce through a modified Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and economic opportunities for low-income families living in Park Village Apartments. [Park Village Farm Project, Stockton, CA].

- A commercial greenhouse and garden run by youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in which the produce grown is sold at the farmers' market serving a low-income neighborhood. Extra produce from the project is given to a food pantry that serves street teens. The youth learn job skills from staff and agency collaborators and gardening from Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners. They are also getting connected to vital social services [Seattle Youth Garden Works, Seattle, WA].

- A coalition of food, health, and university (including Cooperative Extension) organizations develop a CSA farm for low-income people and linking it to food bank production plots; a "Grow a Row" in home gardens for donations and marketing; gleaning; and sustainable agriculture education programs. [Garden City Harvest, Missoula, MT]

What are the boundaries of a community food system?

Residents decide the exact geographic boundaries of a community food system. We suggest, however, that a "community" should be local enough that its residents come to know each other, have opportunities to interact with one another in mutually satisfying ways around food, and that transporting food and farm inputs in and out of the community is considered when making food system decisions. The area can be as small as a neighborhood or as large as a town or city, including its nearby growing region. One study suggests that a local community-scale be defined as an area small enough to drive across within two hours (Wilkinson and Van Seters, 1997). We encourage each "community" to define its own area so that an increasing proportion of its food needs can be met as practically as possible through local sources.

DEVELOPING YOUR PROJECTS

In the remainder of this paper, we discuss the key processes involved in developing community food systems projects. These projects are collaborative efforts that address several of the objectives described in the last section. As such, they *contribute* to the growth of a community food system. Figure 2 summarizes how a community would go through the process of targeting their own priorities and setting their own unique project goals to develop a project. At the heart of the process is building a diverse coalition. The coalition will be engaged in every aspect of developing a community food systems project. In turn, project development provides many opportunities to build and strengthen your coalition.
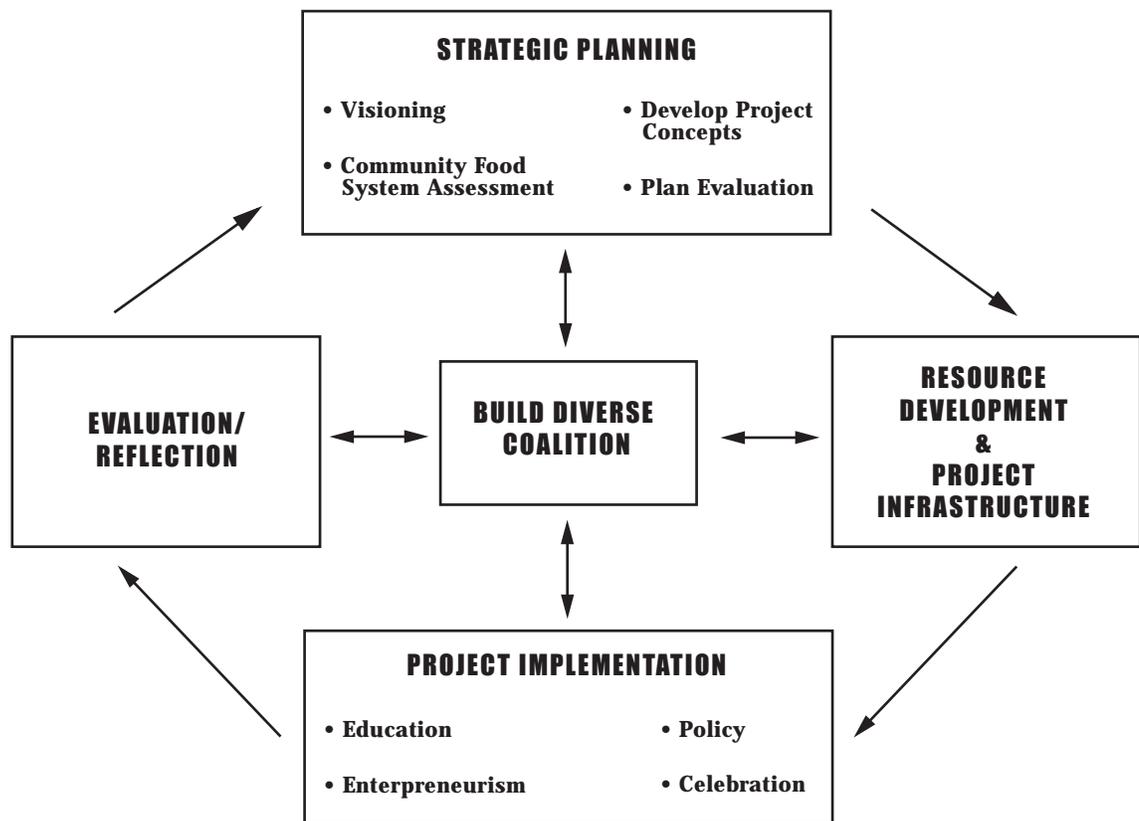
STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Visioning
- Community Food System Assessment
- Develop Project Concepts
- Plan Evaluation

