



Report from Food Secure Canada's Assembly 2010

**Weaving together food policy
and community action:
an agenda for change**

Université de Montréal, November 26-28, 2010

Our partners:



COOPÉRATIVE DE TRAVAIL



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*This report was prepared by Martha Steigman with Cathleen Kneen
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INTRODUCTION



Food Secure Canada is the voice of the food movement in Canada, uniting groups and individuals working toward a food system that is healthy, ecological, and fair for producers and consumers at home and around the world. Its members represent a broad alliance including farmers, fishers, food businesses, community development and social justice advocates, Indigenous peoples, researchers, and nutritionists. Together we are building the foundations for sustainable, just food systems grounded in strengthened democracy and community action, while challenging the corporations who control, and the public policies that shape the dominant food system.

Every two years the Food Secure Canada Assembly brings members together to learn from each other, broaden our vision, and build coherence in our movement. The 2010 Assembly, “**Weaving together food policy and community action: an agenda for change**”, was held Nov. 26-28th at the Université de Montréal. The location was chosen as an opportunity to overcome some of the barriers between the food movement in Québec and the “rest of Canada”, and showcase the on-going work to build food sovereignty in Québec.

The Assembly brought together more than 350 people, representing dozens of organizations working on issues from Indigenous land rights and sustainable agriculture to food banks and policy change. The diversity of the participants is an indication of the complexity and depth of the analysis and alliances that are being built through Food Secure Canada’s work.

Participants came together to gain inspiration, learn about the interconnectedness of our respective struggles, and deepen solidarity. About one third of the Assembly was devoted to furthering the Peoples•Food Policy Project; other sessions covered a range of topics, including the parallels between government management of farming and fishing industries; youth food justice initiatives; food banks going beyond charity models; and the interconnectedness of Indigenous, feminist, housing and international peasant movements. This document does not attempt to provide a complete record of the 35 different sessions at the 2010 gathering; instead, our aim is to give readers a taste of some of the issues that were explored through the Assembly.

Of course, some the most important outcomes of the Assembly are intangible: the atmosphere created by the amazing food and beverages served, which featured local products such as the famous Québec cheeses and the work of local chefs and community food programs; the networking; and the relationships that were formed at the event. While these cannot be captured in a report, the fact that a Northern Food Policy Council and a new youth initiative linking young farmers and urban youth were formed at the Assembly, gives an indication of the energy and dynamism that animated the three days.

For more information on the Peoples’ Food Policy Project, see <http://peoplesfoodpolicy.ca>

For more information on the Assembly and the complete program see <http://foodsecurecanada.org/assembly-2010>

TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The food movement in Canada is creating the building blocks of a more sustainable and just food system. In the past decade, there has been an increased focus on policy analysis and activating policy change, sparked by a realization that the current policy framework is not only undermining our food security here in Canada, but is also affecting the food sovereignty of peoples around the world. To achieve the goals of justice and sustainability in Canada requires an international orientation. The dominant policy framework must be understood and challenged, including the role Canada's foreign trade and aid policies play in the destruction of subsistence food economies in countries across the global south.

The opening public forum of FSC's Assembly, "Earth Grab", aimed to increase this understanding by deepening an analysis of the political context for the recent international food crisis. Earth Grab featured farm leaders from the 'global south': Ibrahim Coulibaly of COPAGEN (Coalition to Protect Africa's Genetic Heritage) and Iderle Brénus, an economist and organizer with the Papaye Peasant Movement in Haiti (both with la Via Campesina as well), along with Jim Thomas of the ETC Group and Cathleen Kneen of Food Secure Canada.



Synthetic Biology and the new Biomass Economy

Starting with the big picture, Jim Thomas explained that there is a massive shift underway in the global economy. As carbon reserves in the form of fossilized plants (coal, oil and gas) are running out and becoming harder to access, industry is trying to replace these with 'biomass'. The supposed logic is: why wait millions of years for carbon to fossilize, when industry can switch the feedstock from black to green carbon? The world's biggest corporations are rushing to grab and convert living plant matter, or biomass, into fuel to create electricity, chemicals, and other products — with potentially devastating effects for our climate, and the food sovereignty of peoples around the world.

The rise of the biomass economy is connected to structural changes in the global food economy that have been underway for some time. In 2008 the world's poorest people were in the eye of a perfect storm causing hunger: food prices rose an alarming 83% in three years, adding 100 million people to the 830 million hungry, and triggering political unrest in many countries across the global south. Corn and other food crops being diverted for bio-fuel production was partly to blame, as were the decades of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that have forced open southern markets to floods of subsidized imports from the global north, decimating domestic agriculture. With food now a commodity on the international market, speculators did what speculators do: push up prices.

In 2008, the NGO GRAIN uncovered massive land grabs across

"We need to ask ourselves if we want to be in solidarity — if we want to move from a vision of food charity to a vision of food sovereignty where we understand that our food security in the long term comes only when there's food security for everyone in the world." — Cathleen Kneen,

“The 2008 food crisis wasn’t a perfect storm that passed. It was the first indicator of a larger trend, the tip of the iceberg of a transition that’s been underway for some time that makes more hunger likely, and brings environmental destruction with that.”

— Jim Thomas

the global south that were turfing peasants off ½ billion hectares of land in order to produce food (and profits) for countries and corporations in the north. When the financial crisis hit in 2009-10, food prices dropped again, ethanol investments dried up, and many of these land deals were dropped — or so we were told.

Land grabs are in fact continuing, and the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Program are scrambling to head off a new food crisis. That’s because the 2008 food crisis wasn’t a storm that passed; it was the tip of an iceberg, the first indicator of a massive transition in the global economy that’s been underway completely under the radar for some time. What’s more, it claims to be carbon neutral, or even green! Wood chips are being mixed with coal and used to make electricity to meet renewable energy targets; GM crops are being developed for biomass production and touted as climate-change ready for production on marginal lands; and new kinds of legal claims are being made by companies such as Monsanto who are claiming patents on not just the DNA of these ‘climate-ready crops’, but the very biomass itself.

For a more complete coverage of these issues, see ETC Group’s publication *The New Biomasters: Synthetic Biology and the Next Assault on Biodiversity and Livelihoods*

Although investment in ethanol has bottomed out, and there’s a move away from biodiesel derived from palm oil, this is being replaced by a large rush to invest in biomass from sources such as corn stalks, wood chips, algae, and sugar cane. There’s already been a massive increase in

sugar cane plantations in Brazil and sub-Saharan Africa. There have also been deals between the largest oil companies and companies developing synthetic biology — an emerging technology Jim described as “extreme GM on steroids” that involves generating new DNA via computer, then programming microbes to create new life forms such as bacteria to gobble up biomass and produced plastics, gas or jet fuel.

