

Connect for Food Summary of Workshop Participant Discussion

November 8th, 2022 - Ardmore Hall, Ardmore, Alberta

Thank you to all participants and to everyone who helped make this event a success!

The following is a summary of themes and highlights from discussion relating to a more localized food system.

Connect for Food - 'Food Wheel'



Workshop Overview:

Thirty-three individuals attended the workshop, including participants and table facilitators, representing the categories of the Connect for Food - Food Wheel. Participants offered insights, learned from others' perspectives, and expressed their ideas about actions on developing a more localized food system, that is also regenerative/sustainable.

Early in the workshop, participants were asked to complete the statement: *"My time here today will be well spent if ..."*. At the end of the workshop, participants were then asked to complete the sentence: *"The workshop today was a good use of my time because ..."*. These two exercises, at all of our workshops, are helpful for the CFF team to better understand the expectations of participants and what they found valuable and have been very useful in planning our events. Thank you to all for your open and honest responses!



A presentation by Eileen Kotowich, Farmers Market Specialist, Food Science & Development Section with Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation, titled *Possibilities for a Localized Food System: the time is now!* set the stage for critical thinking and sharing of perspectives.

Participants sat in groups, each with a facilitator at each table to guide the conversation, ensure timely input from all individuals, capture key points and report highlights to all participants to support further discussion.

Discussion focused on two topics:

- Describing our current food system; and,
- What needs to change in our thinking and behaviours about food

Workshop Outcomes:

As anticipated, the workshop environment provided an excellent setting for both individual and collective discovery, critical thinking and, most importantly, a learning that can be applied to future events for Connect for Food. In general, the discussions affirmed and validated that there is indeed a need and purpose for the Connect for Food initiative, and the timing is right for engaging people (stakeholders).

Following, are key points captured from participant conversations around two *Topics for Discussion*.

Discussion Topic #1: Describe elements/characteristics of a more localized food system

Ten elements were identified as necessary for (developing) a sustainable localized food system:

1. Awareness and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders of the food wheel can benefit from education and increased awareness. (Connect for Food is committed to <i>a learning culture</i>). • Our food system is adaptive to consumer needs • Consumers are aware of and informed about food sources and production practices • Committed to continuous education and consistent, transparent information • Knowledge is celebrated
2. Effective Policy and Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and regulations are clear and balanced to serve all stakeholders • Regulations support a self-reliant food system • Trade agreements support both our current commodity/export model as well as a more localized food system • Regulations are outcomes-based and foster ideas, opportunities and innovation in food systems
3. Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a culture supportive of innovation and technology adoption, education and connection • Increased emphasis on innovation that supports a more localized food system (not just commodity, mono-culture, export-driven system)
4. Accessible and Inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility to food is inclusive without biases

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through localized food, communities are more connected – and not just through social media
5. Food Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From production to consumption, our food system ensures food safety for consumers • Food growers, processors, distributors, aggregators, retailers and food services use best practices to ensure food is safe and that consumers have trust in the system • Regulations and management practices minimize wastage while ensuring food safety
6. Ecologically Responsible and Environmentally Sustainable (Regenerative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All components of food system are ecologically responsible, environmentally sustainable and humane • Management practices along entire food chain support regeneration of resources
7. Connected and Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through a <i>systems thinking</i> approach, components of food systems are integrated, with all segments interconnected and collaborating
8. Food Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Susceptibility and vulnerability to domestic and global factors are mitigated through a self-reliant, resilient, year-round localized food system
9. Contributes to Rural Economic Development and Beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals and communities realize benefits from economic development resulting from a more localized food system • Food production is a viable business that contributes to local economy and rural communities are vibrant and diverse through employment opportunities and an increase in businesses related to agriculture/food
10. Supported by All Levels of Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments support a shift from a primary focus on commodity production and export to local food production and consumption • Globalized and localized food systems co-exist and contribute to economic growth and community vibrancy

Discussion Topic #2: What needs to change in our thinking and behaviours about food?

