

## **Food Policy Council Conference Call - April 9, 2008**

### **Food & Farm Assessments: Know the Way Before You Go Astray**

#### Introduction

The Community Food Security Coalition's Food Policy Council Project sponsored an open conference call on Wednesday, April 9, 2008. The Project is funded by the Risk Management Agency of the USDA.

Mark Winne, the Food Policy Council Director, opened the call: The idea of this call is to look at two ways that communities are getting a handle on what's going on in their food system - farm production capability, demand, size of marketplace, and at the same time - to look at this from another side - see what the access to good healthy affordable food is. This is a problem in many parts of the country.

Our speakers today are two strong people who are leaders in this field. One will talk about the regional side & the other will talk about it from the urban food access side.

#### Announcements:

Please send ideas for future call topics to [mark@foodsecurity.org](mailto:mark@foodsecurity.org)

Last of the series of 3 Food Policy Council workshops will be in Santa Fe, NM. It's part of the SW Marketing Network Conference at the La Fonda Hotel, May 5-7

Food Policy Council Workshop is May 5, 9am-6pm.

Go to [www.swmarketingnetwork.org](http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org) for more info. No online registration but you can download the registration form from the internet and fax or mail it in.

Topics covered at the workshop: Brief overview of Food Policy Councils, Early development, early stage group building.

Workshop cost: \$40

The workshop emphasizes regional connections, but we have room for those outside the region as well if you're interested. Visit <http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/meetings.html> for more information about the training, or contact me directly at [mark@foodsecurity.org](mailto:mark@foodsecurity.org) with any questions.

Conference will be great, with lots of information about food production, marketing, policy, etc.

There's a short deadline on getting a room on the hotel - register at \$85/room by April 14th (there is a little wiggle room on that deadline).

New Reports related to Food Policy Council work:

- **Building Healthy Communities: Expanding Access to Fresh Food Retail**

Go to [http://www.sph.tulane.edu/PRC/pages/FPAC\\_RecommendationsShado.htm](http://www.sph.tulane.edu/PRC/pages/FPAC_RecommendationsShado.htm) to download the report.

- **Building Chicago's Community Food System**, by the Chicago Food Policy Council

This publication is posted on our website: [www.foodpolicycouncil.net](http://www.foodpolicycouncil.net)

Please keep us updated on your work: go to [www.foodpolicycouncil.net](http://www.foodpolicycouncil.net) - see if your council is listed, verify the contact info is correct, and let us know about any changes/additions. Send any changes to [mark@foodsecurity.org](mailto:mark@foodsecurity.org)

This helps keep the Food Policy Council world informed on what's going on.

#### Speakers

- Ken Meter of the Crossroads Resource Center
- Anne Palmer of the Center for Livable Futures at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health;

speaking with Anne: Joyce Smith, Operation Retail Southwest – both in Baltimore, MD

Ken Meter, President of Crossroads Resource Center

*Ken is a guru on food system analysis related to production capability. He often speaks on regional food assessments.*

I will first talk about what I do, to give some background. I have been working since 2001 (although much of the data goes back to '79) in Southeast Minnesota. The primary reason is that people get involved in this work with good intentions but things are usually more complicated than they seem. We want to make sure we fully understand all these issues before determining a work plan so we don't end up creating more problems rather than helping. Policy folks really like to hear numbers, not just general arguments about food system change. A concrete, tangible number can really move the discussion forward. We've discovered that people are hungry for a discussion about what things are really like, what the numbers are. Economics can help distill the argument into something more specific and persuasive for many folks. There are a number of different perspectives from which to approach this work – the community perspective is often overlooked. We are finding that showing people a story about their locale really involves them in thinking about their own place and how they fit into a national or even global context – it helps them connect with larger issues.

Various kinds of analysis:

- There is information available on how much people spend on food, personal income on food related industries - transfer payments are a big source of income in rural areas. There are good numbers from 1965-present – the info is online, helps you see the historic trends.
- Asset map - where I would start if I was a small group with limited resources. It helps identify resources and bring people together for future projects.
- Community Food Assessment protocol developed by CFSC (available here: <http://www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html#cooking>). This CFA protocol is good, but I would like to see it be more of a systemic analysis.
- Redundant trade studies are done in Canada and other locales but have not been done in the US.
- Local multiplier - looks at how far a food dollar goes. That's often where you bring in PhDs to do more sophisticated studies.