Land Grabs and Peasant Resistance in Mali

Mali is a country where 75% of the population lives directly from agriculture, so the impacts of land grabs and the emerging biomass economy are being felt hard. Ibrahim Coulibaly followed Jim’s speech on the opening **Earth Grab** panel, with a presentation on the national campaign against land grabbing in Mali.

The backdrop to the current land grab is a story all too familiar to peasant movements across the global south. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by the World Bank in the 1980s dismantled what few government supports had existed for agriculture, along with spending in health and education — creating total chaos. Farmers were in crisis, which made them vulnerable to pressure from international NGOs, government, and the media who, in the years leading up to the food crisis, had encouraged farmers to grow corn for agrofuels, touting ideologies of progress and better profits. Then in the 1990s, the World Bank had pressured farmers to shift from growing food for regional

markets to planting cotton for export — again, with promises of higher returns. But when cotton production increased, prices dropped, and farmers were left with nothing.

The result, said Ibrahim, was a dismantling of Mali's regional food systems, making the country dependent on the international market for its food security. With the food crisis of 2008, rice exports dried up on the international

"It's only thanks to our resilience that we are still alive and here to fight and resist this." — Ibrahim Coulibaly

markets as exporting countries held on to their reserves, and prices soared. In Mali, this triggered panic and food riots. Investors, backed by international institutions, came in, claiming peasant agriculture was obsolete and that the solution to the food crisis was an even greater shift away from peasant farming for local consumption towards intensive industrial agriculture for international export. Land grabbing began, with the government violating its own laws to sign 50-year leases on huge tracts of land to grow food for Libya and Saudi Arabia — leases that include access to increasingly precious water. Chinese contractors installed massive irrigation systems, ruining villages and destroying banana plantations with no regard for the local people. As far as they were concerned, the land was empty. It's an experience all too familiar to Indigenous peoples here in North America.

Ibrahim described how COPAGEN is building a large coalition to oppose the massive financial interests behind these deals, and mobilizing social movements in Mali to resist the land grabs. It's not easy: when peasants resist, the army comes in. Ibrahim told us of one

"In Africa, the problem isn't the capacity to produce — it's that farmers bear all the risks." — Ibrahim Coulibaly

confrontation where pregnant women and elders were beaten by soldiers. International solidarity will be crucial in the coming years. "We need that land, we can't give it up," Ibrahim said. "Mali can't just be for sale."

Rebuilding Haiti, Rebuilding Haitian Food Sovereignty

Iderle Brénus spoke on the Earth Grab panel about the ways agribusiness is taking advantage of the post-earthquake crisis to make inroads into Haiti's agricultural economy, the crucial role peasant farmers are playing in Haiti's reconstruction — and their continued resistance against GM crops.

Haiti's experience echoes that of Mali: until the 1980s Haiti was self-sufficient in major food crops. But crisis brings change, and Iderle laid out how international institutions and the US have taken advantage of political instability in the country to impose a series of neo-liberal reforms that have destroyed much of Haiti's capacity to feed itself.

With the 1986 overthrow of the Duvalier regime, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank imposed SAPs in Haiti through conditions attached to loans. The resulting disinvestments in domestic agriculture, health and education eroded local food production and triggered migration to Haiti's cities. In 1991, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected president, fled the country because of a western-backed coup. When he was reinstated, the IMF, World Bank and USA forced Haiti to adopt yet another set of neo-liberal free trade reforms: agricultural tariffs were slashed from 35% to 3% and markets were flooded with subsidized imports from the north.

“30 years ago we were self-sufficient in rice production; now most of our rice is imported — 82% directly from the US.”
— Iderle Brénus

their efforts, but the tremendous solidarity Haiti’s peasants have shown has been largely overlooked. Meanwhile, corporations like Monsanto, with the collusion of the government, are taking advantage of the situation to invade the Haitian market with their hybrid and GMO seeds. “After all they’ve already done to us, they want to attack the very basis of our food system — which is based on indigenous varieties.”

As part of earthquake relief efforts, Monsanto donated 475 tons of seeds treated with chemicals and fungicides that are prohibited in the USA. Iderle described how the MPP stood up in opposition to this, mobilizing peasants and training farmers about the threat of these seeds and the benefits of indigenous varieties. On June 12th 2010, thousands of people demonstrated to say NO to Monsanto’s seeds. “We lit the seeds on fire to say: No! You can’t give away our seeds left to us by the ancestors. We have to fight for local seeds and defend food sovereignty!”

“We still have the right to defend and define our own agricultural policies; and the ideology of the government, the World Bank and IMF can’t stop us!”
— Iderle Brénus

Campesina’s slogan, she declared: “Food sovereignty is urgent and necessary. Globalize the struggle! Globalize hope!”

Iderle said that the 2010 earthquake and the reconstruction efforts led by the international community have triggered yet another round in this cycle of crisis and increasing dependency. Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and international NGOs have received a lot of recognition for

Iderle emphasized that agriculture must take center stage in the post-earthquake reconstruction of Haiti. What is needed is a process of agrarian reform that mobilizes the peasant population to rebuild the peasant agriculture and food sovereignty of the country. “Friends, Monsanto seeds create health and environmental problems. We have to resist that project to the death,” Iderle said. Using La Via



FIRST PEOPLES, FIRST PRINCIPLES

The Assembly began by acknowledging the Hodenashone, or Mohawk People, who are indigenous to the territory known today as Montréal. An opening thanksgiving prayer was given by Kahnawake elder, Alex Sonny Diabo, who also offered a closing prayer at the end of the Assembly. In his opening, Sonny called to mind the agricultural history of this island, which was a gathering place for the many nations that spent the summer months on their planting grounds here before returning to their hunting territories in the cold winter months.



Dr. Priscilla Settee is a ‘word warrior’, and professor at the University of Saskatchewan’s Department of Native Studies. During her talk in the opening plenary, “Weaving Food Policy”, Priscilla emphasized the centrality of the land question for Indigenous peoples. Many Indigenous peoples call themselves “people of the land” in their respective languages; in fact, to be Indigenous is to be *of the land*. It’s an intimate, sacred relationship that endures as the heart and soul of Indigenous cultures — despite centuries of colonization, and threats from western development.

