

Farm to School Connections Team Meeting 4.17.08

WSU King County Extension Office

Present: Sarah Garitone (Pierce Conservation District); JP Kemmick (Pierce/Tacoma Health Dept); Bridgette Lee (SU Dietetic Intern); Anita Finch (Seattle Schools); Gail Gensler (King County Hazardous Waste); Anita Bowers (grandparent); Charlotte Marrison (Kent School District); Amythyst Shipman (Evergreen State College); Pete and Joeve Wilkinson (Seattle Audubon Society, Grandparents); Tim Bernthal (Northwest Farming for Humanity); Acacia Larson (Homegrown Nutrition and Food Sense); Mo McBroom (WEC); Claire Lane (Children's Alliance); Michelle Bates-Benetua (Lettuce Link, Solid Ground); Gina Jacklin (citizen); Erin MacDougall (King County); Paul Benz (Lutheran Public Policy Office)

UPDATES:

Welcome Acacia Larsen from *Homegrown Nutrition* who will now be preparing no-cook kid friendly snacks for our meetings with produce donated by Greenfresh Market. Acacia also works with WSU King County Extension's FoodSense program. (Link to recipes and related lesson plans can be found at <http://king.wsu.edu/nutrition/WebsitelinksUnit1.html>.)

Tricia: There were many people who emailed in advance to say that they really wanted to be here today. This is a great turn out and I want to point out that the group is always much bigger than those in the room. Parents are always welcome to come and bring children!

Seattle City Council: Local Food Action Initiative proposed by Richard Conlin.

The initiative is a broad policy framework that looks at the needs of vulnerable populations, emergency preparedness, sustainability and social justice. The Initiative sets up a framework for infrastructure and to aid in interdepartmental coordination. There are some specific goals around creating permanent locations for farmer's markets and other things and some requests of various departments, but not a lot of detailed projects. Those will come later. This is a step to the Acting Food Policy Council becoming an official Food Policy Council, but that will also require a separate ordinance. Seattle is working closely with King County on the policy council issue.

There was a public hearing at Seattle City Hall on April 16th in front of the Environment, Emergency Management and Utilities Committee. It was very well attended by a large cross-section of Seattle residents who represented many different interests regarding food policy in Seattle. The hearing can be viewed on the Seattle Channel.

<http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos/newvideos.asp>

What are the costs associated with the Local Food legislation?

The Local Food Action Initiative's primary objective is to mandate food policy planning and collaboration to occur within the city. It does not provide funds for the costs inherent in division of staff, interagency coordination, etc. There will be further policy work to make specific things happen.

Discussion about local policy possibilities:

Mo: Local Solutions to Global Warming was an ambitious State bill that passed during the last legislative session that focused on growth management, coordinating with state agencies such as CTED. A key component of the legislation calls for tools for local

communities to demonstrate how they will reduce climate impacts. The recommendations were not food specific, but food is a critical component and will definitely play a role.

Tricia: Cities operate as separate entities from school districts. In looking at what role the city policy might have in relation to schools I have begun to research joint-use agreements for cities and school districts to coordinate land use. This language is clearly meant for ball fields, but I wonder if this could be applicable to gardens? If there is an option for community partnerships off, or on, school grounds?

- For more information on the Local Food Action Initiative:

<http://seattle.gov/council/conlin/>

- To contact the City Council and Mayor to voice your support:

City Council: <http://www.seattle.gov/council/councilcontact.htm>

Mayor Nickels: Email http://www.seattle.gov/mayor/citizen_response.htm

Phone: (206) 684-4000

Community Conversation about Farm to School in Portland

Tricia recently participated in a Community Conversation about Farm to School in Portland where I was able to act as a Washington representative and hear directly how Farm to School implementation is occurring in Oregon. Oregon has two staff—one in the Dept of Agriculture and one in the Dept of Education. Oregon is ahead of us on implementation and folks there were helpful to us in planning for the legislation. I hope we will continue a long fruitful relationship. Michelle Ratcliff is the NW regional lead for the National Farm to School Program, who oversees the NW region, including WA, OR, ID, AK organized the event. I have also begun to participate in regular national phone calls to collaborate and learn from other states. I will report back on the outcome of those calls as they relate.

