One Region Forward
Food Access and Justice
Meeting 6, January 27, 2014

Working Team Members in Attendance:

Natalie Cook, Cornell Cooperative Extension
Sarah Jablonski, Cornell Cooperative Extension
Charlotte MacVittie, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County
Phil Haberstro, Wellness Institute
Mary Stottele, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County
Fred Heinle, Alden Chamber of Commerce
Derek Nichols, Grassroots Gardens
Mark Rountree, Erie County Dept. of Environment and Planning
Diane Held, Cornell Cooperative Extension
Diane Picard, Massachusetts Avenue Project
Mike Van Der Puy
Mary Aldridge
Patricia Watson, AARP

Facilitators:
Samina Raja, UB School of Architecture and Planning
Travis Norton, UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab
Brian Conley, UB Regional Institute

Note-takers/Observers:
Bradshaw Hovey, UB Regional Institute
Jenny Whittaker, UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab
Teresa Bosch de Celis, UB Regional Institute

1RF Food Access and Justice Working Team Mission statement
“We strive to make regional food production, food consumption, and the ties between them sustainable, just, and sovereign. We seek to ensure that food production remains a viable livelihood; that people have access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally acceptable food; and that the links between regional food producers and consumers are strengthened.”

1RF Food Access and Justice Working Team Goals
- Support food producers
- Support food consumers
- Link food producers and consumers

Introductions and Agenda review
A brief welcome and introduction was given by Brian Conley.

Improving food access and farm viability in Buffalo-Niagara (Powerpoint Presentation)
A brief presentation was given by Travis Norton of the UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab. Refer to the slides posted here.
The presentation focused on a draft of the plan, “Growing Together-A report on food in Buffalo Niagara”. Topics covered include- farmland, agricultural practices, farmers, food access, healthy eating, connecting producers and consumers. The plan also includes farmer interviews, a food store assessment, policy framework, and three separate analyses.

Three analyses included in “Growing Together-A report on food in Buffalo Niagara”:

1. Who has limited access to healthy food?

   56,954 households have no car and live farther than walking distance to a food store. 11% of all households in the region live farther than average driving distance to a supermarket as well. Places of low access for driving are concentrated in rural areas where as concentrations of low walking access are in urban areas.

2. Are we growing enough for what we need to eat?

   Currently we grow about 67% of demand, but if we increased healthy eating to recommended levels, we would only have 38%. Only 1% for dark green vegetables. We are 35,000 acres short of farmland to reach full self-reliance.

3. How much can we expand farmland?

   143,753 acres is suitable for farming and not being used. 11,739 acres of the land is vacant or publically owned and underdeveloped.

Follow-up discussion:

- Phil: Is the land in the city buying used by Grassroots Gardens factored into this picture?
  Travis: We looked at soil quality based on conventional farming. All of the soil in Buffalo is considered unsuitable for farming. Therefore, it is not included and would need to be shown on a separate map of urban agriculture.

- Mike: How do we influence what is done with privately owned land?
  Diane Held: Using incentives
  Travis: Transfer of development rights can be used to support agriculture in suitable privately owned land; however there are other incentive based programs to encourage this.

- Bradshaw: I am surprised our region is so close to self-sufficient. I am trying to reconcile this with the previous report of the dollar value of products for human consumption. A big proportion of what we produce is actually for animals.
  Travis: A big part of that is self-reliant in things like soy beans and head cabbage. Certain groups of food “throw off” the overall food reliance (in fruits and vegetables).
  Samina: The 68% figure is based on our current eating habits, not what we should be eating.
  Bradshaw: But much of the produce people buy here comes from all over the world.
Samina: Although we don’t buy local, our reliance is high because we don’t eat enough fruits and vegetable to begin with.

Diane: The other thing to remember about our food system is that much of our food goes elsewhere. The Eden Valley Cooperative ships all across the Eastern seaboard, so we are actually shipping things we produce locally.

- Phil: I’m guessing there is a correlation between poverty and access to food and cars. Is this something we are seeing?
  Travis: We have not teased that out, but we know that access to car is about access to wealth.
  Samina: Also, there are strong correlations between poverty and access to food. We know that poverty is connected to poor food access.

- Mark: How did you determine the vacant land that was included in the report? Can we please review the map of this? Could there be some methodological errors with the data?
  Travis: These vacant land parcels are extracted from tax assessor data using property class codes, there may be some inaccuracies.
  Samina: Brownfields could be used for greenhouses and other forms of production. These areas are not shown on the map.

- Fred: What does restaurant’s capacity in the community effect the farm to table movement and wealthy people going out to eat more often?
  Travis: We have looked at ways to get locally grown food into restaurants to make it easier to distribute. We have not studied that if this improves food access,
  Samina: This would not the 68% number because it is not about how the food is getting to the people, but that our farms are producing enough that if we continue our eating habits, we could get 68 percent. The mechanism for how we get local food to the local population is not in this study.