“We need to see the interconnectedness of all our struggles. And the first thing we can do is acknowledge the true history of this country — and an important piece of that history is acknowledging the place of First Nations and Indigenous People in this country.” — Priscilla Settee

The colonial policies and day-to-day realities facing Indigenous peoples are largely unknown in the wider settler societies, though the high rates of type II diabetes, 80% unemployment, and highest youth suicide rates in the world are shocking indicators of the extent to which colonization and western development are destroying the capacity of Indigenous communities. We are separated by race, gender and so many other factors; but Priscilla reminded us that food has the potential to unite us all — if we take the time to learn about the interconnectedness of our struggles.

Part of our project to build food sovereignty in this country therefore involves educating ourselves about the colonial history — and present — of this place we now call Canada. It means countering Steven Harper’s recent claims at the G20 summit that Canada has “no history of colonialism,” and acknowledging the two legal fictions that supposedly legitimize Canadian sovereignty: *terra nullius* and the doctrine of discovery. It means acknowledging the contributions of Indigenous peoples: the ecosystems they’ve maintained for centuries, the genetic heritage we all depend on — crops like cocoa, potatoes, medicinal plants, and foods at the heart of Québec culture like corn and maple syrup. And, concluded Priscilla, it means recognizing that our collective fight for food sovereignty must include the fight for Indigenous sovereignty and land rights.

Ellen Gabriel was chosen by her community of Khanesetake as spokesperson during the so-called ‘Oka crisis’, and is the now president of Québec Native Women. Speaking in the Sunday morning plenary, • “Weaving Social Movements: Food Sovereignty in Action”, Ellen illustrated the need for

"In 1995 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples said that the relationship between Canada and Indigenous Peoples is broken and it needs to be fixed. And then a few years ago there was the apology for the residential school experience – and people thought things would change. Well I am here today to tell you nothing has changed."

– Ellen Gabriel

our movements to work together by sharing her experiences during the recent Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) negotiations in Nagoya, Japan. So much of the global genetic diversity is the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples – peoples who have never surrendered their sovereignty. Yet states like Canada claim absolute sovereignty over 'genetic resources' and are privatizing them through forums like the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and CBD. Because Indigenous peoples are excluded from UN decision-making processes, and given mere token participation during international negotiations like Nagoya, they are unable to protect their

genetic heritage and traditional knowledge on which we all depend for survival. This places all of us at the mercy of states like Canada that are furthering the privatization and exploitation of biodiversity.

A major stumbling block in the Nagoya negotiations was Canada's refusal to acknowledge the collective rights of Indigenous peoples by fully endorsing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). After much public pressure, Canada grudgingly signed on to the UNDRIP in the spring of 2010. Canada was the 2nd to last country in the world to do so, and the endorsement was qualified by the words, "in a manner fully consistent with Canada's Constitution and laws". In other words, as Ellen explained, our government is reducing international human rights standards to fit our (flawed) domestic laws.

"The rule of law is there so that governments cannot make arbitrary decisions on the rights of peoples and yet this government ... that doesn't care about anybody, is allowed to continue to violate the rule of law ... That's deplorable, it's disgusting!"

– Ellen Gabriel

As a result, an international framework is emerging that increases corporate control over seeds and other genetic resources, preventing farmers from breeding and reusing seeds to survive. Corporate patents on life are a violation of the spiritual connection of Indigenous peoples with their foods, they criminalize farmers saving seed, and they threaten the food security and sovereignty of us all. "So how do we change that?" asked Ellen. "We change that by working together in solidarity ... to bring back respect,

hope, peace, and dignity." Her words were greeted with an enthusiastic standing ovation.



URBAN POVERTY & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Food Secure Canada grew, in part, out of an alliance between the anti-poverty movement and small farmers. An exciting diversity of innovative food initiatives have sprung from those same roots — projects working to build community food security, and advocate for food sovereignty.

Community Food Security (CFS) is a broad, systemic approach to food system transformation that links concerns around poverty, sustainable agriculture and public health. CFS advocates begin from the premise that food is a fundamental human need, and it is our government's responsibility to ensure we all have assured access to culturally-acceptable food in sufficient quantity and quality, produced and distributed in ways that respect people and the environment and provide sustainable livelihoods.

Hunger is not a problem of insufficient production; it is the result of political choices that have polarized wealth in our society, and shaped a food system geared towards maximizing commodity production for corporate profit, regardless of the social and ecological consequences for the rest of us.

The organizations that shared their experiences at the FSC Assembly are challenging the public policies that shape the dominant food system, while building alternatives based on principles of social justice, ecological sustainability, strengthened democracy and community empowerment. The Assembly featured presentations from a diversity of groups using food as a community organizing tool and building local solutions to address a wide range of issues, from the social isolation that comes with poverty to the cultural alienation aboriginals and new immigrants can experience in cities. They run the gamut from emergency food relief, to food-system networking, to building progressive food policy.



Considerable effort was made by FSC Assembly organizers towards opening and strengthening relationships between Québec and the “rest of Canada”. The fact the Assembly was held in Montréal with full simultaneous interpretation allowed FSC to profile the exciting work being done in Québec's community movement; many workshops featured presentations from organizations in Québec.

COLLECTIVE KITCHENS

*Regroupement des Cuisines Collectives du Québec
(RCCQ) (Québec Network of Collective Kitchens)*

Collective Kitchens are about much more than cooking — they are about popular education, empowerment, and strengthening networks of mutual support. In the session



Food Autonomy:

Food Autonomy means having constant, long-term access to a sufficient quantity of food at affordable prices. It's having the power to make your own dignified food choices, based on clear reliable information. Food Autonomy comes out of collective action grounded in a vision of solidarity and sustainable development, that prioritizes ecological and socially-just food choices which ensure the health of present and future generations.

“Building Community with Food”, Marie Leclerc and Nicole Ducharme of the RCCQ explained that the collective kitchen movement in Québec began in the early 1980s, as a response to neo-liberal cuts to social programs, and increasing poverty. Each RCCQ member kitchen is comprised of a group of 6-8 people who work together to plan meals, shop for ingredients, cook, and do a collective evaluation of their group process. They also adhere to the RCCQ’s basis of unity: solidarity, democracy, equity, social justice empowerment, respect and dignity.

Marie and Nicole talked about the RCCQ’s increased frustration with the ways the term Food Security is being co-opted and stretched to encompass initiatives that don’t adhere to these core values. In response, their organization refers to “Food Autonomy”, a term they feel better describes their practice.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

There are thousands of community and collective garden initiatives across Canada. Each grows out of the local culture and organizing context, in response to the particular needs of a given community.

