One Region Forward
Food Access and Justice
Working Team Notes
Meeting 3, June 10, 2013

Working Team Members in Attendance (sorted by break-out discussion groups):

Group A

Susannah Barton, Grassroots Gardens
Mark Rountree, Erie County Dept. of Environment and Planning
Melanie Horton, Wellness Institute
Diane Held, American Farmland Trust
Sarah Jablonski, Food for All
Facilitator: Brian Conley, UB Regional Institute

Group B

Sean Mulligan, Food Policy Council of Buffalo and Erie County
Diane Picard, The Massachusetts Avenue Project
Pat Watson, American Association of Retired Persons
Britney Patera, Wellness Institute
Facilitator: Travis Norton, UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab

Group C

Cheryl Thayer, Cornell Cooperative Extension
Phil Haberstro, Wellness Institute
Jen Bieber, Town of Royalton
Mary Stottele, Wellness Institute
Jim Bittner, Singer Farms
Facilitator: Jessica Hall, UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab

Note takers:
Cristina Delgado, UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab
Bradshaw Hovey, UB Regional Institute/ Urban Design Project

Introductions and Agenda review

Update on other working teams (Hovey)
See presentation document posted on Teamwork site

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.”
Goals

- Support food producers [Focus of today’s meeting]
- Support food consumers
- Link food producers and consumers

A common language
See document posted on Teamwork site for definitions of the following terms:

- The Erie and Niagara food system
- Sustainability and a sustainable food
- Healthy food
- Community food insecurity
- Food justice
- Food sovereignty

Digging deeper into the state of the regional food production:
See presentation document posted on Teamwork site for issues and data on the following topics

- Land
- Farms and Farmers
- Products
- Policies

Breakout Discussions

Scoring the Strategies

Working in their discussion groups, working team members were asked to assess existing and any newly developed strategies by judging whether the strategies addressed:

1. the three goals of the working team (Support Food Producers, Support Food Consumers, Link producers to consumers),
2. the three themes of food production (Land, Farms and Farmers, Products) and
3. the over-arching goal of sustainability.

Strategies were given one point for each of these components that it substantively addressed to yield a score from 1-7 for each strategy. Each break-out discussion group was assigned a set of three strategies to score, these grades are shown below.

Group A

- Strategy 1: Protect our current and potential land from sprawl... SCORE: 6/7 (Did not address the goal of linking consumers to producers)
- Strategy 2: Connect local growers to distribution opportunities. SCORE: 7/7
- Strategy 3: Enhance opportunity for all individuals to obtain healthy foods. SCORE: 7/7
- **New Strategy**: Immigration reform to ensure a healthy, consistent supply of farm labor. 
  SCORE: 6/7 (Did not address the land component of supporting food production)

- **New Strategy**: Attract and support the “next generation” of farmers; Focus on youth, refugees, former convicts, veterans, prisoners and people career-shifting. 
  SCORE: 7/7

**Group B**

- Strategy 4: Adopt more sustainable agricultural practices. 
  SCORE: 7/7

- Strategy 5: Strengthen economic viability of local food system. 
  SCORE: 7/7

- Strategy 6: Heighten public awareness of local food system. 
  SCORE: 7/7

- **New Strategy**: Increase opportunities and educational experiences for youth, different ethnicities related to local food... 
  SCORE: 7/7

- **New Strategy**: Increase access to convert farmland into farms. 
  SCORE: 7/7

**Group C**

- Strategy 7: Support all forms and scales of urban food production. 
  SCORE: 6/7 (May not be sustainable)

- Strategy 8: Creating a regional culture that values healthy eating and strong food economy 
  SCORE: 7/7

- Strategy 9: Promote career development and workforce training for local food system. 
  *Not scored.*

**Break-out discussion group presentations:**

During the group discussions, each group was asked to brainstorm potential actions and actors to implement the set of strategies their group was assigned to work on, as well as possible indicators to monitor progress towards these strategies. Groups were also asked to suggest possible new strategies. Each group chose a spokesperson to present this new material to the broader working team. After each group presented the entire working team was then given the opportunity to provide feedback in a team-wide discussion.

**Group A (Spokesperson - Brian Conley)**

- Support smart growth policies:
  - Potential actors: Local governments, REDC and Farmland Protection Boards
  - Possible indicators: % of Land in Agriculture
  - Acres of permanently protected land
  - Number of new developments on greenfields

- Ensure a healthy supply of labor – related to immigration reform
Next generation of farmers – refugees, former convicts, veterans, career-shifting

Implement the existing strategies of existing ag and farmland plans
  - Potential actors: Local Governments, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Higher education institutions, REDC
  - Possible indicators: Number of recommended strategies implemented

Food hubs
  - Potential actors: County governments, private investors, public-private partnerships
  - Possible indicators: Number of food hubs established, State of plan/feasibility study

