



LOCAL FOOD POLICY COUNCILS: BUILDING A COMMUNITY-BASED FOOD SYSTEM

What is a Community-Based Food System?

A just and sustainable food system in which food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place.

What is the Food Systems Approach?

A food system covers all aspects of food - from field to table and back again. The systems approach covers everything from farming and agricultural practices to the manufacture and packaging of food and food products. It also includes the transportation, sale and distribution of food, as well as the waste that it generates.

Trade, Climate Change and Food Sovereignty

In an Era of Climate Change, Dumping and Rural Poverty, we need to rethink food trade and go local on a global scale. Supporting or rebuilding local food systems to bring food from small local producers to local consumers promotes community and regional development in both the global North and South. Producing and marketing more food locally can help alleviate both global climate change and rural poverty.

Building these local food systems requires rethinking the role of trade and the institutions that promote it. The economics through which we produce and exchange goods and services are shaped by cultural values and power arrangements in society.¹ Hunger, poverty and environmental degradation in the U.S. and other parts of the world are related to those cultural values and power arrangements that have shaped our local and global food system. We need to change this system!

Food Aid, Local Economies, and Climate Change

1. Advocating for local food requires reexamining the deeply held economic theory of comparative advantage, which holds that each locality or region should specialize in producing what it can do more efficiently, that is, only what it can produce most cheaply, and then trade with other regions for everything else. However, traditional economic calculations do not account for the true social and environmental cost of trade, the so-called "negative externalities."
2. Policies that promote trade liberalization as a global solution for poverty, hunger, and inequality drive unnecessary trade, but the biggest beneficiaries are large corporations seeking access to markets and greater profits.
3. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have long promoted rapid trade liberalization with no clear evidence that it helps the poorest populations. Powerful countries set global rules in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and agreements such as CAFTA (the Central American Free Trade Agreement) that prevent communities, states, and sovereign nations from nurturing local production and regulating businesses according to the needs and values of their citizens.
4. The link to climate change is two fold: on the one hand most food travels hundreds, even thousands, of miles from farm to plate, and the fossil fuel transportation infrastructure we rely on for all this trade emits greenhouse gasses that are contributing to climate change. On the other hand, export-led economic growth (embedded in

1. Shiva, Vandana, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*, (South End Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2005), 5

the current trade-oriented system, which deliberately favors large-scale agriculture for export over small scale, local economic activity,) contributes to the spread of monocultures throughout the world, which increases land clearing, and loss of biodiversity that contributes to climate change.

5. Food trade also can undermine rural economies. The global overproduction of basic foods is a major factor driving low incomes and poverty in rural areas. For those who think that lack of food causes hunger, it's surprising to learn that the world currently has an overproduction of basic food crops, which results in agricultural dumping: the selling of imported food at less than what it costs to produce it.² It is the inability to afford food, not the lack of food, that causes hunger.
6. This movement's potential to transform our food system is enormous. The successes of community food programs have already demonstrated how local food can foster robust local development, improve food security and nutrition, build community, and support productive family farms. Going local can also be a part of the answer to reversing global environmental degradation and greatly reducing rural poverty. It's time to scale up and institutionalize these successes through organizing for policies that promote local food systems globally, and dismantling those that promote ecologically and socially damaging trade.
7. Citizens are passing innovative laws at the city, county, and state levels, including townships in rural Pennsylvania that are banning corporate ownership of farms. Community builders are not waiting for supermarkets to come to their neighborhood, but rather are growing or buying food through urban gardens, school gardens, farmer's markets, community supported agriculture, and food purchasing cooperatives.

What is a Food Policy Council?

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are comprised of individuals from all aspects of a local food system. They are often officially sanctioned through a government action such as a City Council motion or they can also be a grassroots effort. A Food Policy Council is an innovative collaboration between citizens and government officials. The goal is to provide a forum for advocacy and policy development that works towards the creation of a food system that is ecologically sustainable, economically viable and socially just. The primary goal of many Food Policy Councils is to examine the operation of a local food system and provide ideas and policy recommendations for how it can be improved.

Local Food Policy Councils can provide opportunity for:

1. A more comprehensive approach to analyzing food system issues. Due to the multi-stakeholder nature of a Food Policy Council, a wide range of ideas and expertise can contribute to the creation of food policy.³
2. An opportunity for a focused examination of how local government actions shape the food system.
3. Bringing a wide range of interests and voices together which do not typically work directly with each other.
4. The examination of often unexamined issues; such as the effectiveness of food assistance programs and the causes of hunger in a society.
5. A role in considering how decisions at all levels of a food system—not just farmers or governmental officials—but also food buyers, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers must also be considered in the equation.

Resources:

- Kirsten Schwind. "Going Local on a Global Scale: Rethinking Food Trade in the Era of Climate Change, Dumping, and Rural Poverty." 2005. Institute for Food and Development Policy. 8 September 2007. <<http://www.foodfirst.org/backgrounders/goinglocal>>
- City of Vancouver Food Policy Council, <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/index.htm>

2. 4 In response to low prices, many First World farmers receive subsidies, which can allow them to sell their harvests for less than the cost of production. Current trade rules permit this dumping, which can destroy nonsubsidized farmers' ability to compete.

3. Food policies are decisions that affect how food is produced, processed, distributed, and purchased or recycled. Food policies are involved in many aspects of city life.