The Villeray Garden Network

Over the last decade, collective gardens have become integrated into the neighbourhood-based structure of the community movement across much of Montréal. The Villeray Garden Network is a good example: the network integrates gardening projects into the range of community food security initiatives in the Villeray neighbourhood, projects that help people meet basic needs through collective action. These include collective buying groups, collective kitchens, and a community round table that facilitates communication between organizations and coordinates joint projects.



Sanou Issiaka told us about the increasing poverty in the neighbourhood their garden network is responding to: 35% of people in Villeray live below the poverty line, 15% are single parent families, and 30% are new immigrants. The network supports 14 collective gardens in social housing projects, church grounds and other community service

agencies, 100 balcony gardens, they’ve planted 5800 m² of fruit trees in the area, and do programming in 10 schools in the neighbourhood. The impacts, he said, include helping new immigrants to integrate into the life of the neighbourhood, celebrating cultural diversity, increased self-esteem, environmental awareness, political education around the food system and globalization, and the benefits of local sustainable food.

FARMERS' MARKETS ADDRESSING MANY NEEDS

Farmers' markets are a great way to make direct links between local, small-scale growers and city people: consumers get a better price, they get to meet the people growing their food, and they get to choose fruit and vegetable varieties supermarkets just don't carry. And farmers get the chance to sidestep the large retail chains that simply don't work with small-scale growers.

But while more and more farmers' markets are opening across the country, these are not always suited to the needs and realities of low-income neighbourhoods. Many farmers' markets are adapting to meet the needs of lower-income areas through voucher programs or coupons distributed through community organizations, or what Food Matters Manitoba calls "sweat equity", where market volunteers are compensated with fresh food.



Club Populaire de Point St-Charles

Point St-Charles is a working class neighbourhood in southwest Montréal with a strong sense of history, and very strong network of community organizations. It's also a virtual "food desert": there's only one supermarket in the neighbourhood and people are frustrated with its high prices. The "Club Populaire de Point St-Charles" has been active for 40 years; they run a host of programs for low-income residents including collective kitchens, gardens and food buying clubs. In 2009 they held the first "solidarity farmers' market" in the neighbourhood, thanks to support from the regional government and Moisson Montréal, the municipal food bank. Michael Brophy, from the Club Populaire, explained that community mobilization was the most important step in setting up the market. The Club put a lot of work into involving people in the organization of the market, and making sure that seniors and people living on social assistance were a part of it.

The first solidarity market was organized as part of a community celebration and about 200 people came. As with all the programs at Club Populaire, explained Michael, people are encouraged to get involved. Market planning happens in teams so that people who are illiterate can participate, and those who participate in the organizing get a \$10 bag of food. Michael said they designed the market in a number of ways to meet the needs of low-income people: it's held at the beginning of the month when social assistance cheques come in, there is nutritional education to encourage people to eat more produce, and there's information about the benefits of organics. Farmers have learned to stick to basics, and don't bring in more expensive items.

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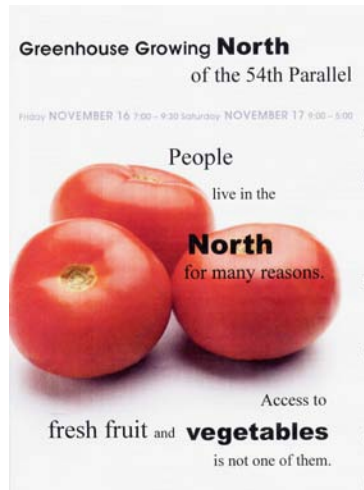
NORTHERN FOOD INITIATIVES

Northern, rural and remote regions also struggle with access to quality food, due to the costs of long-distance transportation and decreased access to 'country foods' because of dwindling supplies and

industrial pollution (mining, oil and gas etc.). Local food production, distribution, processing and storage are important for food security, especially in the North.

FOOD SECURITY IN THE NORTH

In the “Northern Food Security Roundtable” session, Jennell Majeran described the exciting work being done to strengthen local food access in northern Manitoba, where many villages don’t have four-season roads. The Northern Healthy Food Initiative has been working with 70 communities to build more than 650 gardens, 35 greenhouses and three community freezers, as well as educational programming around nutrition, the benefits of local food, peri-natal nutrition, Indigenous traditional knowledge, how to decipher food product nutritional labels, and more. Gardening workshops and technical support is offered, from seeding and transplanting curriculum in schools, to canning and other winter storage techniques.



They even have chickens! Byron Beardy from the Four Arrows Regional Health Authority told us about the shockingly high food prices in many northern First Nations communities, and the poultry program his organization set up in response to food insecurity. Four Arrows supports families wanting to raise chickens, using innovative structures uniquely adapted to the northern Manitoba climate. Chick-

ens are not a traditional food, Byron explained, but can provide a way to navigate the contradiction between traditional ways of life that have been so disrupted and the realities of reserve life that communities must negotiate today. Last year 5 families raised 25 chickens and the response was incredible: many families are interested in learning to raise chickens, goats, ducks and turkeys. Byron said the program even had an impact in terms of shifting negative attitudes about aboriginal people in the non-native community.



In the “Farmers’ Markets” session, Joan Norberg, of the Fireweed Farmers’ Market in Whitehorse, Yukon, noted that farmers’ markets are also an important link between farmers and the community in the North, and help to mitigate the dependence on expensive, imported foods.



FOOD BANKS :: THINKING OUTSIDE THE BREADBOX

The first food banks appeared in Canada in the early 1980s. They were supposed to be an emergency mechanism to address the economic downturn, but have since become institutionalized and are now seen as essential services. In 2009, a shocking 15% of Canadians were food insecure. There are now more than 600 food banks in Canada affiliated with 3000 agencies; more than half are completely run by volunteers.

Food banks sometimes get a bad rap for “creating dependency”, “providing charity not justice” or for letting government off the hook for the massive cuts in income support and social programs, and other neo-liberal policies that have created food insecurity in this country. The reality is that about 80% of food banks are struggling, and don’t have the means to do more than distribute food. Others have evolved into community food centers of sorts, and offer a range of food-related programs — from sharing wild meat donated by aboriginal hunters, farming and gleaning trips, and Good Food Box programs, to coordinating cooking clubs and offering farmers’ market vouchers. Some even engage in political advocacy, and offer support related to employment readiness and training, life skills, GED courses, and computer literacy.

The Stop Community Food Centre

Kathryn Scharf of The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto, one of Canada’s first food banks, described it as a dynamic community hub with a broad range of programs that provide healthy food, build community, and promote engagement in civic issues. The Stop’s programs range from community kitchens and gardens, to cooking classes and peri-natal support, to food markets and community advocacy. They also offer support around employment and housing.

