

Farm to School Connections Meeting
January 17, 2008, 11am – 1pm
Capitol Hill Branch, Seattle Public Library

In attendance: Wes Huggins, Jamie Baird, Sharon Whalen, Kerri Cechovic, JP Kemmick, Sarah Garitone, Joann Headou, Viki Sontag, Tim Crosby, Wendy Weyer, Tricia Sexton, Clementine Kovacs, Abbi Little, Gail Gensler, Tiana Colovos, Erin MacDougall, Maggie Anderson

Update on Local Farms, Healthy Kids

The Bill has gotten off to a great start. Nice article in paper. Bipartisan support at the beginning bodes well for the bill.

Thursday , Jan 24 House Bill 2798 Hearing at 10:00 am Senate Bill 6483Hearing at 3:30 pm.

Biggest challenge will be the \$5million price tag. Policy momentum is there but needs support (letters and phone calls) to see it through.

You can call the legislative hotline 1-800-562-6000 between 8-5 and an operator will route your message to all of your legislators based on your address.

Procurement is biggest and most delicate issue. Also includes a farm to food bank piece as well as farmers markets and WIC. Diverse groups are involved.

Panel of distributors and processors:

Abbi Little of Abbi's Northwest

Abbi is a distributor of farm fresh produce and Shepherds Grain products. School districts need volume and this presents a set of obstacles to address. School billing is very timely in terms of paying growers. Orders are consistent. She carries \$5 million worth of insurance which might be an obstacle for growers. Currently working with five different school systems.

Sharon Whalen of Duck Delivery

The owner is very interested in procuring local produce. Duck serves so many school districts that volume and availability is an issue. Currently, Duck has its own fruit orchards in Yakima. Largest soft fruit producer in state of WA. Raw product presents a processing obstacle. Duck has a large processing facility in Oregon. Serve close to 100 school districts between OR and WA. Has a warehouse in Sumner WA, Bend, OR and one other location. Also serve restaurants and grocery stores.

Wes Huggins, Hendrickson Farm (previously school nutrition director in Mt. Vernon). Producer/processor. They cut fresh produce and deliver next day. QFC, Safeway and other stores. Just starting to focus on schools. The owner is committed to buying WA grown first. Very different for a nutrition director to convince kids to accept food in different formats. Process “everything” in terms of produce.

Would clients like to see more local food in schools?

AL: Yes, it's just a question of price. Want to support the community. Want to make menus more innovative.

SW: Ditto what Abbi said.

WH: 60% of dollar goes to labor and the rest to other things including food. Entrees are expensive. Milk is another 20 cents. Can't control entrees because limited by commodity offerings. Supplement with salad bars helps balance nutrition. Challenge is difficult.

What is the range of farm size you deal with?

SW: Relatively large farms that can provide product all summer long.

AL: Typically 1000 acres or less except for grain farmer cooperative.

WH: Being relatively new, can't say what farm sizes are.

Is there an optimum size?

AL: Generally, if less than 20 acres it is difficult for a farm to manage labor, distribution, and wholesale costs. Unless they are really solid on one product.

How do you track where products come from and how much?

SW: Would be easy to calculate how much is locally grown that ends up in school menus.

WH: Tracks and could also calculate.

Are there studies that show what kids actually eat?

What about curriculum to educate kids about what they are eating and why?

Portland has developed a Harvest of the Month program. Flyers in the school, integrated nutrition education that involves the cafeteria.

WSU offers nutrition education that often focuses on gardening or local produce (e.g. Food Sense Harvest of the Season, Square Foot Gardening).

Orca School did a plate waste study but numbers not high enough and garden bar not long enough to make results meaningful.

The next F2S meeting will focus on curriculum.

Can kids be involved in preparing produce?

Not really, it is just not practical in terms of volume.

Do you do delivery to schools or districts? What is the insurance factor about?

SW: depends on school facilities. Need to be assured that the product has been handled properly. Farmers have to carry insurance.

JB: Farmers have to insurance as well as packing shed. Direct means the farmer and the distributor must have coverage.

AL: Schools require (some a million) but mostly \$5 million. Requires farmers to have \$1 million of general liability insurance.

Who takes ownership of the products? For legal reasons?

AL: Owns the product once it leaves the farm.

Some farmers have a statement about their handling processes.

Is there a tax benefit to delivering to schools (government or non profit)?

No. No incentives.

Might be interesting if B&O tax could be eliminated as an incentive to sell to schools. An interesting topic for future discussion!

Back to kids working in cafeteria topic...

High school culinary arts programs in some places have occurred. There are union issues as well in terms of kids doing work that union members do.

How do you address quality control issues? Who takes the final hit?

Try to do everything to prevent quality issues. Must have quality standards. With small farms product is not always consistent and conformed to standards.

What are three issues you would like to see changed?

WH: 1. Time for NS Directors – has this issue percolated up to administration as a priority?

2. Supply and sourcing enough volume out of farms. Growing contracts in place ahead of time.

3. Price – with a contract negotiated ahead of time this may not be such a big obstacle.

SW: 1. Product availability/variety and growing season. After October there is little produce available.

2. Standards. Must be assured that products meet standards.

AL: 1. Getting the produce in a format that schools need and can purchase.

2. Getting schools to move away from the current system.

3. Pricing. Excludes smaller farms that can't produce at this level.

Thinks availability is there.

Describe Food Alliance standards and other safety standards.

Food Alliance addresses labor, environment, water quality, animal treatment.

Processors must be USDA certified. Schools could write certification standards into bid specs.

Food Alliance needs to do outreach and education to schools.

What would be an ideal relationship working with farmers?

WH: Have farm deliver the food.

AL: Consistency – product quality, size. Plan for growing food on a contract basis.

Certifications.

More interest in local produce from non-school clients? How does that impact schools?

Yes, there is interest. There is a lot of press and media right now. It is definitely a growing trend.

Schools pay very timely. Corporate contracts require distributors to carry debt – with 90-120 day pay outs.

Often places like Bon Appetit work with what is given to them rather than contracts.

What would happen to diversity if growing contracts are developed.

Anything we can do to continue conversations to build relationships is very important.

Just as relationships are key for direct marketing.

A lot of the excitement of local foods movement is dealing with very small farmers.

But it is still about knowing the face of your food and supporting the local economy.

People assume that buying local means buying sustainably produced food. More and more are asking for foods produced from sustainable agriculture.

If anyone has information about locally grown foods in school breakfasts? Specifically, a “local burrito”? If so, let Tricia Sexton know.

Announcements

Sustainable Seattle is holding a local food economy workshop on February 18.

Farmer Chef Connections is Feb. 4

Michael Pollan will be in Seattle on a book tour 2/13

Wayne Roberts from the Toronto Food Policy Council 2/21

Jon Jeavons Feb 15-16 (check with Cascade Harvest Coalition for dates)

Joel Salatin speaking on Jan 28. at Pierce Council Conservation District Annual Mtg.