Results from these analyses:

- In **urban** areas where I've worked, the data has been powerful to show that low-income folks have lots of spending power. They get an 18% subsidy with food stamps - 82% is bought with their own dollars. Many assume that these folks don't have much \$, don't spend much.
- In **suburban areas**, studies have been done looking at the housing market. Choices in suburban areas to invest in housing development are questionable when building over farmland – the data shows the need to reconsider housing developments, shows that they're not economically viable. Goes back historically - 10% of the land was devoted to feeding folks, subsistence. Made them think about how folks will be fed in their areas if they're building over farmland.
- **Rural** studies have shown where farmers are losing money. They show the importance of food in strengthening the area for economic development in the future.

A food systems study in Minnesota showed that a vast majority of land from farms were devoted to growing food for animals when many people don't know where their next meal is coming from. They found out that in 1930, 20% of land was devoted to oats for horses (energy crops). This helped them see that crops were grown for energy in the past in a sustainable way, it helped get gears spinning about how they might do that sustainably in the future.

Impacts I've seen from the data (I wish they were bigger but they are still very profound):

Data turns eyes & minds. The movement is growing - the data motivates them to leverage their impact.

- In one **urban area**, it helped residents become part of creating the food system, this community had limited access to grocery stores. The data resulted in a deeper discussion and led to a state funded study. Another outcome has been noticing that high-fructose corn syrup was related to the surplus in corn in '74-75 after the OPEC energy crisis, helps people understand some of the reasons it's hard to get sweeteners out of our diet and see the connections with our oil dependence.
- In a **suburban county** - developer was saying "forget about agriculture" - I was able to provide data to counter the developer's arguments. Close proximity to a major urban market, it's important to consider local food sources & infrastructure. Development is very strong but I'm proud that the data opened up the discussion.
- In a **rural area** - the Northeast Farm & Food Coalition (in NE Iowa) used the economic data to be the key insight to attract newcomers to the cause - because it's close to me, I have given the same speech there several times - the group went from 6 farmers to 50 people, all different types interested in a regional food system. Data helped bring in newcomers, motivated people on the fence to get active, and conveyed the gravity of the situation.
- **Puget Sound area** - data helped form a strategy to think about a cluster of businesses - food co-op, bakers, etc forming conscious links to create a flow of wealth, capacity, insight that stays in the community.

Leopold Center has a great document on their website: *Developing a Vibrant and Sustainable Regional Food System*

[http://www.valuechains.org/rfswg/RFSWG\\_guide\\_081406.pdf](http://www.valuechains.org/rfswg/RFSWG_guide_081406.pdf)

Regional Food Systems Working Group. Aldo Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

#### Questions for Ken:

Q: What are the questions we have to address to form a strategic plan?

A: Studies have shown that food system is more effective at taking wealth out of our communities rather than promoting health & social values that we want. Nearly all of my studies have shown that our current Food systems totally fail at that. Going into this data has been really rewarding - surprisingly enough, people are liking talking about charts & graphs.

Q: If you were to advise somebody on where to start, what would the first 2 steps be?

A: The first place to start is to look at the assets in your area - facilities, people who have the answers to the questions you have. I can produce some data on assets in just a few weeks, it's not a huge task.

You could also call me and we could talk through what resources you have. Seek the data that that exists already on your area - much is on my website. Unfortunately the data is not framed in a way that is helpful for our work, I could help reframe it for issues pertinent to your work.

#### Anne Palmer & Joyce Smith, Baltimore MD

Anne Palmer of the Center for Livable Futures at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

also speaking with Anne: Joyce Smith, Executive Director of Operation Retail Southwest (local community partner)

They will speak about work they've done to address food access, retail food affordability, quality, etc in Baltimore.

Joyce talks about ORS: The average income in our area is 20k but there are some upper-income residents as

well. Lots of single-parent households, mostly headed by females. In 1995-97 we established a plan, and one issue area was to address health in the area. We did a comprehensive plan, looked at health needs; did an asset map, found several assets, but also looked at negative indicators - no DR offices. Looked at money, safety & sanitation, economic access. (The last bank moved out of the community in 1995 but we opened our own to serve the community. Developed it with the support of the community residents. We have achieved a lot of successes from that approach, working with the support of the community.)

We started looking at food in the community, health disparity studies showed chronic diseases, many of which were generational. There were high hypertension & obesity rates in particular. We started a community garden, and then partnered with Anne.