EVALUATION/ REFLECTION

BUILD DIVERSE COALITION

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT & PROJECT INFRASTRUCTURE

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

- Education
- Enterpreneurism
- Policy
- Celebration

Figure 1. Process of Developing a Community Food Project

Building Successful Coalitions

Perhaps one of the most important elements of designing community food systems projects is that it is a collaborative process. This means that it includes the participation of multiple formal and informal organizations, associations and individuals with a variety of backgrounds and expertise. The participation of a broad cross-section of the community is essential for the project to be representative and contribute to the growth of a community food system.

In order for any community food system project to function well, relevant stakeholders in the local food system need to be represented in the beginning of the dialogue. The relevant stakeholders will then need to evolve into a coalition. A coalition has been defined as "individuals or organizations working together in a common effort for a common purpose to make more effective and efficient use of resources" (Clark, 1992). The coalition is essentially a mechanism for increasing the power or leverage of groups or individuals. Situations that are difficult or impossible for the individual to overcome alone can often be dealt with effectively by acquiring the right partners. Coalition partners are motivated to participate because it is clear to them that they will benefit from such a partnership in multiple ways.

What are the benefits of a coalition?
Winne et al. (1997), describes the following benefits of forming a coalition:

- Allows the group to tackle complex issues through the insights of the multiple components of a food system

- Improves coordination of services through increased communication of the coalition members

- Policy development can be accomplished through the various constituencies brought to the table by the coalition members

- Resources can be leveraged by in-kind match of project resources

- Spreads the work by adding more players to an issue or project

- Improves project viability by committing more groups to the issue or project

- Provides perspective through the diversity of the members' experiences

- Builds multi-sector involvement in community food systems by groups not normally associated with food and agriculture programs

Who should be involved?

Every project will have a different mix of coalition members. Ideally, a coalition should include a balance of stakeholders within the local food system. Studies on food policy councils, for example, have shown that one common reason for failure is that one stakeholder group is over-represented (Dahlberg, 1994). The following are examples of community stakeholders who might be involved on a community food system coalition:

- Locally elected leaders

- Food and agriculture agency representatives

- Farmers or groups interested in sustainable farming and/or farmland preservation

- Food banks and anti-hunger advocates

- Cooperative Extension and other relevant university faculty

- Public health workers and nutritionists

- Environmental and sustainable community advocates

- Parks and Recreation Departments

- Urban gardening organizations

- Food processors, retailers

- Small business support and local lending institutions

- Interested community members

One of the keys to building successful community food system projects is developing connections between diverse stakeholder groups. The nature of the relationships will vary, depending on the project's focus. All coalition members do not have to be equally involved in each project, but it is necessary that they are all kept informed. It takes a long time to build trust among diverse stakeholders. A year is a reasonable period to expect just get to know each other.

Cambodian gardening family at the Salishan Family Garden

*Photo by
Sue Bernstein*

Group facilitation

One of the key factors in convening a coalition is choosing someone to lead the meetings. One method is to invite a professional facilitator from outside the group to run the meetings during the initial phase of the coalition's development. The facilitator should be perceived by the coalition members as neutral and trusted (Clark, 1992). This can help prevent turf wars or leadership struggles and ensure that the group gets to the issues that need to be addressed in a smooth and timely manner.

