

Northeast Alberta Food Marketers Association (NAFMA) Localized Food Project

Summary of 2022 Workshop Participant Discussions

(Summary prepared January 4th, 2023 by Connect for Food)



(*Word Cloud generated from Workshop Participant comments)

Thank you to all the participants of the workshops and to everyone who helped to make them a success! The following is a summary of the themes and highlights resulting from discussions around a more localized food system.

NAFMA acknowledges the ongoing support from Community Futures in making this project possible, as well as Alberta Agriculture & Irrigation and many other organizations that have contributed – Thank you!

Connect for Food - 'Food Wheel'



Workshops Overview:

Through the *Connect for Food* process, six workshops were held between April and November 2022 in the following areas/locations: the MD of Bonnyville (Flat Lake), Smoky Lake County (Gathering Place Co-op), Town of Ardmore, Vermilion River County (virtually) , Lac La Biche County (Portage College), Lac La Biche and Lamont County (Bruderheim).

One hundred thirty-five individuals attended the workshops including participants and table facilitators, representing the categories of the Connect for Food - *Food Wheel* in the NAFMA Region. 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 each 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 are helpful for the CFF team to better understand the expectations of participants and what they found valuable and have been very helpful in planning and our events. Thank you for your open and honest responses!

A presentation by *Eileen Kotowich*, Farmers’ Market Specialist, Food Science & Development Section with Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation on the “Possibilities for a localized food system: the time is now!” helped set the stage for critical thinking and sharing of perspectives.

Participants sat in groups, each with a ‘table facilitator’ 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 workshops provided an excellent setting for both individual and collective discovery, critical thinking and, most importantly, a learning experience for participants which can help guide next steps and future events for localized food projects. In general, the discussions affirmed and validated that there is indeed a need and purpose for the Connect for Food process, and the timing is right for engaging people (stakeholders).

Following, are the 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:

<p>1. Awareness and Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All stakeholders of the food wheel can benefit from education and increased awareness ● Committed to continuous education and consistent, transparent information ● Consumers are educated to be aware and understand the process/steps to get food to the table ● Globalization vs. localization. Understand everything is connected and balance can be found between the two and be sustainable
<p>2. Effective Policy and Regulation</p>	<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 are outcomes-based and foster ideas, opportunities and innovation in food systems ● Regulations are made available in plain language and are understandable to all stakeholders

3. Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster 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 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 • 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 systems are ecologically responsible, environmentally sustainable and humane • Circular regeneration thinking and processes • Management practices along entire food chain support regeneration of resources • Soil is healthy and regenerative – permaculture approach
7. Connected and Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through <i>systems thinking</i>, components of a food system are integrated with all segments interconnected and collaborating • Food stories are shared to connect with others • We value working together as a community
8. Food Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Susceptibility and vulnerability to domestic and global factors are reduced to create a self-reliant, resilient, year-round food supply • 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 • Localized food production and/or processing is a viable business that contributes to local economy and rural communities are vibrant and diverse through employment opportunities and an increase in business related to agriculture/food • Rural living provides a sustainable lifestyle

<p>10. Supported by All Levels of Government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments support a shift from a focus (primarily/typically) 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 • All levels of government work together to provide positive guidance for emerging and developing food systems • Small food businesses will thrive
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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:

<p>1. Take pride in producing and consuming our own food</p> <p>“Grow what we eat. Eat what we grow”</p>	<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) • 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 • Concentrate on the micro system / local may be the place to start • Understand the importance of food in our lives and how cheap food may not be sustainable – it’s a matter of value, not just price
<p>2. Expectations need to shift regarding reliance on imported food</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <i>paradigm shift</i> to change our behaviour and understanding of the sources of healthy food • Certain types of food we import and are dependent on, could be replaced with other foods grown locally that provide same or better nutrition • Be sustainable, efficient, regenerative. Finding the balance is necessary. We must accept our limitations due to our location

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People need to <i>rethink the wants and needs equation</i>- Critical thinking skills are needed • Think longer term and have continuity, especially when growing food
<p>3. Adopt a culture of learning, leadership, and self-reliance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Lead from where we stand” and accept that solutions may not come from external sources • Our conversations are valuable, important and needs to increase • Need better networks for local food systems so end-users can easily access information on local growers in their area and beyond • Work together, collaborate and 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 agriculture practices so that more of our food supply is produced locally • Find a balance that is sustainable for food production and consumption • With high level achievements (a vision) in mind, work on attainable objectives as well as our thinking and behaviours
<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"> • Shift to think of nutritionally dense food vs. nutritionally compromised 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 • Succession planning for agriculture / food business owners

Results of Participant Evaluations:

The following summarizes how participant respondents rated the workshops on a scale of 1 – 4 (4 being best) based upon relevancy and quality; this information is very helpful in further improvements to the CFF approach.

- 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:
 - 92% rated as 4
- Relevance of topic:
 - 95% rated as a 3 or 4
- Important step in changing the way people think and behave about localized food:
 - 87% 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:
 - 92% rated as 3 or 4
- The workshop process worked well:
 - 93% rated as 3 or 4
- Wanting to continue being involved with CFF
 - 91% of rated as a 3 or 4

Quotes from Participants attending the Workshops:

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

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

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

“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.”

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

“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 spent 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!”

“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’.”

“The workshop was run in a way that promoted a good exchange of ideas and prompted seeing the many connections in the food system (‘wheel’).”

Next Steps and Action Going Forward:

Input and feedback from the workshop participants and coffee shop series participants have clearly indicated that the Connect for Food approach 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 *Connect for Food Showcase and Exchange* events in April, 2023 and the development of a Regional Stakeholder Directory.

About Connect for Food:

Vision:
Connect for Food envisions a more localized food system where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● risks associated with being too reliant on the globalized food system are mitigated ● stakeholders are empowered around all parts of the <i>Food Wheel</i>, from production to consumption, to regeneration of resources ● communities are renewed through our connection with food
Mission:
Through a commitment to learning and continuous improvement, with a focus on engagement, empowerment and enablement, Connect for Food provides an environment conducive to critical thinking for participant-stakeholders, relating to concepts, possibilities, solutions and opportunities, while facilitating connections for a regenerative and more localized food system.

Thank you for supporting this NAFMA project and participating in the Connect for Food process! Please reach out to us with your questions and comments. We can be reached through our website, our email info@connectforfood.ca and Facebook group / page. NAFMA can be reached by email at: contact@nafma.ca.

With kind regards,

Perry, Keleigh & Brooke

Your Connect for Food Team