Regina & District Food Bank

The Regina & District Food Bank was started in 1981, and has since grown to include programs related to employment readiness and training, life skills and GED courses, and the Village Market — a grocery store open to households that access the food bank, featuring items like quality protein, eggs, milk and fresh produce that are in short supply at the food bank. These are sold at cost, below retail prices.

Do the math!

The Stop’s “Do the Math!” campaign features an interactive website where people can calculate the minimum amount of money they feel they would need to live a healthy and dignified life; compare that to what people actually receive on social assistance — then send an email to the Premier, Minister of Social Services and the Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction demanding they introduce a \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on social assistance, and establish a better way to set social assistance rates. As part of the campaign, 10 prominent Torontonians, including journalist Naomi Klein, lived off a food bank hamper for a week and blogged about their experience.

THE YOUTH FOOD MOVEMENT :: LEADERS OF TOMORROW, LEADERS OF TODAY



Our youth are the leaders of tomorrow, and they have their own concerns and issues related to food justice. More and more children are growing up in busy households where their parents don't cook, families don't eat meals together, and children don't learn good eating habits at home. Many have never seen a garden, and don't know where their food comes from. Youth are increasingly food illiterate, they are the target demographic of many advertising campaigns, they struggle with eating disorders, they deal with the challenge of feeding themselves when they move away from home for the first time, they are the largest population

using food banks, and they are a falling percentage of farmers.

More and more youth are excited about the food sovereignty movement and many are looking for meaningful careers in the food system. There are lots of exciting initiatives working to generate positive youth engagement around food justice and build empowering youth-driven initiatives. Many of them presented their experiences at the FSC Assembly.

URBAN YOUTH MOBILIZING

Toronto Youth Food Policy Council (TYFPC)

Established in 1991, the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) is a city-funded citizen body that brings together stakeholders from across sectors in the food system to discuss food issues, foster coordination and joint initiatives, and to evaluate and influence food policy in the city.



The Toronto Youth Food Policy Council (TYFPC) was founded in 2009 in response to increasing youth interest, and increasing youth involvement in the TFPC. It maintains a formal relationship to the TFPC (which reserves 2 seats for youth representatives), but allows for a unique youth voice in sustainable municipal food policy change. The TYFPC is a mobilizing and networking space for youth in the community, and a way of legitimizing the voice of youth and encouraging their involvement. It's also an inspiring example, according to Tracy Phillippi. Youth food policy committees have been

set up in other cities, and the TYFPC is helping the growth of the youth food movement in Toronto and across the country.

Santropol Roulant

Santropol Roulant is a Montréal-based not-for-profit organization founded and run by young people.

The Roulant brings people together across generations and cultures through an innovative meals-on-wheels service, intergenerational activities and food-related volunteer programs. They have 120 clients, and deliver 80 meals a day — by foot, bike and car — that feature some local and organic ingredients, often grown on the Roulant rooftop garden and the community gardens the organization runs in partnership with McGill University and Alternatives (an international development NGO). The Roulant’s Julia Monkman listed the exciting projects you don’t find at most meals-on-wheels programs, like the community bike shop, worm composting, and gleaning trips; but these projects alone don’t really capture the magic of the Roulant. Julia explained it is really a dynamic community hub: a place where young people can learn about food issues for the first time, become involved in the larger community, and break the social isolation so many seniors face.

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FOOD EDUCATION TRANSFORMING OUR SCHOOLS

Schools are one of the best places to give young people the knowledge and skills they need to take control of their food system. This year’s Assembly featured many programs developing food curriculum and working in schools to use food education to help build food sovereignty — and to transform the education system.



Canada is the only G8 country that doesn’t have a universal school food program. Debbie Field of FoodShare in Toronto spoke about the work her organization is doing to integrate food literacy into the entire school curriculum. FoodShare’s dream is to see universal breakfast, lunch and snack programs, school gardens, bees and chickens, cooking, food literacy and policy integrated across all subjects taught in schools. Their “Field to Table Schools” program offers teachers curriculum support to integrate food education throughout all subjects; their “Great Big Crunch!” in March is a full day of food education that uses the apple as point of departure for activities on nutrition, cross pollination, composting, food systems, and more — ending with a synchronized apple crunch at 2:30pm. In 2010 more than 64,000 kids participated.

Christiane Gascon described the work of **Jeunes Pousses**, integrating food into the heart of daycare, kindergarten and grade schools in Québec. Jeunes Pousses has developed a collection of resources for educators on how to integrate gardening, cooking and food system education. School gardens and a food curriculum also strengthen

“Schools need farmers as much as they need librarians”

— Sunday Harrison,
Green Thumbs Growing Kids

links with the wider community. **Green Thumbs Growing Kids** works in inner-city Toronto schools. The organization believes that gardening should be integral to school curriculum, and has the potential to transform the education system which, at present, is reductionist. Québec’s **Bruntland Green Establishment** has created a toolbox for classrooms that links food with environment, peace, solidarity and democracy. Their “La Terre dans Votre Assiette” program explores topics from the green revolution and the global food crisis to how young people can become involved in building food sovereignty.

YOUNG FARMERS

Anyone familiar with the farm crisis in this country can imagine why young farmers would need more than a little encouragement getting into the business. Speaking on the “Weaving Social Movements: Food Sovereignty in Action” panel, Colleen Ross from the National Farmers Union said that agricultural exports have tripled in the last decade — and farmer debt has as well. The loss of farmers and the lack of young people taking their place will soon become a very real problem for the Canadian domestic food supply.

We need to support a new generation of farmers to meet current needs — and the growing demand for local, sustainably grown and culturally appropriate fresh produce. In a session on young farmers, FarmStart’s Christie Young, Manitoba farmer David Neufeld, Frédéric Sauriol, a farmer from Québec, and the NFU Youth’s Jessica Weatherhead spoke about the unique challenges facing young and new farmers.



The average age of farm operator in Canada is 52; 80% of current farmers are looking to sell their farms in the next ten years. The risks and challenges facing new farmers are overwhelming. They include securing financing for small-scale and ecologically sustainable production, lack of government support for farmers outside commodity-style agriculture, an onerous and expensive organic certification process, and the need for mentorship from experienced farmers. Development pressure on agricultural lands near our cities is an especially pressing concern, as is land access in general for new farmers. There are unique challenges in Québec, where l’Union des Producteurs Agricole (UPA) with its focus on developing export commodity-style agriculture, has a legal monopoly over farmer representation, and existing supply management programs make it even harder for young farmers to get on the land.

