

Coming Together To Strengthen Our Local Food System

On March 21st, 2010 a **Local Food Forum** was held at the Université de Moncton bringing together farmers, restaurateurs, tourism operators, NGOs and members of the greater community to discuss local food issues. Seventy-five people gathered at the event organized in partnership by the Fundy Biosphere Reserve, Post Carbon Greater Moncton, the NB Food Security Action Network, ACORN and the K.C. Irving Chair in Sustainable Development at Université de Moncton.

Guest speaker Kent Coates of Nature's Route Farm opened the discussion with a presentation on **Food Sovereignty: the plight of today's Farmer, sustainability and the importance of the Consumer-Farmer relationship**. The presentation sparked lively discussion amongst participants on a range of topics that included: access to local foods, quality standards, labeling, consumer relationships, relationships between groups/organizations with different mandates yet similar goals, the current landscape of activities being coordinated by organizations throughout Southeast New Brunswick (SENB) and other areas of the province and finally what participants thought our 'local' food system could look like in the future.

In 10 years....

- 15% of our food is imported and 85% is produced locally
- "Hey! Who's *your* farmer?" is a commonly heard question.
- Transparent Farming is the norm.
- Cooperative/communal farming is practiced everywhere in many forms.
- FDA is the guide for the quality health standards and only food that meets this criteria is sold
- Urban Agriculture is on the rise and green-space is preserved and made available for producing food.
- Community Supported Agricultures (CSA) adopt a Farm membership similar to the Costco model
- Consumer ethics a part of the school curriculum
- Local produce is available stores of all sizes— rural and urban
- Farming is valued. Skills and knowledge are being shared, innovative practices are supported and financed and infrastructure is continually developing to support innovation and sector growth.
- An easily accessible and growing list of what is grown in NB

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While the open group discussion was free flowing and wide ranging, four themes were identified to explore further in small group conversations.

- Access/Distribution
- Urban Agriculture/Community Supported Agriculture
- Education/Knowledge Building and Sharing
- Policy Issues

Access and Distribution

Infrastructure

- Existing groceries stores or direct marketing
- Online ordering
- Mobile trucks
- Farm Stands/ CSA's

Producers Co-operatives

- Bulk purchasing
- Place for farmers to distribute

Pricing

- Farmers should have control
- Challenge with Co-ops is that they have control over product pricing – farmers should set their price

Shared Facilities between Farmers

- Washing and Storage
- Root cellars
- Requires collective action and networking

Policy

- Federal plant needed for meat in province

Seasonality-extend growing season

- Barriers: financial, training, energy that is appropriate
- Promote eating seasonally

Access

- How to find out where the local food IS
- What is local: one suggestion is to **label** it and let people choose. Local may be different depending on what area of NB you are from.
- Community relationships
- Ethical wages/employment standards

Urban Agriculture/CSA's/Community Gardens

Post Carbon Group

- Urban farming
- Roof top gardens
- Bees

YMCA of Greater Moncton

- 6000 sq. ft. community garden
- Workshops on seeds, bottling, canning, cooking etc. (in partnership with Mapleton Teaching Kitchen and local growers)
- Emergency Food Service/Food Bank with reusable bags, tables to sit and have coffee and speak with qualified people on existing services/resources in the community

Landless Gardeners Group

- Fredericton group is gardening in other people's yards

Community Gardens

- Municipalities could donate land or at least preserve green-space for community-decided use.

Edible Garden

- Social aspects of gardening

Vertical Garden

- Living art piece

Homelessness

- At risk people to work with community gardens

Education

Food is the problem *and* the solution

- We need to educate people
- Go to schools
- Foster Food Literacy (food knowledge, food management and the development of renewed food relationship)
- Farmers are going into schools but there is resistance by the Education Department because there are no provincial standards.
- We need cooking classes and nutrition classes in our schools because we are losing knowledge
- School children need to visit farms to see where food comes from
- Partner with youth groups (high achievers and at risk) to visit farms, understand and appreciate farming

Labeling

- All food needs to be labeled to show consumer where their food comes from

Restaurants

- They need to use more local food and state in their menus

Education

- Stop fast foods
- Stop eating processed foods

WHAT DOES CHEAP FOOD REALLY COST?

Suggested resources: Ted.com & Jamie Oliver

Policy

85% locally grown groceries in 2020 → 2010 15% local
→ 2015 45% local
→ 2020 85% local

Labeling – Country of origin – NB GROWN

- Strict standards – safety standards equal to Canadian standards
- Transparency
- Auditing systems
- Policy stating a minimum requirement of locally grown food available in grocery stores

All government institutions should prioritize BUY LOCAL first

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Energy

Ecological goods and services:

- Carbon, Esthetic, BIO Gas
- Identify underdeveloped land

Government supported infrastructure:

- Equipment, research, marketing

Advocate and make the case for cross departmental policy

Local Food Charters - Municipalities

How We Move Forward

- Roy MacMullin from the Green party offered to develop an agricultural policy and move on a political solution
- National Farmers Union – Jean Eudes Chiasson, stated a farmers' union is already developed and many political forces are already in place. **Support what is already in place for the Farmer.**
- Bethany Dykstra suggested we do something that hasn't been done before. **Consumer and Farmer work together.** Pork farmers are now gone because the government is catering to large corporations. "We have been deceived about the foods we eat by our government and now our health is suffering because of it. We need to become more active and pressure our government."
- Have Food Forums in every community
- Align with consumer groups to create a coalition to spread ideas and experience
- Agriculture Alliance holds a Farm Day every year to connect the farmers with the public – how can we support this? Ensure more people hear about it and attend?
- National Farmers Union wants a People's Food Summit/People's Food Forum
- Tourism aspect could be involved whereby restaurants could promote locally produced food on their menus
- Create t-shirts: **Who's your Farmer?** With proceeds going to develop local food initiatives.
- Host **Food Forums** in Fredericton and Saint John
- Petitcodiac Watershed Alliance's online distribution proposal
- Foodshare Toronto: www.foodshare.net The Big Crunch. On March 11 children in Community Schools throughout School District 2, ate Belliveau Orchard apples purchased and distributed by United Way of Greater Moncton Southeastern NB to support an educational opportunity. Next year plans to incorporate learning about local food systems from seed to compost.
- Downtown Moncton-Greening of Downtown-model for Canada
- City parks-urban agriculture: community gardens, school gardens
- Involve school districts in agriculture

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Other suggestions

- Hand out pamphlets at Sobeys: **Who's your Farmer?**
- Bring a farmer to school OR bring a school to a farm
- Appeal to NB pride: give people the facts
- Bethany committed to create a network
- Marketing

Five Things To Happen Next

1. Promote "Hey! Who's your Farmer" with t-shirts etc.
 2. Involve restaurants for the culinary experience
 3. Virtual farmers market: online
 4. Education: day camps, activism network
 5. Organize groups with diverse perspectives around food security to make the case for councils to approve Municipal Food Charters.
- Andrew offered to put an email online to use as a communication tool.
 - The New Brunswick Food Security Action Network has a new blog.
To subscribe to the blog here's what you do:

- 1) go to <http://nbfsanrasanb.wordpress.com/>
- 2) on the bottom right-hand side of the blog, click on the "sign me up!" button.

Thank you to everyone who came and participated sharing your knowledge, ideas, passion and time!

A special thank you to Calactus and Aliper's Hearth for the fabulous food!