School Gardens Symposium

Erin has been working with a loose coalition called the Puget Sound School Gardens Collective, which was formed in 2006 by a UW graduate student who saw that this issue was not getting adequately addressed. The purpose of the collective is to foster collaboration between schools, parents, government and others with a vested interest in school gardens. It seems that this ad hoc group is becoming a movement. For the symposium, we visited Islandwood on Bainbridge Island on May 19th.

www.islandwood.org. They have a beautiful 200 acre facility where they are trying to expand their garden work. The purpose of the symposium was to share assets and barriers on what groups and individuals are currently doing and to develop an agenda and plan for next steps. The process was led by Michelle Bates-Benetua, Erin MacDougall, Rachel Van Lynn. There will be a report on the website on the outcomes of the symposium.

<http://www.pugetsoundschoolgardens.org/index.php>

Highlights:

We have designated an 18 person leadership committee;

We plan to have a fully functional website within 2008;

And we will be running additional planning and articulating how gardening connects with F2S, focusing on issues ranging from land-use, wellness, and education.

We are, and want to convey that we are, a broad coalition of groups working on school gardens and that we represent many diverse interests.

The next Puget Sound School Gardens Collective meeting will be taking place on May 21st at Solid Ground from 3 to 5pm. This meeting will focus on connecting parents and

kids with resources to create school gardens. They need and want support, models of gardens, etc.

Erin: I recently attended an Urban Sprouts presentation.

<http://urbansprouts.blogspot.com/2007/01/environmental-justice-in-california.html>

This California program is a leader in moving gardening research into action and they are defining how a gardening program impacts youth learning criteria. We have lots to learn from California as they are many steps ahead of Washington. In 1995 the State Superintendent set goal of having a school garden in every school. There is much to replicate from what they have already done.

Ideally, we plan to bring more people into our work, develop polices and change from a movement to developing concrete policy.

Tricia: What about the public health concerns with school gardens?

Erin: Yes, this is an often asked question. My feelings are that school gardens are not production gardens. The utility of these gardens are teaching children about the impacts to their health. These gardens provide one-off opportunities to celebrate and educate. There is USDA language that supports school gardening. Honestly, it is more likely kids will get sick most everywhere else.

Anita F: There has been an old wives tale circulating for years about a ban on using food from school gardens. It is not banned. But, without question children's food safety is of the utmost importance and must be fully considered in each case.

Claire: What is the connection between the local group and efforts across the state?

Erin: These are baby steps, shoestring programs. There are a number of policy possibilities. The process is to reach out and coordinate to determine what we can do.

Tricia: Coordinator positions are being created at the state level in the F2S Program. They are tasked with providing information to those interested in school gardens.

Michelle: We would love case studies from around the state for our website!

Gail: Are the participants of the Garden Collective doing organic gardening?

Michelle: yes.

Tricia: That seems to happen by default in school gardens because of who is participating. The Local Farms-Healthy Kids Act encourages school, and requires that they educate about organic and conventional gardening.

Local Farms-Healthy Kids (LFHK) Update

Mo McBroom, Washington Environmental Council; Paul Benz, Lutheran Public Policy Office; Claire Lane, Children's Alliance

There is often a misperception that once a bill has passed, the problem addressed by the legislation is solved. We know this is a first step. This bill, SB 6483, cobbled together a package of policies that moves the local food ball forward. Its intent, and I believe, result is that it puts Washington in front nationally in stating that we value and possess a cultural

desire to promote local food through food banks, farmers markets, schools and other state institutions. The pieces of bill hang together, yet they are discrete.

The program has designated 2.5 FTE's within the Department of Agriculture to implement the programs. The goal of Local Farms-Healthy Kids is to have employees work with other state agencies, such as the Department of Health, directly with schools and others to *identify where barriers exist* and to develop strategies to bypass or correct them. Exactly how this will take shape is uncertain. Should they be working with farmers? There is the problem of production. Or, they could be working with schools that lack resources and are scrambling to respond to increasing parental demand. The key is that *we now have resources to dive into these questions*

The other key gain is that we achieved a change in procurement language. Again this states that *local is part of our values*. We have yet to see if the school district level will actually change their purchasing practices and policies. This shift will not occur all at once, but we now have the option and this may percolate down over time.

