

Farm to School Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

May 11, 2007, 9:00 – 11:00 am

King Street, Seattle

Present: Steve Evans, Heidi Broekemeier, Tricia Sexton, Erin MacDougall

1) Heidi provided an updated copy of her farm-to-school policy analysis – looking at options and criteria.

2) NEW DISCUSSION:

Steve mentioned a recent memo about Good Agricultural Practices USDA, which is gaining ground as a farm certification program as supermarkets and school districts increasing make it mandatory for their farm suppliers. The GAP protocol includes some standards that are troubling for small farms using sustainable or organic methods, including a requirement to keep animals two miles away from vegetable growing, and limitations on using compost. This concern is expressed in relation to legislation in that even if we are able to get an exemption policy, farms may face barriers if the USDA GAP standards are required by schools.

Erin recently went to a session at the Food and Society Conference with a broker business that is the distributor and value-added processor for 50 farms and all their farmers are GAP certified and are small farmers. Whole Foods also requires GAP certification.

Erin asked how it relates to HACCP. Steve believes that HACCP is more inclusive, while GAP is specific to microbial contamination issues.

ACTION: Tricia to send an email to Steph Larson, Marion Kalb and Jennifer Wilkins for their thoughts about how farm certification and food safety standards affecting farm-to-school policy and practice.

3) DISCUSSION OF EXEMPTION OPTION

Heidi brought in some draft text for legislation providing exemptions for food in WA school purchasing procedure, divided into two versions. Exemption criteria are adapted from Montana legislation – defines food, which would include meat, eggs, dairy, veg, and processed and manufactured foods

Oregon, Montana, Massachusetts – all used educational tool as a reason for exemption – is that the only way to get it exempt? Tricia noted that this may require a lot of work around creating curriculum for food and nutrition around school meals, and in documenting the educational uses.

Erin pointed out that this exemption would allow local purchase, but not necessarily encourage or provide incentive. In order to have broad impact, or real imperative for schools, this exemption would need to be paired with environment, climate change, or health imperatives for school food procurement.

Also, in order to get an exemption legislation passed, there needs to be a story to attach to it. The education component may be an easy way to do that. Others, such as health benefits or environmental benefits of local food, are harder to quantify and have few concrete studies to back up claims.

Erin mentioned that it would be nice to expand the legislation to other public institutions, but these are governed by separate legislation and procurement regulations. If we wanted to expand to other institutions, we would need to find legislation that governs those and exempt them separately and justify separately.

Another question to keep in mind is how this policy, if enacted, be put into active practice? Is it best to work with current distributors and for schools to require local purchasing attempts?

Erin notes that cost is still the biggest barrier. Will need to fix cost first – must allot more money to school meals. – This is OPTION 3 in Heidi's document – adding state money for fresh food purchasing, as was done in Oregon. Maybe the next step in the policy committee's legislative discussions. A current obstacle is that if schools have extra money leftover from school lunch extra income goes into general fund, giving schools an incentive to buy cheapest food and put the funds elsewhere.

Steve feels exemption is still a real win, even on its own, as it is a low-hanging fruit, more easily picked because it is not asking for money, or for the school districts to do anything. It just opens the option. Tricia points out that some of the organizations and individuals working for change would then have at least the clear legal option to present to schools.

ACTION: Ask Marion/Steph about exemption laws other places, how they fit with national issues/laws, and why the educational component reason is the one used in other states for justification. Also, Raquel from CFSC has been having monthly phone calls – would it be possible for them to sponsor a quarterly or monthly F2S phone meeting for various places to share updates, challenges and information?

ACTION: Heidi – Can you send a copy of your exemption language to the group, for those who were not at the meeting?

4) We briefly discussed speaking with Shakti Hawkins in Cantwell's Seattle office, or with someone in Rick Larsen's office, to discuss how policy goals can be reached in a way that might change things more significantly and tie in issues of nutritional guidelines, funding and food purchasing exemptions.

ACTION: Email to Tim from the Policy Committee – in your discussions with policy people – can you clarify who you've spoken with and on whose behalf and about what issues? We would like to make sure informational efforts are not duplicated.

5) Heidi thinks that legislation funding a WSDA coordinator (Option #2) is one of the most solid options in her policy analysis. Erin notes that the DOH should be included, as well.

There is currently no State Food Policy Council – if were to work toward that, a statewide coordinator assessing farms for supply potential would be a great part of the work.

Steve mentioned that the State Conservation Service just got money for coordination person. [Steve, do you have more info on this?]

ACTION: Erin to call Fred about his perception of a state-wide approach based on Option #2

At a later time, we may also wish to contact George Sneller about statewide approach/coordinator idea.

6) National Conference of State Legislatures: Leslie Levine has moved on. Tricia has new contact information for them. After the recent conference hosted here, there were funds available for a follow-up event, but we missed opportunity for a legislator education event this year, as funding had a deadline and there was a requirement for a WA legislator to request the event.

ACTION: Tricia to check with new contact to ask whether there will be new money under their new contract to have a fall follow-up with our legislators?

General notes:

Erin – reminded Tricia to keep Farm-to-School in mind for articles in the Harvest Fair guide - Ann Lanning updates

Next Meeting was not discussed.