Anne: We had funding through CFSC (UPS funding) to do a community food assessment. Joyce felt they needed data about the food situation. I was new to food assessments so we got technical assistance from the Food Trust in Philadelphia, we did a training with them. Joyce & Anne developed a survey for residents, then had a medical student who took an Emory University study as a basis to do a store survey. We were trying to determine what you need to know from the stores & what you need to know from the residents. We asked about: quality, selection, price, availability - foods you cannot find in your community. Interest in growing your own food, how much do you spend, how often do you use those food sources? How often were you unable to purchase food because of lack of money?

We surveyed a wide variety of people, didn't target a specific group. One thing we didn't ask but wish we did is to have them describe a healthy meal. Many people didn't have a clear sense of how health was defined. In the **store survey**, we asked: what healthy food choices are available (low in salt, sugar, whole grain bread, lowfat milk & meat)? We surveyed mostly corner stores (there are only 2 supermarkets in the area) – and we mostly found an absence of healthy food. Stores are very small, 300-800 sq ft. and offer highly processed foods. We can send people a brief summary of the findings if interested.

Joyce & Anne have worked together for 1.5 yrs now, it's a great partnership. We've made some inroads with the City of Baltimore & their interest in the issue. One of the grad students at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health did a study of rate of cardiovascular disease & availability of healthy food. The Health Commissioner saw the study and was interested to do a meeting, so Anne & Joyce invited other people involved in this issue. It has gone in a direction that's very exciting. Mark Winne facilitated a half-day meeting on whether we need a Food Policy Council in Baltimore. People were asking 'what can we do?' The city is re-writing it's planning code, including food planning aspects. There is a lot of interest in addressing childhood obesity - Joyce helped develop a task force on this issue, examining food environments that affected children's access to healthy food. Now there's a working group examining what a Food Policy Council would look like if we had one - many in the group are not interested in participating in the city bureaucracy.

Anne: From the perspective of working with a community organization that doesn't have a lot of money for research, I suggest using a local university or college - students often have a requirement to collect data. Professors would much rather that the data collected actually be used for a purpose.

Joyce: residential community leaders can give you a foundation, you need to educate them on what you're doing. The process of getting the word out is really difficult but very important.

#### General Q & A:

Q (Laurie Trieger in Eugene OR): I grew up in Philadelphia, so I'm familiar with large metro areas on the East Coast. However West Coast communities are much smaller – I'm looking for standards on what is the adequate density of the number of stores/mile, but it's hard to translate data from dense communities to smaller ones.

A (Mark): The Rural Sociological Society did a study on rural food deserts.

Laurie specifies - these are small metro areas, not rural, just smaller scale than the big East Coast cities.

A (Ken): The city of Minneapolis might be a good comparison - they had a policy that everyone should live within 4 blocks of a park. Perhaps instead of thinking in terms of the number of stores/mile, you could think

about it in terms of access when walking or using public transit. Kimberly Moreland has done research looking at the relationship between one's distance from stores & healthy food consumption.

Q (Jay Bradley, Southern Illinois asks Ken): Regarding local economic multipliers, it's difficult finding access to such data. How do you get access to that number to give to local economic development types & civic leaders and such?

A: Those numbers may have been true in historic times. Some researchers have developed a broad-use local multiplier 3 for making a simpler community-based calculation. This was recently used by the city of Seattle. A more formal way would be the inplan model - measures labor & money. It's hard to use that - it assumes bigger scale business than many of our community businesses really are. Right now multipliers are running 1.4-1.3 in rural areas. The only way those will get higher is if people are keeping money within the community. I can talk with you offline if you need more info.

Q (Tanya Denkla-Cobb in Virginia asks Ken): Charlottesville is considering doing a gap analysis, surveying producers to see how much they could increase production - how much they could provide for the demand. Wondering if anyone has done a study like this, have you found it useful?

A: I haven't seen one, there might be one at Cornell. I'm starting on some studies that are doing that, but it's pretty tricky. The way we produce now is not very intense, we can learn more about farming and be good stewards of the land. It's hard to know how much we could produce when we don't know much about farming. What I'd do as a quick study is to look at census data to see how much was produced before we used fossil fuels.

Q (Kai Siedenburg asks Joyce & Anne): About your community/university partnership, how were you able to make that kind of partnership work? I know that many who have attempted such a partnership have been unsuccessful.