Mo: But, one of the items that I find most interesting is the state institution language that applies to state agencies that purchase food. This is more binding. Whenever the state enters into contract, they **MUST** maximize local sourcing.

As defined in the bill, Local means grown in Washington State.

Mo: There were political and policy reasons for this definition. Writing a definition of local as a radius creates a conflict with the federal Commerce Clause. Washington Grown is a known, marketable and most importantly previously defined definition.

The Washington Fresh Fruits and Vegetable program provides a smaller sum of money, \$600,000 for snack program for students attending elementary schools with over 50% of students on the free and reduced lunch program. We wanted 2 million designated to the program, but in a tight budget year, this is a start that will allow a number of schools to gain access. This program requires a systemic approach—how do we source locally? This again has flexibility. Maybe work with larger distributors? Or, maybe it turns towards developing relationships with small local farmers.

Erin: One of the things it does is it helps us get a handle on educating kids on seasonality.

Tricia: It also allows for participating schools to use the money to cover staff time and equipment purchases.

Tim:—Why does the program just focus on snacks?

Mo: We interpreted that including lunches might make us vulnerable to federal scrutiny that we were showing local preferencing. Working with OSPI, we determined that the snack focus allows dollars to get local food in school without legal hurdles. If, in the Farm Bill, USDA restrictions go away, then our state is poised to buy more local. Getting rid of state requirements to not preference local sets us up to maximize our options if this happens. As it stands, we still have more flexibility by including this program. It is a step that will allow us to take big strides if federal restrictions change

Gail: If bill takes away state barrier, then is the federal barrier still an impediment?

Mo: Food service directors currently have to be creative regarding the federal barrier, but if federal restrictions are removed then doors will open.

Erin: This is not the issue that is hanging up the farm bill. There are many larger concerns, but this is included in the larger legislation and is not controversial.

Claire: The state program is modeled after the federal program. We feel it is a great piece that builds capacity on what is working.

Erin: What we aim to do is to make purchasing more flexible, the shift to purchasing WA grown will be challenging for schools. Schools will tell OSPI what they need, but the goal is to be flexible.

Anita F.: I support flexibility. When we at Seattle Schools are required to use money in January to buy raspberries that is, among other things, a bad lesson for our kids on local food and seasonality.

Mo: OSPI was very helpful in passing this bill. They worked with positively us.

Tricia: OSPI is required to track this program throughout implementation. That is a challenge, but it seems to be one they are willing to take on. There is a lot of support.

Mo: Our initial request was for 4 million. The dollar allocation is not reflected in the bill because it can be found in State budget bill. You can go to the Office of Financial Management <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/> to see the budget. But, budget bills are hard to read and it's thousands of pages.

Tim: You can get some idea on the state website in the fiscal note.

Mo: That's a great way to see how much policy bills will cost before they are passed. Caveat: Fiscal note shows a projection by agencies, not the final allocation, so it does not reflect what was actually allocated.

Mo: \$50,000 was allocated to farmers market card reading technology to read food stamp and debit cards. The goal is to aid food stamp recipients to shop at farmers markets and to help farmers to make the process of selling easier. Erin MacDougall was a strong proponent of this issue.

There was also a Farm to Food Bank pilot program included in the bill. This effort was led by Solid Ground. The one-year pilot programs will connect local farmers to the food bank system. The Farmers to Food Banks program directly links growers in our state to the emergency food system and was funded at \$350,000.

Main Challenges with Bill Passage 101

1. Bill gets killed by an opponent
2. Introduce ambitious bill— someone pushes back –the final result gets watered down
3. People do “mischief” to your bill—tagging on amendments unrelated to the original intent of the bill.
 - 3a. Resulting in that you sometimes have to kill your own bill.

Amendments to LFHK:

School garden piece and farmer market/farm store language. The first makes school gardens explicitly legal. This language is fairly benign, maybe even good. Schools may have a garden and pick the produce. No state ban. There was also an attempt to prioritize 4-H gardening. But, not all communities have 4-H, so the resulting language simply says that 4-H shall be given the opportunity to garden too.