Strategic Planning

Developing a strategic plan is a critical element of planning a successful community food system project. There are many helpful resources available for helping communities design a strategic plan (Cantrell, 1991; Kinsley, 1997; North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, 1997). Early in its development, the coalition will need to create a strategic plan that includes a common vision, mission, goals, objectives, and plan for evaluation. It will also include action steps and time lines for achieving the objectives. People who are responsible for implementing each objective need to be identified. The plan that is developed then becomes a guiding document for project implementation, creation of promotional materials, and if desired, for incorporation into a non-profit organization.

In order for the objectives to be strategic, they need to build on each other in a logical and progressive manner. The objectives also need to be prioritized so that finite resources are directed first toward the most essential elements of the overall plan. In order to set priorities, it is critical to have enough information about the local food system. A comprehensive assessment of the food system will provide this essential information.

Community Food System Assessment

A community food system assessment is a comprehensive "picture" of the way a particular community grows, processes, distributes, and consumes its food. It documents the specific ways that the community strengthens the links between the economic, environmental, and social aspects of its food system. It can also provide historical information that can guide future food system development.

Usually the elements that mobilize a community to action are the deficiencies within a food system and these elements are central to understanding and assessing a food system. However, we agree with McKnight and Kretzmann(1993), that assessing and mapping the food-related assets (vs. deficiencies) allow community members to mobilize their unique capacities to revitalize their food systems by:

- Identifying potential collaborators and community resources

- Encouraging participation of a broad-based group of community members

- Integrating otherwise separate components of a community's food system (e.g., transportation systems and food access issues; direct marketing options for low-income residents; or agricultural value-added opportunities and employment for the community's youth)

- Creating a sense of community identity among participants

- Making a community's local food system more visible

- Educating policymakers and other local government officials about the state of the local food system

- Promoting leadership opportunities within the community to be served

In conducting a community food system assessment, community partners will need to decide what kind of information they need, where to get it, who will get it, and how to analyze it and incorporate it into a usable package. There are several excellent resources available for communities to use as they plan their assessment strategies (See Resources).

A good assessment includes information about a wide variety of food system components, which include but are not limited to:

1. The history and culture of the local food system and the economic, social and political trends that have led to the current food system

2. The current agricultural system, including production and labor issues

3. The food retail sector including direct marketing opportunities

4. Community gardening

5. Food consumption patterns

6. Local food processing and value-added capabilities

7. Food-related employment

8. Local food and agriculture organizations and institutions and their projects

9. Food/agriculture economic development; residents' food and farming skills

10. Local food, agriculture, and land use policies

In addition to gathering data about each of these components, it is important to understand how they are, were, or could be interconnected. It is especially instructive for community members to build a "sense of place" by inquiring into their own food system's unique history. This will help participants gain a richer context for making future decisions and connections. Future possibilities should be explored as well. For example, if land use patterns indicate that unused arable land exists near potential farmers, such as immigrants with a farming background, then this invites matching these elements for market gardens and/or farmer training.

Data are available from a variety of sources within the community. The more broad-based the group that collaborates in conducting the assessment, the easier it will be to gather data on a wide range of issues. Each member will have access to or knowledge about different data sources. Some of the information will be available from public or private institutions in census, statistical, or government reports. Other information might be gleaned from surveys or research reports that have already been conducted. Other information will be unavailable unless it is collected through personal interviews, surveys, or focus groups. Resources for conducting surveys, focus groups, and similar approaches are readily available (Dillman, 1978; La Gra, 1990; Greenbaum, 1988; Andranovich and Howell, 1995; Butler, 1995). Coalition partners will need to decide how much data they can reasonably collect given their resources and which data are of highest priority for them to achieve their goals. The following sources are good places to start (Hart, 1996; Winne, 1997):

*   *Local agencies or local offices of state or national agencies:* county clerks, department of public works, public health departments, public libraries, local school boards, finance departments, welfare offices, local government offices, commissions, local planning boards, city councils, economic development agencies

*   *Local organizations or branches of national organizations:* League of Women Voters, Chambers of Commerce, farmland preservation organizations, farm bureaus, county departments of agriculture, environmental organizations, sustainable agriculture organizations, direct marketing or farmers' market organizations

*   *Local colleges, universities, community colleges:* libraries, specific departments or programs, Cooperative Extension (especially census data, reports, surveys, research on local food and agriculture programs, policies, attitudes, behavior)

