The Social Economy in Canada: Food Security

Since the World Food Summit in 1996 communities around the world have become more concerned about food security. Though in Canada we often consider ourselves fortunate to have a great and varied food supply there are many areas which are becoming vulnerable. Many farmers are struggling to make a living, local food production is not enough to supply demand for local food, foodborne illnesses have been making national news, and monoculture is making our foods more ever reliant on pesticides and fertilizers. There are just a few of the reasons for concern.

While some are waiting for government policies to address these concerns (we’re one of the only ‘developed’ nations not to have a national food policy) and for corporations to start changing their practices, others have already started developing alternatives to our conventional food system. There are different lenses for looking at the food system and the challenges of food security, and many of these are finding ways to work together.

The Social Economy is one innovative way to tackle these challenges. The Social Economy, which is defined as a network of organizations and initiatives founded on principles of engagement, empowerment, solidarity and mutual support – is a tool for social innovation. There are many definitions used by practitioners throughout the world, but the Social Economy is characterized by cooperative enterprises, based on democratic decision making and on a not-for-profit basis, to develop and deliver goods and services for the community. In Canada there has been increasing interest in what is known as the social economy (or social enterprise) movement.

In Canada, some groups are already working in the social economy. For example, the Social Economy Research Partnership (CSERP) researchers and practitioners across Canada have been working together to learn how the Social Economy is helping to bring about policy change and system redesign in Canada.

The Social Economy

The Social Economy in Canada introduces the Social Economy as follows:

The Social Economy includes: social assets (housing, skills, social enterprises, community gardens, Fair Trade organizations, and food security networks). The organizations and stories featured in this publication all share in common an understanding of how a Social Economy organization has both social and economic goals.

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University Campus’ Serve-up Socially and Environmentally Responsible Meals

Choosing what food you eat is one of the most routine elements of our days, but often as a captive audience it is something you may have no control over. For students, a socially and environmentally responsible meal—being on campus is a prime example. Thousands of students across the country flock to university campus cafeterias for a quick sandwich or snack between classes. These food items often travel from across the globe to our plates. Although universities in Canada have taken steps to demonstrate that their cafeterias can dish more than the typical fried feasts and well-traveled advantages.

Looking to central Canada, the University of Winnipeg provides a unique and inspiring example towards food plan security that mixes jobs for dozens of inner-city residents, support for local farmers, and engages the campus and the community. This new food plan for Diversity Foods was designed by Winnipeg based non-profit organizations. The University of Winnipeg’s Community Renewal Corporation (UWIRC) and Supporting Employment and Economic Development (SEED) Winnipeg. They have partnered to create a joint venture called Diversity Food Services that will provide food for the entire campus, and will employ approximately 25 people including immigrants and Aboriginals.

SEED Winnipeg works to overcome poverty in the inner city of multicultural Winnipeg, and employee Terri Proulx explained that Diversity Foods is another example of SEED’s framework designed for local food systems. Newcomers gain employment skills and make money in a culturally safe way. This summer, the new employees will have extensive cultural, culinary and business training to prepare them for the September start.

Proulx said that she is “excited too, because we can transition our 48% share of Diversity Foods over to worker ownership or a worker co-operative model.”

At the forefront of the venture is Executive Chef Ben Kramer, second place winner of the Manitoba Iron Chef competition, and owner of Dandelion Eatery. “There are 10 other places to eat in Winnipeg. We can create authentic cultural food that is prepared from scratch using authentic ingredients and recipes,” said chief chef Kramer.

Proulx also added that, “the local food movement is huge here, and Diversity Foods is a testament to U W of that they’re walking their walk.”

The University of Winnipeg is providing more environmentally and economically sustainable food initiatives. The new food plan for Diversity Foods is a prime example of a collaborative effort between the university and local government. “We have taken a leadership role in this initiative,” said CCA Government Affairs and Public Policy Advisor, Ashley Hamilton-MacQuarrie. For the full article, visit: www.martlet.ca/article/19472-campus-serve-up-socially-responsible-meals.

New Approaches to the Health Promoting School: Participation in Sustainable Food Systems

Both Dietsitians of Canada (DC) and the American Dietetic Association (ADA) are supportive of building Community Food Security (CFS) and sustainable food systems (SFS) that incline children and the United States to healthy eating. Dietsitians of Canada encourages dietetic professionals to help build CFS by, among many strategies, facilitating the development of school garden and hydroponics projects, creating multi-sector partnerships and networks that can be described at the global, national, community, household, and individual level and can be engaged in a variety of strategies for community food security policies. The American Dietetic Association urges professionals to help build SFS by working to improve access to and consumption of locally produced foods, encouraging community and multi-sector partnerships and networks that can be described at the local, regional, national, and global level and can be engaged in a variety of strategies for community food security policies that encourage farm to school programs and school gardens. While the body of research around public school participation in SFS supporting these position statements is growing, there is still a need to better understand the specific health, environmental, social, and economic advantages.