There are also exciting opportunities for new farmers in emerging niche markets such as local, sustainably produced food; small scale, local processing; and Community Supported Agriculture. For example, the Toronto market for ethno-crops is \$5.8 million a month and represents a huge potential for young farmers and new-immigrant farmers. However, as Benoit Girouard of the Québec *Union Paysanne* noted, farmers need help in reaching these urban markets. There are countless initiatives within the food movement to support new farmers, from urban farmers markets to land trusts set up to preserve agricultural land. But while the non-profit sector has done an incredible job in planting the seeds of sustainable localized food systems, the state has a responsibility to support the sustainable agriculture movement — and part of our job is to organize and demand food policies that reflect our values, and ensure food security for all members of society.

Farmstart

FarmStart is a not-for-profit organization working toward increasing the presence of young and new farmers operating their own farm enterprises within the local, sustainable agriculture community. Christie Young described their “New Farmers Incubator Program” that supports new sustainable agricultural enterprises supplying local markets. This support includes helping new farmers with

access to land, equipment and infrastructure at reasonable rates, along with business planning support, technical training, mentorship and experience with ecological and emerging farming methods. Christie explained that there is greater support to enterprises during the early stage of development which is phased out as enterprises mature. They also run a “FarmLINK” program, bringing together new farmers who are looking for land or mentorship with farm owners who have land available or expertise to share.

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FARMING AND FISHING :: POLICY PARALLELS IN SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

The state plays a huge role in structuring both agriculture and fishing — but to what ends, and in whose interests? The quota system of regulations that govern much of Québec agriculture and the coastal fisheries were originally put in place to fulfill a social mandate: regulate supply and demand, and protect the place of independent farmers and fishers in their respective industries. In both cases, the systems have evolved to a point where they no longer serve that mandate and are in fact contributing to corporate concentration of ownership and vertical integration.

In a session comparing quota systems in farming and fishing, Benoit Girouard of Union Paysanne, Marc Alain of the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, and Tasha Sutcliffe of EcoTrust spoke about the impacts of quotas in these industries, and ideas their organizations are developing to untangle the mess. This was an especially important workshop because of the fact that the links between the fisheries and sustainable agriculture movements are so new. Fishers have been by-and-large left out of the food movement — despite the importance of fishing for our food sovereignty, the importance of fishing for coastal, lakeshore and riverine, and Indigenous communities, and despite the many similarities between the issues facing farmers and fishers. This session was an invaluable opportunity to ‘catch up’ after decades of little communication between these two movements.

The Other Coast



Quotas in Québec Agriculture

Supply management is especially strong in Québec agriculture, where government regulations include production quotas, import tariffs, price fixing and single points of sale. These were first put in place in the late 1960s, and remain very strong, especially in the dairy, poultry and egg sectors. Neo-liberal deregulation has resulted in the dismantling of supply management systems in countries around the world, but not in Québec; in fact, Québec may be the only jurisdiction in the world where such regulations will remain in place past 2015.

The political landscape of Québec agriculture is unique in another sense: l'Union des Producteurs Agricole (UPA) has an enormous impact in terms of structuring the industry, and leaves farmers operating outside the industrial commodity agriculture model out in the cold. Union Paysanne is an

alliance of farmers and citizens working to build food sovereignty, counter the voice of the agribusiness lobby, and demand policies that support sustainable agriculture and localized food systems.

Benoit Girouard is a forester, rabbit farmer, and president of Union Paysanne. Benoit explained that Québec's quota systems were originally put in place to keep farmers across the regions of Québec on the land, and protect them from the volatilities of the market. But quotas are no longer doing what they were set up to do. Small farms in Québec are disappearing 10% faster than in the rest of Canada, even more so in sectors "protected" by the quota system. Food imports are entering Québec markets despite tariff barriers. And quotas have become overcapitalized: they've created a market now worth more than \$11 billion.

Benoit explained that supply management boards have become akin to legal cartels; we have to dismantle the system, he said, and rebuild a new one better suited to accomplishing the goals of supporting small farmers and protecting our agricultural heritage. This will be an immense challenge given the vested interests within the current system but necessary if we are to promote agro-ecology, local food production, and maintain regional agrarian cultures. Benoit pointed out that there are examples to build from: New Zealand dismantled their agricultural quotas by dividing the costs between farmers, government and the banks. How do we find an equitable means to untangle the mess in Québec? Benoit offered a simple, yet enormously complicated answer: through public debate.

Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) systems in the Fisheries

Fisheries and Oceans Canada uses a quota system in most sectors of the fishing industry to regulate how the total allowable catch of a given species is distributed amongst fishers. Individual Transferable

The fishers out on the water are no longer independent operators – they've essentially become sharecroppers."
– Tasha Sutcliffe

Quotas (ITQs) were put in place in the early 1980s, first in the Atlantic industrial off-shore dragger fleets, and then in the 1990s throughout the smaller-scale mid and in-shore fisheries on both coasts. The logic was that of the "tragedy of the commons": the misconception that what is owned by, all is taken care of by none. According to

this logic, conservation is best achieved through the creation of quasi-private property rights in the form of quotas that are "transferable", or that fishers can buy and sell. ITQs were meant to set off market competition for control of quota, ending in the survival of the most "efficient" and "competitive" fishers — the idea being that if a fewer number of bigger companies "owned" access to a resource they would have greater incentive to take care of it, thus allowing for a reduced government role in regulation.

EcoTrust: ITQ Lessons from British Columbia

ITQs were put in place throughout most of the BC fishing industry in the 1990s with the stated goal of protecting fishing communities. Tasha Sutcliffe is the Fisheries and Marine Program Director at EcoTrust. She called the debate around ITQs on the west coast "polarized", and often fuelled more by ideology than reality. ITQs have been promoted by government as a solution for conservation; the shortcomings of ITQs have been completely ignored. EcoTrust maintains that ITQs do not promote conservation or sustainable practices; they are not a substitute for sound science and strict monitor-

ing; and they are certainly not protecting the small fishing communities as they are supposedly intended.

Tasha described the incredibly inflated market ITQs have created that is putting quota completely outside the reach of most fishermen. The fishers out on the water are no longer independent operators — they've essentially become sharecroppers. Furthermore, lower wages are translating into higher crew turnover and lower skill levels, which means the industry is becoming more dangerous.