- Phil: Is there any evidence that if we increase demand that we can increase production?
  Travis: There has not been a shock to demand case study in other cities, but taking a holistic approach to direct marketing could level out and meet demand. We have to organize both food production and consumption.
  Diane: Another huge market we need to gear up for is institutions. They are a huge part of the market.
  Samina: We have numbers of the overall capacity of the food system. We know how much we produce.
  Phil: What needs to happen on the farm side to meet that demand locally?
  Diane: Farmers will respond to markets and if the demand grows, they will produce more.

Small Group Discussions
A brief introduction to the following break-out discussion activity was given by Dr. Samina Raja.
Remember, we are one of many working groups and we cannot strengthen our food system without thinking about the work of everyone else. We need to have things come together for a synthesized vision of the region.

In prep for that, we want to be ahead of the game by thinking about how to give ideas to the other working groups. In front of you is a tentative list of “Ideas for the Future” (link here), or recommended action items. If you want to make changes or additions to this list, now is a good time to do so. But today we will also think about what implications these proposed actions have on the mission of the other working teams: Climate Change, Transportation & Mobility, Land Use and Development, and Housing and Neighborhoods (link here).

You will role-play by examining this list from the perspective of someone from a different working team and think about how their decisions can be used strengthen the food system. We should also be asking what we, as the food working team, need to do to promote parallel work of other working teams. For instance, if you are viewing this as a member of the Transportation and Mobility team, when you see our action item that deals with promoting food access in underserved areas, you should ask, “How could we improve transportation to affect this?”

Notes taking during the break-out discussions
Notes refer to the list of “Ideas for the Future” (link here).

Group A: Playing the role of the Transportation and Mobility Working Team.

- Idea 16: Link to Idea 29 – hub and corridor system.
- Idea 18: Include a transportation representative on the Food Policy Council of Buffalo and Erie County (and think about transportation when forming a Niagara County FPC).
- Idea 23: There is an explicit connection here.
- Idea 24: Provide free transit fares home from supermarket.
- Idea 26: Social impact bonds – use for subsidizing transportation to food stores.
- Idea 29: Protect farmland works well with promoting a hub and corridor system.
- Idea 30: Connect Healthy Corner Store program with Ideas 31 and 36.
- Idea 31: Increase fresh food availability in food deserts. Increase multi-modal transportation – see the Transportation Working Team’s Goal #1.
- Idea 32: Ethnic food markets and farmers – food hubs can facilitate these connections.
- Idea 33: This shares a common goal with Transportation Working Team’s Strategy #4.
- Idea 34: Increase consumer awareness of local food and farming (also tie in with Items 35 and 36).
- Idea 35: Farm-to-school programs can support this (also tie in with ideas 34 and 36).
• Idea 36: Regional food aggregation – support vehicle-sharing amongst producers (also tie in with ideas 34 and 35).
• Idea 37: Frame food as a policy issue to appeal to policy makers.
• Idea 38: Sustainable growing practices – Get the word out to farmers about more localized processing and distribution (to reduce farmer transportation costs).
• Idea 39: Food workforce preparation to increase access to transportation facilities participation (in education and employment).
• Idea 42: Increase consumption by increasing access. Improve the local transportation infrastructure for people who do not own cars.

**Group B: Taking on the role of the Climate Change Working Team**

• Address farmers’ ability to retire. Make retirement secure for farmers (possibility through a service cooperative of retired employees.
• Promote either water-use regulations or water-recycling incentives.
• Agriculture should have an emergency plan for inclement weather. Assume a proactive approach on climate change. Educate farmers on climate change, how it affects what can grow and how to adjust their growing practices.
• Idea 12: What are the next steps??
• Idea 13: Farmers may not be on board.
• Idea 14: Regulations regarding green production of foods.
• Idea 16: Protect farmland – see Idea 29.
• Idea 17: Establish and continue communication with nearby counties on this. CCE and UB could be other potential actors.
• Idea 21: “Sweat-equity” programs can be used to make CSAs more affordable/accessible.
• Idea 28: Underutilized buildings can be retrofitted for urban agriculture as well – do not necessarily need a vacant lot (green roofs are a good example).
• Idea 30: Provide freezer-space for healthy food in a Healthy Corner Store program.
• Idea 33: Combine with Idea 25. This could become a policy at the state or federal level.
• Idea 34: Integrate this into a broader communications campaign of One Region Forward.
• Idea 37: Also increase understanding of climate change and its impacts (both policy makers and farmers).
• Idea 38: Use agreements with institutions to purchase green-sourced foods. Use incentives for alternative energy, conversion to organic agriculture and retrofitting farm-equipment to limit fuel consumption and emissions.
• Ideas 38, 39 and 40: Promote season extension to increase the local production of fruits and vegetables (by using hoop houses, indoor production, etc…) Basically, support innovative production methods.
• Idea 40: Incentivize the harvesting of rainwater on farms.
• Idea 41: Maintain the integrity of the Great Lakes water basin.
**Group C: Taking on the role of both the Land Use and the Housing and Neighborhoods Working Teams**