*   *Local residents and businesses:* consumers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, food and agricultural businesses (interviews, focus groups)

There are few comprehensive food system assessments to use as models. The two that we are aware of, *The Seeds of Change* (Ashman, et. al., 1993) and *Fertile Ground* (Allan, et. al., 1997) were both done by graduate classes in urban planning [page 10]. Motivated by the 1992 riots

in Los Angeles, *The Seeds of Change* set out to assess the sustainability of the local food system in South Central Los Angeles. It focused on an urban food system with food access a primary issue, but identifying specific marketing and policy connections to local agriculture. *Fertile Ground,* on the other hand, puts greater emphasis on the local agricultural system, community economic development, and the environment, with specific attention to food security in the Madison/ Dane County food system. Both of these studies have elements that might be adapted to a food system assessment, depending on the goals and resources of your community. A more modest and less comprehensive assessment than these may be more realistic and can still provide valuable information about the local food system.

Seeds of Change

This 400-page study is one of the most comprehensive food system assessments we have seen. It is the product of 13 months of work of 6 principle researchers, two supervisors, and more than a dozen research assistants at UCLA's Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning. Information was collected from primary and secondary sources at three levels: local, regional, and state/ federal. The local level case study included a food system "map" of a two-square-mile area in South Central Los Angeles with a telephone survey, demographic information, land use/ GIS (Geographical Information Systems) information, a profile of food outlets, and a comparative price survey of 23 food outlets with suburban community food outlets. The regional level analysis examined the supermarkets in the region over time and the structure of the retail industry, reviewed transportation route surveys, conducted studies of consumers and growers at farmers' markets, interviewed community gardeners, and reviewed urban agriculture programs and policies over time. The state/ national level analysis reviewed existing state and federal food policies and public health/ nutrition/ food security literature, reviewed existing Food Policy Councils nationwide, and reviewed community development initiatives regarding supermarket investment in inner cities. Major findings were categorized in five major areas: hunger and nutrition; the food retail industry; transportation and the food system; alternative food strategies; and a new policy framework for food issues.

Fertile Ground

Modeled after the *Seeds of Change*, but more modest in scope, *Fertile Ground* is a product of a spring workshop of 22 graduate students and 2 faculty in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Using primary and secondary data collection, the team focused on a food system analysis at both regional (Dane County) and local levels (City of Madison and Northside neighborhood). Regional level data included the agricultural environment (farmland availability, agricultural production, the environmental impacts of food transportation and the waste stream), the local food economy, government food policy, a review of policy councils in North America, and alternative food access strategies including community supported agriculture and community gardening. Local analyses were conducted of food prices in Madison-area supermarkets, and a food asset map was drawn up of the Madison Metropolitan Area. Two student groups conducted focus groups of adults and children to better understand strategies used by low-income residents to obtain adequate food. Additional neighborhood analyses included a food-related SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of one Northside community and a food-related business survey to estimate the significance of the food sector in providing employment opportunities.

GETTING YOUR
PROJECTS STARTED

As you get ready to implement projects, it is important to keep in mind whether the activities are compatible with your community's vision, build local resources and opportunities, are within the coalition's capabilities, and bring people and politics together (Cantrell, 1991). In this section, we discuss how to develop project resources and an organizational infrastructure, the importance of integrating projects and policy, and how to plan for project evaluation.

Developing Project Resources

Funding for community food systems work can come from many places. Since these projects take time before they are up and running and are producing tangible results, it is important for the project's leadership to be thinking ahead. Depending on the source, it may be six months or more from the time an initial contact is made until the funding is available. A diverse funding base will provide the most secure, long-term prospects for the community food system project's future. Collaborative ventures with other organizations are one way to access funding. They can improve chances for funding for all parties, improve access to information, resources, and help build relationships. Community food systems projects often involve an entrepreneurial component in which a portion of the cost of a project is covered by sales of a product. Finally, in-kind donations of equipment and labor can help offset the cost of a project while contributing valuable human and other resources.