EcoTrust has learned some valuable lessons about the ITQ system. These include the following:

- ITQs promote leasing not ownership of quota
- ITQs further privatization
- ITQs can increase overcapitalization in fisheries
- Sound science and strict monitoring are NOT dependent on ITQs

Available on-line at <http://www.ecotrustcan.org/fisheries/cautionarytale>.

Atlantic Fisheries and Food Security

Marc Alain from the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters said that in Atlantic Canada the experience in ITQs is similar to that of British Columbia: a loss of jobs and a concentration of corporate ownership and power. What's different on the east coast is that ITQs are less widespread. Neo-liberal ideologues within the Fisheries and Oceans Canada (popularly known as DFO) were able to push through the ITQ system in many sectors of the industry because fisherman associations were weak and fragmented across geography, species and scale. But in some fishing communities — for example the in-shore groundfish sector (small-scale cod and haddock) — resistance was effective and community-based management was put in place to guard against ITQs.



Marc said that the problem, or at least part of the problem, is not policy — it's how policy is enforced. There are a number of policies meant to protect independent fishers and prevent the corporate takeover of the industry. For example:

Owner-Operator: the owner of a license is the one who should operate, or fish it.

Fleet Separation: licenses will not be issued to corporations; there must be a separation between processors and fishers.

Multi-species licenses: demanded by fishers to protect smaller scale operators

INNOVATIONS IN COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY RESEARCH RELATIONS

Many innovative models of research are being carried out in partnership between communities and university-based researchers. At this year's Assembly a variety of innovative research models were presented, from research grounded within social movements such as the People's Food Policy Project and community-based food assessments, to university-based research such as community-engaged scholarship and community-based research for course credit, to university-community partnerships.

Building community-university research collaborations

Community-University Research Alliances, or CURAs, are university-based research projects created and carried out in partnership with communities. University researchers can offer communities a lot of material resources and student energy, and in the eyes of some funders and decision-makers, academic analysis gives credibility to community projects and helps them garner support. But there is



often hesitation within community groups when it comes to working with academics. Many communities feel like they have been “researched to death”, or used as a training ground for university students, and gotten very little in return from university-based researchers who all too often place the priorities of their academic careers over those of their community partners. Often there is insufficient follow-through, or short-sighted research project design; research stops at analysis, when what communities really need is plans to act on these findings and *using* results.

CURAs strive to level the ground between university and community partners. Patty Williams heads the “Activating Policy Change for Community Food Security” CURA at Mount St. Vincent University; Stephane McLachlan is the “principal investigator” for the Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance, based at the University of Manitoba.

They said that the strongest research collaborations are ones in which university partners see themselves as part of a movement, and where their research questions emerge from the work of that movement. Solid relationships are the foundation of any project; they are crucial to establish the mutual understanding, respect, trust and communication necessary to move past so many of the shortcomings that have plagued some university-community partnerships in the past. Partners must understand each other's needs, priorities and expectations. This requires transparent communication around goals, project timelines, budgets and the kind of pressures both community and university partners must answer to. For example, there is often a tension resulting from academics' need to respond to the “publish or perish” environment of the academy, whereas community partners are often responding to urgent, front-line concerns. As practiced in anti-oppression frameworks, all partners need to be continually “checking themselves”, to make sure they are acting in line with their values and keeping true to collaborative goals. Most important, all

The CURA funding program has now closed. For more information, see the Social Science and Humanities Research Council: <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/cura-aruc-eng.aspx>

partners need to be continually “checking themselves”, to make sure they are acting in line with their values and keeping true to collaborative goals. Most important, all

partners must be vigilant and sensitive to power imbalances and power dynamics at multiple levels — between university and community partners, between community partners and their community members, and so on.

According to Stephane, a major goal of the Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance is to find ways to do university-based research differently and actually work *with* communities. For example, their CURA governance structure operates by consensus. University-based researchers are a minority within the steering group, and all three geographic regions of Manitoba (northern, central and southern) are represented within the structure of the project. Roughly half the research money goes to community projects, and supporting and promoting these projects is a major priority for the researchers.

The Nova Scotia CURA focuses on the policy environments affecting Community Food Security (CFS). They are striving to increase the knowledge and skills of partners in the development of strategies for policy change, while strengthening CFS through policy change. Capacity building, education, training, and community research are all major elements of the project. Patty's team has learned to remain vigilant to a key tension in their work: the expert/learner divide. Their experience has taught them the need to focus on valuing and bringing *all* partners' lived experiences together. For example, research questions were developed jointly through a partnership process, ensuring they reflect community, academic, and government perspectives.

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ACTIVATING POLICY CHANGE

Food Policy Councils

The first Food Policy Council (FPC) was established in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1978. By the late 1990s roughly a dozen councils had been founded across Canada and the US, including the Toronto Food Policy Council, today there are over 150.



Wayne Roberts is a Canadian food policy analyst and writer who coordinated the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) from 2000-2010. Wayne pointed out that FPCs can be applied anywhere — in schools, hospitals, cities — but stressed that municipal governments have an important leadership role to play: food is a public good, and must be publicly addressed. Municipalities also have an important role to play because of the multi-dimensionality of food: it involves land use, economics, community development, public health mandates and more. FPCs must therefore be driven by a holistic mandate, and participating agencies must agree to work not just for their particular constituents, but towards a larger collective mission. The FPC's main role is to facilitate and ensure this collective action and communication between agencies.

FPCs are also important as sites of collaboration between government, community, industry and

other sectors. Here the role the FPC is to act as a kind of translation office between grassroots organizations and city councilors in order to create better dialogue. Wayne also cautioned those developing FPCs to strike an appropriate balance between inclusion and effectiveness — too big might not work — and encouraged FPCs to take advantage of opportunities presented and to be careful about becoming overly bureaucratic.

Brewster Kneen of The Ram’s Horn was part of the crew that planted the seeds of the TFPC. He pointed out that, thanks to some forward-looking city staff and officials, the TFPC was established



with a somewhat unique status among FPCs in that it operates as a sub-committee of the Toronto Board of Health. Winning municipal support — or even recognition for that matter — has been an up-hill battle for FPCs in many other places. Paul Chorney from Food Matters Manitoba noted that the Winnipeg Food Policy Council has used a province-wide Food Charter as an organizational strategy to win such municipal support. Approximately 50 organizations signed on to the charter, voicing their desire for a FPC in Winnipeg. But despite the momentum they’ve generated, the mayor remains uninterested.

