

Connect for Food Review and Summary of Workshop Participant Discussion

October 17th, 2022 - Gathering Place Co-op, Smoky Lake County, Alberta

Thank you to all participants of this workshop and to everyone who helped make it a success! The following is a review of the event and a summary of the themes and highlights from our discussion around a more localized food system.

Connect for Food - 'Food Wheel'



Workshop Overview:

Twenty-eight 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	All stakeholders of the food wheel can benefit from education and increased awareness. (Connect for Food is committed to <i>a learning culture</i>). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the seasonality of food availability • Know what the real cost of food is • Disconnection of consumers to producers • Address misconceptions when they become influential and harmful • Outreach/extension
2. Effective Policy and Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity, balance and optimization of policies and regulations is needed so <i>all</i> stakeholders are served and can succeed • We have an integrated food system. All parts need each other to work
3. Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a culture supportive of innovation and technology adoption, education and connection
4. Accessible and Inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility to food should be inclusive and consider demographics, psychographics and socio-economic factors • Year-round access to local food
5. Food Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From production to consumption, our food system ensures food safety for consumers

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 • Circular regeneration thinking and processes
7. Connected and Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through a <i>systems thinking</i> approach, components of food system 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 to create a self-reliant, resilient, year-round food supply are reduced • Food system is trusted
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
10. Supported by All Levels of Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments support a shift from a focus (primarily) on commodity production and export to local food production and consumption • globalized and localized food systems co-exist and contribute to economic growth and sustainability

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"> • Need to celebrate the production and eating of local food for our health and wellbeing, (not just for convenience or sustenance)
2. Expectations need to shift regarding reliance on imported food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat what we grow and grow what we eat • Education is key (re-introduction of food/agriculture in schools, schools with farms, understanding the long-term impact of food on our individual health and our health system) • We need a paradigm shift to change our behaviour and understanding of the sources of healthy food
3. Adopt a culture of learning, leadership and self-reliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Lead from where we stand” and accept that solutions may not come from external sources • We need to have these conversations more often and be mindful of the importance of them • More critical and collaborative thinking

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need better network for local food system so end-users can easily access information on local growers in their area and beyond
<p>4. We need to embrace complexity and accept that many solutions are not simple</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Appreciating the gift of good soils and food, it is not a right
<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 per acre in a local food model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If nothing changes, we remain vulnerable to external factors and our smaller, local producers will not be sustainable, our morale will suffer

Results of Participant Evaluations:

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

- I was able to provide input in a meaningful way and felt my contribution was valued:
 - 93% rated as a 3 or 4
- Participation was encouraged:
 - 93% rated as 4
- Relevance of topic:
 - 93% rated as a 3 or 4
- Important step in changing the way people think and behave about localized food:
 - 79% rated as 3 or 4
- Challenged their own thoughts and ideas about the food system:
 - 79% rated as 3 or 4
- Appreciated hearing new perspectives and ideas:
 - 85% rated as 3 or 4
- The workshop process worked well:
 - 93% rated as 3 or 4
- Wanting to continue being involved with CFF:
 - 75% of rated as 3 or 4

Quotes from Participants of The Gathering Place Co-op Workshop:

“I connected with a diverse group of people from around the ‘food wheel’ who are passionate about ‘localizing’ our food system.”

“I discovered some gaps that exist for our producers that are not insurmountable!”



"It was good to be part of a group of people who think alike but were challenged to think differently; Problems shared were similar but potential solutions were more varied, and that's a good sign."

"Was reminded that being truly connected to other people is so important and not something that can be done through social media."

"I understand that the purpose of the workshop is to inspire change rather than facilitate pathways."

"As a consumer, it made me much more aware of the complexity of food production and the rest of the 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