Five themes were identified for changing our thinking and behaviours about food:

1. Take pride in producing and consuming our own food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities take pride and have confidence in locally produced food • Consumers and food services industry think first of purchasing locally produced food • Communities tell good news stories, promote each other, and consumers feel good about supporting a local food system
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<p>2. Expectations need to shift regarding reliance on imported food</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More education and awareness for consumers and food service sector to help them understand that dependency on food from afar is not sustainable economically, socially or environmentally • Certain types of food we import and are dependent on, could be replaced with other foods grown locally that provide same or better nutrition
<p>3. Adopt a culture of learning, leadership and self-reliance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together, collaborate, cooperate to develop new and innovative ways to supply our food locally
<p>4. We need to embrace complexity and accept that many solutions are not simple</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create cost efficiencies through more investment in alternative agricultural practices so that more of our food supply is produced locally
<p>5. Our current agricultural model is based primarily on high production and the export of commodities, often providing low net returns. There may be more net return in a localized food model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift to think of nutritionally dense food vs. nutritionally weak foods produced to be transported over long distances • Develop community-based availability of centralized aggregation and seasonal storage • Develop a circular production to consumption and regeneration system where food is grown and utilized locally from beginning to end (inputs, growing, waste management, distribution) • Understand and adapt to economies of scale and pricing models • Adopt regulations and management practices that support market entry for new producers, processors and food services and build localized system • Adopt permaculture model for food production and resource regeneration

Feedback from Participants:

The following shows how participant-respondents rated the workshop on a scale of 1 – 4 (4 being best) based upon relevancy and quality; this feedback is very helpful in planning for future CFF events

- I was able to provide input in a meaningful way and felt my contribution was valued:
 - 95% rated as a 3 or 4
- Participation was encouraged:
 - 91% rated as a 3 or 4
- Relevancy of topic:
 - 91% rated as a 3 or 4
- Important step in changing the way people think and behave about localized food:
 - 85% rated as 3 or 4
- Challenged their own thoughts and ideas about the food system:
 - 85% rated as 3 or 4



- Appreciated hearing new perspectives and ideas:
 - 95% rated as 3 or 4
- The workshop process worked well:
 - 95% rated as 3 or 4
- Wanting to continue being involved with CFF
 - 95% of rated as 3 or 4

Quotes from Participants of the Ardmore Hall Workshop:

“Learn more about a local food system including opportunities for First Nations communities.”

“We share ideas and have a commitment to continue the process toward a localized food system.”

“I can see that my ideas are similar with others and hear new perspectives and gain a better understanding of what ‘local’ means.”

“I can become part of an initiative where brainstorming solutions with new connections is important.”

“We come away with a starting point on how we can do better at making locally sourced products accessible all of the time – not ‘exclusive’ or ‘novel!’”

“The time is not just about talking but actually finding a direction, even if it’s uncomfortable for some.”

“I learned that even the producers don’t fully understand the complexities of our food system and the barriers faced by processors (like abattoirs) are dealing with – it is REALLY complex!”

“Being able to network with individuals committed to creating the building blocks for a local food economy.”

“Typical approaches to economic development may not align with the goals of a localized food system. Interesting and new ways to look at ‘established norms’.”

“Was able to have healthy discussions with peers I respect.”

“Made me think about how affordability and accessibility are factors in a localized food system.”

Next Steps and Action Going Forward:

Input and feedback from CFF workshop and CFF coffee shop participants has clearly indicated that Connect for Food is an initiative that can foster the development of a localized food system (in this region and beyond) and we are stronger through connecting, collaborating and the sharing of ideas and shared vision.

Stay tuned for dates and locations for our upcoming Showcase and Exchange events in April, 2023.

CFF will continue to focus on the following to further develop the Initiative:



- Developing a (longer term) strategic plan including vision, mission, and goals as well as an action plan to serve shorter term objectives;
- Securing funding sources;
- Identifying potential supporters and partners; and
- Stakeholder Directory development

Thank you for supporting Connect for Food!

Please reach out to us with your questions and comments. We can be reached through our website, our email and Facebook group/page.

With kind regards,

Perry, Keleigh & Brooke

Your Connect for Food Team