Potential Funding Sources for Community Food Systems Projects

- Community, regional, and national private foundations (e.g., Jessie Smith Noyes, Share Our Strength, Allen, Bullitt)

- Corporations and their foundations (e.g., Kraft, Kellogg, Candle, UPS, Boeing)

- Churches-national and local (e.g., Presbyterian, United methodist, United Church of Christ, Lutheran)

- Civic groups (Rotary, Elks, Kiwanis)

- Local, state, and federal government (e.g., Community development block grants, USDA Community Food Projects, SARE/ACE, EPA, DOE Sustainable Futures)

- Individual donations (e.g., fund-raising events, contribution/membership drives),

- Internet gateway sites can be helpful. Try www.nonprofit.gov for government funds and web.fie.com/cws/sra/private.htm for private funding

When preparing a proposal, it is important to represent the project well. Thinking through projects carefully before launching into them will pay off later. The following lessons are gleaned from a variety of community food systems projects:

• Demonstrate and solicit widespread community participation and "buy-in" (time and/or resources)

• Represent a broad-based cross-section of the community; community food systems projects should be collaborative efforts

• Be realistic in what the project promises to deliver. Many projects tend to be too ambitious because they want to "please" funders. This results in overwhelmed and burned out project leaders who may rush decisions to produce the "right results"

• Clearly identify how the strengths and capacities of local participants will contribute to the project's goals

• Carefully plan a budget that is clearly tied to the project objectives. Make sure the project will be managed well financially

• Include ongoing evaluation and dissemination of project results

• Make sure the proposal and any project descriptions are clearly written. If writing is not one of the skills of the project leaders, find a collaborator who can write well

• Explore other project models that seem similar to what you are planning so you can see what has worked well in similar communities

Organizational Infrastructure

One of the most important tasks to be accomplished before implementing projects and one that is often overlooked or given inadequate attention is developing an organizational infrastructure. You will need to have a structure in place to implement your projects.

There are three usual scenarios for developing a leadership structure. Each scenario starts with the development of a diverse coalition. In the first scenario, the coalition will remain a coalition, such as Garden City Harvest or the Park Village Farm projects mentioned earlier. The second and perhaps most common structure is that the coalition develops a non-profit organization before they start implementing projects, such as the Tahoma Food System and PlacerGROWN, the two models that follow this section. This structure requires 501(c)(3) incorporation with the Internal Revenue Service, a Board of Directors, and yearly financial reporting. An executive director usually leads non-profit organizations.

The third leadership structure is that the project remains under the 501(c)(3) status of another established organization, such as the Seattle Youth Garden Works does with The Greater Church Council of Seattle. This structure relies heavily on the continued benevolence of the parent organization.

Deciding what structure your project will use right from the start is invaluable. This will allow you to plan for the costs and time involved if you are forming a non-profit organization. Once an organizational structure has been decided upon, key leadership development opportunities need to be kept in mind as projects are created. Community participants can be actively engaged and mentored in taking on new responsibilities.

Systems also need to be in place for personnel management. A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities needs to be developed and understood by staff, volunteers, and the coalition or organizational leaders. These should be put into writing and distributed to everyone involved in carrying out the projects.

Integrating Policy with Projects

We have found that community food systems projects are most stable and successful when they combine project and policy work. Specific, short-term projects engage community participants in concrete ways. Besides building cohesion and trust, they can also produce results of which the community can be proud (e.g., community gardens, farmers' markets, CSAs, job training programs, food-related micro-enterprises, and agricultural marketing programs). However, short-term projects by themselves are not enough to sustain groups interested in working toward the longer term goals of building a community food system.

As the community group learns more about the politics of their community, they will want to consider institutionalizing their successful goals and projects. Creating and influencing local food and agricultural policies allow the community to access additional resources to enable and enhance their work. For example, the Los Angeles Food Security and Hunger Partnership (the LA food policy council) recently negotiated $300,000 for a two-year period from community development block grant funds to develop farmers' markets, community gardens, and market basket programs in targeted city council districts in Los Angeles.

Involvement in policy work also benefits community groups in less tangible ways. Participation in a larger network of like-minded groups who are jointly working toward a particular policy goal allows you to become more effective than you would be on your own. The Community Food Security Coalition, or the Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups, for example, provide forums for smaller community food systems projects to join together to impact state or national food and agriculture policy.

Another benefit is that local media tends to cover policy issues better than projects, so being involved with policy may get you increased media coverage. This provides name recognition which is fundamental to achieving all your goals.