- Idea 1: Link with Land Use and Housing teams.
- Idea 2: Planning boards are a potential actor. Educate the land use and housing working teams.
- Idea 3: Land use and housing should be made more aware. Spread info and concept of community gardens in the plan.
- Idea 4: USDA could be another potential actor.
- Idea 5: Land use and housing working teams should seek a position on the Niagara FPC.
- Idea 9: Housing equality should be provided to immigrant agricultural workers.
- Idea 10: Land use – permits and zoning should allow for the use of mobile food trucks.
- Idea 14 and 15: Land use – protect farmland.
- Idea 16: Land use and housing – should be aware of the concept of community gardens and food access.
- Idea 17: Land use team can be used as potential actors.
- Idea 20: Housing – determine where to target low-cost retirement planning services. Land use – protect conversion of farmland.
- Idea 22: Housing and land use – provide space and allow use of areas for Farmers Markets. Enhance the utilities at these places.
- Idea 23: Land Use – promote mixed-used development and a hub & spoke system of development.
- Idea 24: Retailers, the public and senior support organizations could also be potential actors.
- Idea 27: Opportunity to have indoor growing spaces should be provided everywhere.
- Idea 28: Development should be prioritized with soil quality and urban agriculture in mind.
- Idea 29: Ties in with the mission of the Land Use Working Team.
- Idea 30: Land use team - should promote mixed-use developments.
- Idea 31: IDA’s should provide tax incentives to healthy food retail in areas with low food access.
- Idea 32: Prioritize access to farmland.
- Idea 34: The housing team may have ideas for outreach. Consumers need data and education.
- Idea 35: Land Use team could look into a joint-use agreement (schools and agriculture).
- Idea 36: Food waste.
- Idea 38: Tie-in with the land use team.
- Idea 40: Land use – community and these groups can aid farmers’ ability to harvest rainwater.

**Team presentations from the break-out group discussions**

**Group A: Playing the role of the Transportation and Mobility Working Team.**

- Digital development of transportation system (HUB and Corridor System): how and where to do you connect from point a to point b. That will discuss moving food as well, not just people.
• Create innovative financing mechanism-develop and provide incentives for town centers and high density areas.
• Connect to national and bi-national freight and rail systems. We need to think locally as well, and sustainably. Think of local freight processes as well. Consider that food access is really a transportation issues. Greater access leads to greater consumption.
• Establish transportation associations-vouchers etc. Niagara County Food Policy Council should have someone from the transportation council.

Group B: Taking on the role of the Climate Change Working Team

• Farmers are a community asset-retirement planning is a challenge. Create service corps of retired farmers.
• Farmers respond to economic incentives, not regulations! To shift to any new practice, incentives are more palatable that regulations.
• Incentives for institutions to purchase from ‘green’ farms could be expanded.

Samina- procurement tied to local exists, but not PROCUREMENT tied to SUSTAINABLE.
Diane -Check with Missoula (?) County, Montana-it might exist there.
Sara- It could expand to domestic fair trade.
Brian-We had an action item to develop a list of vacant parcels and their soil quality. We could also look at underused lots or warehouses.
Samina- Green roofs were not mentioned and they could happen faster with incentives tied to it.
• Cross pollination with energy savings programs and farms-could help both sides
• State of the region having a universal communication plan to educate public
• Be proactive with saving produce-grow more undercover, develop freezing capacity (IQT freezing methods) so that weather does not hinder supply
• Retrofitting urban and suburban buildings
• Increase market outreach
• Incentives to preserve and enhance water quality

Group C: Taking on the role of both the Land Use and the Housing and Neighborhoods Working Teams

• All members of other working teams need to be well-trained with what the food access issues.
• Overlapping themes, strategies and actions:
  o Protect farmland
  o Promote denser development-and food and community gardens to be built into site plant
  o Identify and protect farmable soil to target where development should and should not go
  o Provision of zoning for farmers markets-enhance these through procurement of water and electricity.
Mixed use development that includes food retail locations
Development of database of high quality land use - PDR, TDR,
Increase availability of land available for refugee growers. If there is a goal to improve food procurement of minority and women owned businesses, it would increase number of farmers in this area
Reinforce rain water collection on a community level - on big box stores in rural areas
Provision of livestock and bees in land use planning
Support composting
• No prohibition of back and front yard gardening
• Provision of quality housing for retired farming
• Provision of food service near new and existing housing
• Senior housing design that incorporates accessible community gardens
• Support curbside composting in residential developments

Final Comments

Mike- On the climate change business, we could get federal support for growing here through looking at projections of growing here versus growing in other areas of the US. We may look pretty good compared to other areas. The climate for agriculture may get better here (longer growing seasons) while it gets worse other places (possibly more droughts). In terms of national security, this could be a good place to grow. We could be the “northern” southern California. And we have a lot of water to protect. In terms of land and water we could have a real powerhouse for growing.

Samina- The report is in a draft form, we will take the discussed ideas and refine them, then send the report to everyone. Please read and highlight things that you think are not fully captured. Season Extension- We talked about IQF practices to extend season