The purpose of this review is to synthesize research on three public school sustainable food systems, or SFS, frameworks, as described by the three strategies of the three systems within the evolving literature on CFS in an effort to clarify the role and value of school participation in SFS. While recognizing that each school community is unique and as such, requires strategies to engage with each project, program, or policy are equally unique, there are common themes that warrant exploration. Finally, several options for advocacy, policy, and education and awareness and action are presented.

Concepts of Food Security and Community Food Security: A Brief Overview

Food insecurity is a broad concept that can be described at the global, national, community, household, individual, or cultural level and can be engaged in a variety of strategies for community food security policies. Health Canada recently reported that over 10% of Canadian households with children experienced moderate or severe income-related food insecurity in 2004; 5.2% of these families experienced severe food insecurity. Approximately 8% in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported that in 2006, while 15.6% of families with children experienced household-level income-related food insecurity, only 0.6% of these households reported this at the child level. Measurement of household food security differs in Canada and the United States, so direct comparison is not possible; however, these statistics reflect the reality that many Canadians and the United States households have experienced food insecurity.

The Lay of the Land: Local Food Initiatives in Canada

The Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) has recently released a research report, The Lay of the Land: Local Food Initiatives in Canada. This report is the first Canadian wide, national overview of local food initiatives in this country. The report charts the geographical distribution and types of activities that make up Canada’s local food movement, including co-operatives and umbrella organizations. The research was conducted between September 2008 and January 2009 by a CCA intern, Adrian Ebgers and overseen by Lynne Markell, CCA Government Affairs and Public Policy advisor. The research shows that Canada is home to a vibrant local food movement, with local food initiatives in every province. The report documents over 2,300 local food initiatives in Canada, with 277 of them (11 per cent) organized as co-operatives. There are 24 umbrella organizations that work with local food initiatives to strengthen Canada’s local food initiatives.

The driving factor behind the undertaking of this research was to document the breadth of the local food movement in Canada and educate the people who could help support it. By their very nature local food initiatives are solely focused on local people, local media, and local government. “We have taken a snapshot of what exists across Canada in late 2008 and put it one report,” said the report authors. “We think we have captured a significant portion of what’s out there.”

The report follows an initial policy document that was directed towards Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada as part on their consultation process for Growing Forward, the new agricultural policy that aims to grow the Canadian economy, food security, and agricultural development. The report was written by McCullogh’s framework for CFS: The particular setting, or community, can determine the extent of local food initiatives and the step forward. The report is also available online via the Food Secure Canada site.

Three-Stage Continuum of Evidence-Based Strategies

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Resources

Bits and Bytes
www.bitsofbytes.ca/index.php
City Farmer
www.cityfarmer.info
CCIC: Canadian Food Security Policy Group
www.ccic.ca/foodsecurity
Canadian Association of Food Studies
www.foodstudies.ca
Food Secure Canada
www.foodsecurecanada.ca/index.php
City Farm Bay
www.cityfarmbay.com
Food Share
www.foodshare.ca/index.html

LUNCHEON SPEAKERS SERIES – April, 2009
The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) Social Economy Centre.

Food Security – with Debbie Field from Food Share, Michael Oliphant from Daily Bread Food Bank and Lorrie Stahlbrand from Local Plus

“With world hunger growing, there is a need to look at the way governments and community can work together to ensure sustainable and affordable access to food - for everyone. Debbie Field (Food Share) explored a variety of food security options. Michael Oliphant (Daily Bread Food Bank) spoke to the efforts Daily Bread Food Bank has made to address the underlying cause of hunger, poverty, through public policy and political advocacy. Lorrie Stahlbrand (Local Plus) discussed how growing local sustainable food systems which preserve agricultural land and ensure that farmers can make a decent living, is key to food security.”

Listen and watch this presentation here: www.ois.uontario.ca/english/webcast.php

CSEHub TELELEARNING SESSION THREE: Food Security and the Social Economy

What is meant by the term “Food Security”? How does it relate to the Social Economy? These questions were discussed by Dr. Heather Myers, from the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, and Debbie Field, Executive Director of FoodShare in Toronto, in an engaging telelearning session.

To find background readings, and the podcast: www.socialeconomyhub.ca/hub/?p=466