Policy work requires persistence, tact, and strategic planning. It takes time and patience to develop personal relationships with policymakers and to work through negotiations. The policy planning process itself, however, almost always creates new and unanticipated opportunities and can enhance your food systems project over the long term.

Project Evaluation

Evaluation is another integral component of developing and sustaining community food system projects. It demonstrates accountability to the community and project funders. It allows project participants to reflect on their achievements or lack thereof, and to make course corrections. The results of evaluations can also be used to "market" your projects to the broader community. There are two basic types of evaluation: impact evaluation and process evaluation.

Impact evaluations measure the extent to which a project has achieved its stated objectives. It documents as objectively as possible, the benefits and costs (or challenges) of the community food system project to the community. Impact evaluation can further be divided into two types: outcomes and outputs. Outcomes are measurable and achievable indicators that a program is having the intended effect. Outcomes provide a way to measure change in participants' lives and/or the community conditions. They can be short-term, intermediate-term, or long-term. The most common measurement methods are surveys, tests, and focus groups. Some examples of project outcomes include:

- Lowered crime rate and/or a heightened feeling of safety within a neighborhood as a result of a community or market garden

- Increased consumer demand for locally grown produce

- Improved nutritional status among low-income community gardeners

- New skills in sustainable farming and direct marketing learned by local farmers

Output evaluation measures service units; for example, the number of clients served or the number of classes held. Communities might look at changes in particular economic or social indicators affected by community food systems projects such as:

- Direct marketing sales volume in dollars

- Percent of farmers doing some type of direct marketing

- Number of CSAs or shares sold

- Number of participants or dollars generated in a WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

- Number of nutrition education classes held that are connected with local agricultural marketing

- Number of institutions purchasing some produce from local growers

- Number and type of food processing or value-added micro-enterprises

- Number of community gardens or number of residents participating

Process evaluations review the way in which a community food system project is developing, the strategies it uses to accomplish its objectives, the leadership structure, the level of community participation, the funding structure, competency in planning, coalition-building, community organizing, etc. A process evaluation is especially useful if it is started from the beginning and continues throughout the project. It is an opportunity to keep an ongoing record of the project's concept, design, administration, and management. These records can help other projects learn how a variety of projects are implemented so they don't have to "reinvent the wheel."

Both impact and process evaluations are crucial. We recommend planning to do both during the lifetime of a project. Proper record keeping and data collection can be built into the planning process at the outset. Consultation with people who know how to do evaluations is important for maximum utility. Expertise for evaluation may be available at nearby universities or colleges. Faculty may be willing to collaborate on an evaluation or help write the grants to fund one.

Celebration

Finally, we recommend finding time to celebrate your successes.   The energy created from having fun together helps strengthen and motivate the participants of a community's food system. Celebration is a vital part of the rhythms that often is forgotten amid the intense work of community organizing, planning, fundraising, and project activities. Celebration also offers an opportunity to engage other community stakeholders in the project's efforts.

Foothills Farmers Market Association.

*Photo by
Gail Feenstra*

COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM MODELS

Since communities and their food systems vary considerably, we will look more closely at two models, the first urban and the second rural, to see what they are doing to meet the food system needs of their communities.

Tahoma Food System (TFS). In January 1997, a group of citizens, farmers, and agency representatives in Pierce County, Washington, started meeting to identify ways to provide more fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods, save farmers and farmland, and promote sustainable food production systems. They brought together existing Washington State University Cooperative Extension food security projects and urban gardening projects and received a USDA Community Food Projects grant to create new projects. Their mission is **"Developing and promoting a sustainable food supply in the South Puget Sound for healty people, environment, and economy."** The five project areas of the Tahoma Food System are:

Community Gardening. TFS runs the nearly one-acre Salishan Family Garden near a large housing development in Tacoma and they are assisting in the development of more gardens. They also facilitate the Bridging Urban Gardeners Coalition (BUGs), which runs community gardening projects in the Tacoma area. They also partner with WSU Cooperative Extension's Square Foot Nutrition Project (SFNP) which teaches low-income community gardeners how to improve their gardening skills.