Food policy councils
  - Potential actors: Public-private partnerships, County governments
  - Possible indicators: Number of FPC’s established, Number of joint/regional policies established across all FPC’s in the region

Farmers markets
- Consumer education
- Community gardens/ urban agriculture
- Access to healthy foods

Farmer training programs
  - Database/Facilitation tool of farmers and growers e.g. “Farmlink” program

Group B (Spokesperson - Sean Mulligan)

- Adopt more sustainable agricultural practices
  - Action: Create incentives for farmers to transition to organic/energy-efficient practices
  - Small percentage of organic produce
  - Water use is well supply
  - Work with NE organic farmers’ association
  - Potential actors: NOFA, policy-makers, growers
  - Possible indicator: Percent of farmers using sustainable practices

- Strengthen economic viability of local food
  - Increase market opportunities
  - Establish a food hub
  - Shift production to healthy products for human consumption
  - Potential actors: Farmers, processors, distributors, a Food Policy Council, existing co-ops and supermarkets
  - Possible indicators: Rate of local food consumption; rate of production of products for human consumption

- Heighten local public awareness
  - Public service announcements, educational campaigns
  - Potential actors: Non-profits, existing co-ops and supermarkets
  - Possible indicator: How many people know their farmers?
Increasing access to farmland... to turn it into farmed land –
  - Low interest loans – level of funding for farm startups.
  - Subsidies can breakdown
  - Potential actors: USDA, banks
  - Possible indicators: Estimate of deficient funding, number of farmers who lack funds

Increase the diversity of people farming
  - Get minorities to employ farming as a profession

Better the conditions for farm workers

Group C (Spokesperson - Jim Bittner)

Support all scales of urban food production

- This is more of a tool to support consumers than production/producers because urban food production isn’t at scale. It’s more for educational purposes and culture change than feeding people. Engaging people in food production is positive

- “All” forms of agriculture may not be sustainable.
  - Community gardening might not be sustainable because there is a lack of long-term leases for city lots
  - Need policies for long-term lease for community gardening
  - How to make gardens and agriculture profitable for the municipality?
    - NYC study (Raja)
    - Action: Economic study to demonstrate costs and revenues from urban gardens vs. vacant lots – services used – try to prove it is in the city’s best interest.
  - Agricultural water storage is an issue we should think about because climate projections show more precipitation, but in few heavy events rather than scattered across the growing season.
    - Publicly provided agricultural water is extremely cheap--Niagara County farmers pay $1.25 per 1,000 gallons of water. Farmers don’t think about conserving water here because of the availability in Great Lakes, too.
  - Food acres used for grains are good/necessary for our milk and meat production; they are crops which eventually end up as human food.
  - Where/what crops will we grow as climate changes?
  - Soil safety in urban growing– need to check the quality of soil and water – runoff from rooftops may not be healthy.
  - Potential actors: Mass. Ave Project, Grassroots Gardens...
  - Possible indicator: Increase (number of) urban lots with agriculture

Creating a regional culture that values healthy eating and strong food economy

  - Healthy is sustainable
Local Farmer hero celebration - “Farmer laureate”

Get local media more on board – writing about local farmers and food, Need media to report on local food issues, not recycle AP articles.

Local branding – lots of people have talked about it –

- There is no legal definition of “local” or “homegrown” in New York State. Vermont had one… but NYS has resisted.
- Lack of enforcement of what is branded as a “local” food; Possible actors to police false advertising of local food; NYS Attorney General or Food Policy Council
- Food Policy Council may be able to come up with a definition and local branding
- How do we market well locally without repackaging to market at a wider scale outside of the local or regional market [e.g. “Apple Country” (local) vs. “New York State Apples” (outside state)]?

Need food preparation or canning/freezing, etc. training programs for people picking up food at food pantries to ensure that perishable food that is coming from farms in large quantities (e.g. cabbage) is not wasted.

Feedback from team-wide discussion:

- Focus on relationship between producers and institutions (Jablonski)

- Niagara Co. agricultural land protection plan – when you suggest they update it farmers say we didn’t get it done the first time – don’t waste my time redoing it. 1999 plan. They will say it’s not worth another winter of meetings to update it (Bittner)

- Need to ensure mechanisms for implementation (Bittner)
  - NYSERDA has money for people to update plans over 5 years old (Bieber)

- Deal with home rule issues:
  - In Niagara County every town is a kingdom (Bittner)
  - This could be a great catalyst working off the momentum of the HUD plan; needs to be presented by the right people
  - Maybe people would do it (county or regional ag. plan) (Bieber)

- Major institutions could form a procurement policy that facilitates connections between producers:
  - Hospitals (Jablonski)
  - Buffalo Public Schools – Nutrition Committee (Jablonski)
  - Universities and higher-education institutions (Raja)
  - Farm to institution NYS study – contains recommendations to work from (Held)

- Education campaign:
  - Celebration of a local farmer; farmer laureate for the region (Bittner)
  - Existing food celebrations could be encouraged to highlight locally-produced food