

CIELAP's 4th Partnering for Sustainability Workshop
Achieving Resilient Agricultural Systems: Innovation, People and Partnerships
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Rural-Urban Linkages for Local Food in the City of Guelph/County of Wellington Landscape

Name and Organization

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About the case study

Research was conducted to understand the barriers and opportunities for a local food system in this landscape. Two workshops and one focus group were conducted. Results are posted at: www.guelphlocalfood.ca

The goal of this place-based research was to engage citizens, producers and institutions in identifying community-wide constraints and opportunities for local food production and consumption.

How this case study advances sustainable development and fosters resilience.

This case study contributed to stronger communication amongst local food system stakeholders, and identified constraints and opportunities so that a stronger and more resilient local food system can evolve.

Barriers / Challenges

Local food networks are complex social organizations. Identifying primary stakeholders and engaging them in dialogue is time-consuming. The primary stakeholders identified for this research were farmers, institutional consumers, marketers, community outreach organizations, the transport industry, and government institutions. The average consumer was not incorporated into this research due to time and methodology constraints.

Interesting Lessons

Workshop participants were asked to identify barriers to an ideal local food system, and to identify how each might contribute to such a system. It was found that what was a barrier for one group could be overcome by another group. It was interesting for all stakeholders to realize the potential, then, to create a more sustainable food system. The solutions were, literally, in the room.

The research confirmed that face-to-face interaction is valuable as a key element in the development of a local food system.

The main barriers for a local food system are deficient communication networks; the prevalent expectation for cheap food; the lack of viable business models; the availability of a reliable and adequate local food supply; and distribution logistics.

The main opportunities are the development of education and awareness; the adoption of co-op models; coordinating and linking efforts; marketing; and policy development.

Local food systems do not necessarily coincide with political boundaries. Collaborative work among different regions seems to be important for the development and strengthening of these networks.

Moving Forward

It was hoped, apart from the learning experience for everyone, that an outcome of this research would be to build the case for the funding of a local food coordinator position. That funding proposal has been submitted and we are hopeful that it will be successful.

This research has formed the foundation for further research, to be completed by Spring of 2009, on models and best practices for local food systems across Ontario.

Remaining Comments and Questions

It is strongly recommended that the development of policies and programs that respond to the needs of local food systems involve the local stakeholders in an interactive policy-making approach, in order to avoid unintended consequences.

More research is needed to better understand how the social networks embedded in local food systems develop and how policy can support the creation of such networks.