

Connect for Food Summary of Workshop Participant Discussion

November 16th, 2022 - Portage College, Lac La Biche, 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 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>).• Communities and stakeholders are better prepared for food system disruptions• Our food system is designed to also include and support localized food production• Consumers are educated to be aware and understand the process/steps to get food to the table
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• Regulations encourage governments, producers, manufacturers, retailers, food service, etc. to work together
3. Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster a culture supportive of innovation and technology adoption, education and connection• Encourage our stakeholders in our food system to learn, adapt and use technology

4. Accessible and Inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility to food should be inclusive and considers demographics, psychographics and socio-economic factors • Equitable and consistent access to healthy food that is priced within budgets • Seniors, those in hospitals/institutions and the vulnerable have access to nutrient dense, healthy and fresh 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 systems are ecologically responsible, environmentally sustainable and humane • Soil remains healthy and regenerative – permaculture approach
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 • Stories are shared to connect with others
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 • Stakeholders trust our 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 • Rural living provides a sustainable lifestyle
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 • All levels of government work together to provide positive guidance to developing food systems

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"> • Think food rather than commodity • Understand the impact food has on our body and our health
2. Expectations need to shift regarding reliance on imported food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paradigm shift needed for how we feel and think about and consume food
3. Adopt a culture of learning, leadership and self-reliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers are more involved in the harvesting and processing of their food.

<p>4. We need to embrace complexity and accept that many solutions are not simple</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Find a balance that is sustainable for food production and consumption
<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"> ● Revise procurement policies to fill our shelves with local food first then look outside for more ● Develop supportive government regulations to encourage localized production of food

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:
 - 92% rated as a 3 or 4
- Participation was encouraged:
 - 92% rated as 4
- Relevancy of topic:
 - 92% rated as a 3 or 4
- Important step in changing the way people think and behave about localized food:
 - 92% rated as 3 or 4
- Challenged their own thoughts and ideas about the food system:
 - 77% rated as 3 or 4
- Appreciated hearing new perspectives and ideas:
 - 82% rated as 3 or 4
- The workshop process worked well:
 - 83% rated as 3 or 4
- Wanting to continue being involved with CFF
 - 92% of rated as a 4

Quotes from Participants of the Portage College, Lac La Biche Workshop:

“Excellent format for expressing opinions and hearing from others – it was like therapy!”

“Met new people from my own community. Go figure.”

“Heard/shared points of view from many different angles.”



"I learned the importance of food production at a local level and realize that more education (me included) is needed."

"Commonality of food provides an excellent foundation to discuss so many issues."

"Met some important local producers for the first time and I have lived here for over 20 years!"

"I saw firsthand the diversity of thought that allows free speech and a way forward as a society/community."

"It opened my eyes to other food options (seasonal choices) and waste reduction techniques to live a more sustainable life in rural areas."

"Eye opener about what we ALL can do – i.e. "walk the talk".

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