The farmers market and farm store language expands and increases Farmers Market Nutrition funding for WIC recipients and senior citizens to buy from farmers markets and farm shops. This will require Dept. of Health to do work to authorize farm shops, without additional funding for their work. They have been supportive in being willing to take this on.

Mo: Ultimately achieving a total of 1.5 million in funding was a big victory. I think we have launched the issue and built legislator awareness. Thank you to all who worked on the campaign.

Tricia: I am hearing from lots of people. We are getting national recognition for what we have achieved. It is very exciting.

Mo: I do want to caution that although passage of the legislation is an important step, we still face many on the ground barriers to successful implementation. These include logistics and limited resources. There will not be a sea change over night. Our hope is that the State has laid the foundation for future efforts. What are the next steps? This is a launching pad.

Tricia: People are ready to get to work. Folks met last week as part of the WSU Small Farms Retreat last week. They have already pulled together a planning committee to look at this. There is much excitement. I have spoken with OSPI and WSDA. They are ready to work together on implementation.

Erin: Really, ours is the most comprehensive food systems legislation in the country. The Kellogg Foundation and New York are looking our legislation and the coalition work that has taken place as a model. We have demonstrated how important it is that F2S be tied to other food systems issues, and that working in broad coalition with environmentalists and farm groups were keys to our success. We learned so much regarding media, relations with policy makers, and citizen outreach. There was only one vote against this.

Tim: Is there an advisory group for implementation of this bill? There is one for Farmers to Food Bank—why not for the Farm to School piece?

Mo: Right now for this issue, advocacy is, I think, more important than advisory roles.

Tricia: WSU is working closely and well with the WSDA as we move forward with implementation.

Mo: We got this vote despite opposition. No chance that this bill was going to get killed. The inspiring thing is the power and collaboration that we have generated. We need to capitalize on this power for future collaborations and strategies.

Anita B: Was the opposition you speak of from national processors?

Mo: Yes. We learned that the Northwest Food Processor Association, under direction from their DC operation, was outright opposed to fresh and local designations for produce.

Erin: I believe that this opposition was, in large part, due to the fact that this is a new relationship and we can and should work to improve processing options in this state. The relationship with processors in Oregon is strong and I hope we can develop something similar. Food processors will benefit greatly from this legislation. We must support our processors.

Sarah: I feel we have a steep learning curve on the farmers market technology issue, but the Tacoma Farmer's Market Board would love to participate. What is the best avenue to proceed?

Claire: I think the program was designed so the money can come through quickly and it is wise to work with the state to identify how to make the most use of it.

Erin: Currently it is broad criteria for market participation and how it's used that may need to be clarified. We did want there to be room for market boards to determine their needs.

Questions about the farmers market technology should be directed to erin.macdougall@kingcounty.gov

Input on implementation of Local Farms-Healthy Kids

Gail: I have spoken to a school with a question from their Nutritional Advisory Committee: Can our school get a pot of money for our programs?

Mo: No. There is no general pot of money unless it is an elementary school that qualifies for the snack program. I strongly suggest that they call the Department of Agriculture and say they want programs, help us out, let's find the solutions that make this work. ***Be Vocal.*** This bill created the expectation from parents to get local food into schools. This message needs to be delivered up through the system.

What can you do?

- Contact local schools and school boards and urge them to coordinate with state agencies.
- Contact Tricia Sexton at tricia.sexton@kingcounty.gov to learn more and to coordinate with State Local Farms-Healthy Kids leads as the program develops.
- Contact your state legislators. Meet with them if at all possible. They are now in their home districts. You can find the contact information for your legislators here:

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/Default.aspx>

We had such great discussion on LFHK and how it all work, that we didn't get very far with brainstorming what we'd like to see in a state farm to school program. Let's use the listserv to continue that conversation. Please add your thoughts to this discussion

Other Policy Thoughts

Claire: Another issue that is on the horizon is the need to identify priorities for the Federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization. This includes all federal school meal programs.