A (Joyce): I have worked with lots of schools, it wasn't always successful. I suggest that you find out what the needs are in the community. We already knew what our needs were when we met with Anne, we just needed help in getting those needs met. They're the ones we're creating the change for. We started with a community garden, asking kids & mothers where food comes from. Get them involved in the front end and take the information to the university. It helped us refine our tool to make it much more useful for those in the community. Folks had never been asked these questions before. Find the mouthiest person in the bunch.

Q (Terry Sakurski in Tacoma WA asks Ken): Who in the Olympic Peninsula are you working with ?

A: Katherine Burrell, Univ. Extension. Team Jefferson - inter-agency effort. Ken will be coming in mid-May (16th) for a meeting, you're welcome to come.

Q (Sarah in Nashville asks Ken): Regarding the housing study, how do you make the case for farmland vs. development?

A: The story we have is from the West Coast. In 2006 the average household lost \$21k in net worth. Big Silicon Valley homes & wealthy homes were declining in value, people were taking on more debt than they could pay off and buying bigger homes than they could afford. People aren't paying off their debts very well. Lots of sub-prime loans. The craziness in that market is bigger than we can grasp from news stories. Even in areas where the housing crisis is not as bad, the same principles apply.

Q (Sarah to Joyce & Anne): What state & local policies can exist to encourage healthy options?

A (Joyce): The Healthy Store Initiative identifies a corner store in the area as a healthy store, then refers people who come to community meetings. They do food demonstrations, showing how to prepare food healthy ways and how to read labels. Other ways of getting the word out include community newsletters, the WIC office, any ways to engage communities. We can try it and learn from our successes.

- Joel Gilson does the healthy store project. There aren't specific policy barriers at the city level except that if

you have a space that's zoned for a corner store and it shuts down, you can't open another corner store there. The city has been looking at that policy, there are fairly large areas that don't have supermarkets. Students are researching policies that are preventing it - not much, but there aren't many incentives either. Looking into incentive policies to encourage healthy eating.

- Mark Winne adds: Food Policy Councils can work on getting wording into city policy to make sure that healthy food is available to everyone in the community. If you can call it an outcome, many cities in the country have made investments in the development of a new supermarket in an underserved area. This is the most tangible investment that's had the biggest impact. Not a specific policy.

- Prevention Institute resource - ENACT strategic alliance database of policies on their website. It has real examples of policies that get at health access:

<http://preventioninstitute.org/sa/enact/members/index.php>

- NACO published a report on what county government can do to assist local food systems.

Thanks to Ken, Anne, & Joyce for sharing your insights with us today.

## Links & Resources related to the call

From Ken Meter:

Crossroads Resource Center

<http://www.crcworks.org/>

Starting point for local economic analysis

<http://www.crcworks.org/econ.html>

The data sets I use for a local economic overview

<http://www.crcworks.org/leascope.pdf>

Sample PowerPoint: from "The Home Grown Economy," an agriculture forum sponsored by Rep. Collin Peterson, which I keynoted in 2007. This focuses on one regional study and illustrates some of the national and global dilemmas in our food system:

<http://www.crcworks.org/crcppts/meterpetersonforum07.pdf>

Sample PowerPoint 2: from "The Home Grown Economy 2," an agriculture forum sponsored by Rep. Collin Peterson, where I spoke March 31, 2008. This focuses on how local communities are tackling creation of local food systems:

<http://www.crcworks.org/crcppts/petersonKM08>

Some dry, but useful data summaries covering local regions I have researched for local partners can be linked from:

<http://www.crcworks.org/locales.html>

Suggestions for evaluating a Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign, which has some good insights about measurement of success in a local foods initiative:

<http://www.crcworks.org/evalffs.pdf>

Leopold Center guidebook:

Developing a Vibrant and Sustainable Regional Food System

[http://www.valuechains.org/rfswg/RFSWG\\_guide\\_081406.pdf](http://www.valuechains.org/rfswg/RFSWG_guide_081406.pdf)

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From Anne Palmer and Joyce Smith:

The survey we used to assess the Nutrition Environment of community members:

<http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/SouthWestBaltimore-Survey.doc>

The Community Food Assessment survey of stores in the area:

[http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/OROSW\\_CommunityFoodAssessment\\_SurveyTool.doc](http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/OROSW_CommunityFoodAssessment_SurveyTool.doc)