Guadalupe Gardens is a 4.5-acre urban farm in the low-income Hilltop area of Tacoma, as an organic Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. Guadalupe Gardens employs homeless and formerly homeless people as farmers in partnership with the Guadalupe House, a homeless center. In 1999, they hope to start The Nelson Farm, a 10.4-acre educational CSA farm in rural Edgewood. It will be run by farm interns who will live on-site. School groups will use a hands-on curriculum developed by 4-H to learn about sustainable farming.

Cascade Gleaning Network organizes low-income families to go to commercial farm fields to pick whatever is left after the harvest. They can keep whatever they want for themselves, but they also harvest for the local food pantries and hot meal sites. In 1999, they hope to expand the project to 3 nearby counties. Extension Master Gardeners and Food Advisor volunteers teach participants about gardening and food preservation.

Youth Food Employment & Entrepreneurial Development (Youth FEED) teaches inner city youth about local food systems and provides opportunities to earn an income and gain entrepreneurial skills by involving them in raising and selling produce and local honey and working at a farmers' market in a low-income neighborhood.

Farmer/ Farmland Preservation. The Tahoma Food System is organizing a coalition called the Friends of Family Farms in Pierce County to expand the number of farmers in the county and preserve farmland. One goal of the new coalition is to start a County Agricultural Commission to advise the county on farm policy.

PlacerGROWN is a countywide, cooperative agricultural marketing program in Placer County, California. This project was started as a result of a conference that identified the need for local markets to keep agriculture viable in Placer County. With a start-up grant of $97,000 from the Placer County Board of Supervisors, a diverse planning group of people from Cooperative Extension, farmers, ranchers, consumers, farmers' market managers, and representatives from local government came together to form PlacerGROWN. Their goals were to:

*   Develop and expand the demand for locally grown and processed foods

*   Increase the diversity of local agricultural production and the marketing methods used by local growers (especially direct marketing)

*   Create and enhance a more sustainable community

*   Increase economic development and stability in Placer County through local agriculture

The project formed a non-profit membership organization that promotes Placer products locally and outside the county. It has worked in concert with the Foothills Farmers' Market Association to revitalize farmers' markets in the county. It has also helped farmers market local products directly to several institutions, grocery stores, and restaurants. In addition to marketing local produce, PlacerGROWN includes other unique pieces:

Consumer education about regional, seasonal diets. PlacerGROWN has developed "A Reason for the Season" education campaign and local food guides. Master food preservers and other volunteers are trained to educate consumers about shopping, eating, and cooking locally and seasonally. Curricula have been developed for grades 1-3 and 4-6, plus a Children's Bingo Game, which helps children learn about local agriculture and its products.

Grower education. PlacerGROWN sponsors an annual farm conference in Placer County for all growers. Multiple workshops provide information about sustainable production practices for growers and ranchers, new marketing opportunities, season extension practices, and value-added food processing as well as local agricultural policy initiatives.

Reasons for the Seasons food educators.

*Photo by
Gail Feenstra*

Research on the demand and supply of locally grown foods. Surveys have been done of consumers, producers, and bulk food buyers to determine consumer and institutional awareness of local agriculture and the potential among growers/ ranchers for expanding the supply of local agricultural products.

Livestock marketing program. Beef and lamb are major agricultural products in Placer County, yet it has been difficult to market locally due to the concentration in the livestock industry. PlacerGROWN is currently attempting to find local markets with restaurants and institutions for local grass-fed beef as well as develop local processing capability.

Local agricultural policy. PlacerGROWN is working with the County Board of Supervisors and other local government bodies to develop recommendations on county policies that will promote and protect agriculture in the county.

SUMMARY

Creating and maintaining successful community food system projects is a complex but rewarding process. The most successful projects have advanced the goals of creating a community food system by:

- Creating a long-term vision for their local food system that balances the environmental, economic and social health of the region

- Incorporating the values and participation of a wide cross-section of the community

- Finding ways to assess their community's food system to provide valuable information for project development

- Finding one or a few leaders who can effectively guide a coalition through a strategic plan, identify specific projects, manage projects well financially and continue to keep the long-term mission and goals in view

- Initiating one or a few, concrete, doable projects that link the environmental, economic and social aspects of a community's food system

- Evaluating (and documenting) progress of projects to measure how they are reaching their goals

- Finding adequate resources and an organizational structure to start and continue their work

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