Towards a National Food Policy in Québec: the Political Mobilization Committee

The session “From Service to Advocacy” featured an in-depth look into the work of the Political Mobilization Committee (PMC), a coalition of organizations addressing food issues in Québec. In 2005, Québec’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food launched the Commission on the Future of Agriculture; the PMC took advantage of the opportunity to develop a comprehensive food policy for Québec. Their work from 2005-07 is an indication of the extent to which social movements in Québec are moving beyond a “silo” approach, and working in diverse coalitions in order to develop holistic strategies to build food sovereignty.

The PMC’s final policy proposal, “Towards a National Food Policy in Québec”, demands that:

“the government of Québec adopt a national food policy, including clear targets, progress indicators, and specific action plans, all of which should integrate the multi-dimensionality of food: consumer buying power, food prices, physical access, health and safety, nutritional quality, food cultures, diversity, ecological sustainability and social justice, citizen power and participation. This should be done in a holistic manner and in a way that will engage all sectors of Québec society.”

Jean-Paul Faniel of the Round Table on Hunger and Social Development of Montréal underlined the collective aspect of the PMC and their determination to work not just for their particular constituencies, but towards the greater collective good. The PMC considers the recognition and application of the human right to food to be a fundamental responsibility of the state; the adoption of a Québec food policy would be a necessary step for Québec to assume its international responsibilities in this regard.

“Pour une politique nationale de l’alimentation au Québec” (2007) p28.
The complete document is available on-line at
http://www.caaaq.gouv.qc.ca/userfiles/File/Memoires%20nationales%20Montreal/11-M-Comite_mobilisation_politique.pdf

The PMC’s policy document cites international conventions such as the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and the UN’s “International Covenant on Eco-

conomic, Social and Cultural Rights”, both of which establish and reference the human right to food. It also references numerous domestic obligations the Québec government has assumed, such as Bill 112, “The Québec Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion”.

While such a policy would involve actors across the food production chain, the PMC maintains that the state has a responsibility to act as “orchestra conductor” — especially considering the economic and social rights it has committed to ensuring for its citizens. This should be done by coordinating the orientations, goals, targets, and actions of various actors, and overseeing evaluation to ensure timely progress. However food sovereignty is not just the purview of the state; Jean-Paul stressed that a Québec food policy should encourage and facilitate citizen empowerment and acknowledge the important role of social movements in building food sovereignty.

Other speakers went on to present highlights from their policy recommendations, which include:

- Create a new form of social assistance: a guaranteed minimum income designed to ensure basic needs, including the cost of healthy food.
- Prioritize access to local and regional food by developing local and socially-just marketing mechanisms such as public farmers’ markets, solidarity markets, food co-ops, buying groups, community supported agriculture and direct links between farmers and consumers.
- Direct government support for organic agriculture.
- Obligatory labeling of Genetically Modified Organisms as a transitional measure, and the longer term phasing out of government support for this sector.
- Develop policy initiatives to encourage agricultural diversity across Québec, for example through agricultural subsidies and support programs for small and artisanal farmers that are oriented towards agricultural diversity and local markets.
- Encouragement citizen participation by supporting citizen networks and community organizations working to empower people in relation to food.

Francois Décary-Gilardeau from **Option Consommateurs** noted that the PMC’s organizing work was carried out at a political moment where the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was looking for a response to crises in Québec’s food system. Now that the Commission on the Future of Agriculture’s Pronovost Report has been released, François emphasized the necessity of continuing to put political pressure on the state to adopt a progressive food policy.

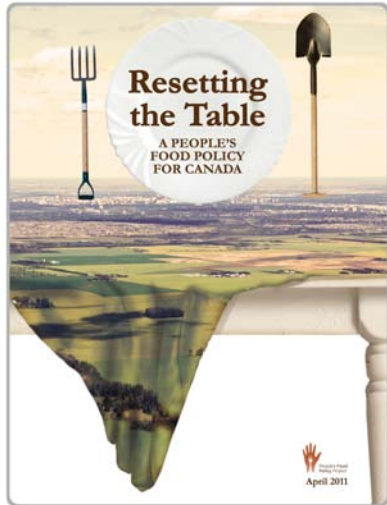
The People’s Food Policy Project

The People’s Food Policy Project was announced at the previous Food Secure Canada Assembly in Ottawa, November 2008. Since that time, animators across the country, supported by a paid Coordinator and teams of volunteers doing research, writing, organizing and management of the project, have developed 10 “Policy Discussion Papers” based on hundreds of submissions from Kitchen Table Talks in communities from coast to coast, plus direct submissions to the website.



People's Food
Policy Project

Pour une **politique**
alimentaire populaire



Grounded in the principles of Food Sovereignty, these papers present a unique and comprehensive picture of how governments at all levels can implement policies that support a healthy, ecological and fair food system. These were debated at the Assembly; the results have been incorporated by the writing teams; and in April 2011 “Resetting the Table: A People’s Food Policy for Canada” was published. It will be the basis on which Food Secure Canada continues to respond to calls for a public movement for progressive food policy.

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CONCLUSION

This report has attempted to provide a taste of the smorgasbord of presentations, workshops, and debates which took place at *Weaving Together Food Policy and Community Action: An agenda for change*. Our aim was to show some of the critical elements in that weaving: the vertical spokes of the Food Sovereignty basket – the seven pillars of Food Sovereignty and the three interlocked commitments of Food Secure Canada (zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and a sustainable and just food production and distribution system) – and the community projects and programs which weave through that framework and give it its colours, textures, and tensile strength.

The Assembly as a whole marked a milestone in the development of the food movement in Canada. It is no longer just an expression of the long-term commitments of people who have been working for decades to improve the health and wellbeing of populations and environments in Canada. Those commitments are now embedded in a broad social movement for global justice and equity which is not only growing, but growing stronger – and younger. It reflects the impatience of so many people with our government’s insistence on ‘business as usual’ when we are painfully aware of the disasters to which that model is leading.

Like the movement itself, the conference engendered both sadness and inspiration, as participants delved into the context of a global movement of marginalized food providers in struggle against the industrial system which is supported, as in Canada, by policies of governments and institutions at every level. Inspiration came from greater knowledge of these struggles, and from learning in detail about the work of the People’s Food Policy Project, along with the projects and programs that are actively changing local food systems across the country.

The concepts of Indigenous food sovereignty have been central to this process and underscore an important aspect of the food movement: the recognition that food is sacred. It is central to culture and community, reinforcing the respectful relationships with the world around us which are essential for the sustainability we seek.

In that spirit, Food Secure Canada will continue to celebrate food as we work collaboratively, across geography, language, culture and other differences for a healthy, fair, ecological and inclusive food system.

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