Session Title: Food Hubs: Connecting Producers with Eaters Across the Value Chain
Session Date: Friday Nov 14, 2014
Session Time: 11:15-12:15

Key Messages from presenters:

Dave (Ecology Action Centre Marine Team) – We have incredible seafood and best fisheries on the planet, but it is hard to find. Without a regional market, there is no such thing as a sustainable fishery. We need a value chain to support it. No mechanism to get the products to the markets. Consumers, chefs and retail suppliers can’t get local fish, because our transport line is so directed towards export.

Justin Cantafio (Off the Hook) – Works with Dave on value chain development. If we’re a small scale fisherman, but it costs exponentially more per unit they’re not able to compete with large scale operations. Just 300km offshore commercial fishing can be done from china for example, frozen and packaged on the ship, marked with made in china and imported into the Canadian market. We need to ask where our fish is coming from. We need to have conversations with restaurants and retailers to get local seafood and show them where to get it and maintain traceability.

Sally Miller (Food Hub Project) – Local organic food coop network, all based on existing established food coops and just improving them to become true food hubs. We don’t have a sustainable system, we’re losing farms, farmland, and 12% of Canadians struggle with food security.

5 Hubs
- Thunder Bay – True North Community Coop Retail store
- London Ontario – On the move organics, root cellar café, bike food delivery service
- Sudbury – Eat Local Sudbury
- Ottawa Valley – Food Coop
- Food Flow Project – food hub model used to address food security issues

Rebuilding the middle. More procurement of local food.

Mathieu D’Astous (Really Local Harvest) – Based out of SE New Brunswick in the Moncton/Dieppe area. Formed in 2000 to promote & market their products. Pooled their resources to be most effective. Switching from mostly wholesale to higher value direct sales (some still supply Sobey’s and other wholesalers). Partnered with the city to create the Dieppe Market that’s open year round. Main mandate is to promote members and their produce, but also to produce more capacity for growth. Farm to Cafeteria initiative was a success, taking over the school cafeteria and supplying local food. Created a non-profit to manage this idea, and are now supplying 25 schools as of this September.

Franco Naccarato (Greenbelt Fund) – “If you ask for it, it will come”. The goal of the project is to help small and medium sized farmers to access large markets. Making it easier for everyone. It’s a risk to jump from farmers markets to retail with the huge investment on switching to large scale. The greenbelt tries to help the transition from small to larger scale farming. Sysco/Aramark bought in because of the demand for local products. Order is processed on the week end, orders given to the farms and picked on Monday, arrives at Sysco Tuesday, and is on the market or in the restaurant for Wednesday. The freshest produce available. Logistics are a huge challenge.

Chefs get a one line description of product, making it hard to share the value and price at times. There is an opportunity to add value by introducing a measurable system to show quality.
Moe Garahan (Ottawa Food Hub) – Small non profit community based hub. For profit and non-profit groups have equal contribution and formed partnership. Ottawa has 1200 farms in their area, it provides a unique opportunity to promote local agriculture. One stop shopping where orders are filled with local first, then provincial, and if it’s not available still the for-profit partner then offers the produce. Assisting with micro processing for small scale local producers (i.e. local apples are made into apple juice and bottled for the Breakfast Program)

Peggy Bailie (Eat Local Sudbury) – Started in 2007 by a group of consumers and producers, because they didn’t have access to local foods. Not for profit coop structure with consumers and producers working together to build sustainable food system. Regional distribution and aggregation is very important for them. They wouldn’t have the food in their coop if they didn’t have a truck to go and get it. The farmers don’t have a way to deliver it themselves. They do a lot of food literacy, community education and seminars for producers.

Discussion Highlights

What are the small scale fisherman doing with their product now?
- Sell to the local fish plant and mixed into the same catch as the large scale.
- No differentiation from their methods of fishing and commercial practices

How did Greenbelt get started?
- First chef to get on board was at York University
- Number of local private colleges have come on board
- Businesses need responsible practice

What Food Safety certification? How do you make it available?
- Farmers Market/Farm stand, planning to use a software to make a graduated licensing is their vision
- Critical issue for food hubs, because this is a voluntary practice

There are big differences between populated areas and rural areas that don’t have the same transportation opportunities.

Mechanisms are needed for profit and not-for-profit to work together

The fish need to be taken out of the commodity cycle. A very different approach is needed because with small communities everyone is interconnected. The fisherman’s brother might work at the plant, making it not as simple as just building a new plant that only processes sustainable fishing practices. Many conversations need to happen and questions need to be asked to meet everyone’s needs. Forming new relationships with the plant itself is an opportunity to be sensitive to relationships between people, but still potentially improve and distinguish between different types of fishing practices. Lobster doesn’t have multiple ways to catch, there isn’t a more environmentally friendly way to do this practice, so traceability becomes a very important factor.

How do you see building demand for your businesses?
- offering contracts to the farmers who’re scaling up to provide security on both ends
- Many of the programs are just starting and have been focused on running the operations. The next stage is when they will be looking at more sales options.
- Right now, the demand is more than they can match. Looking to extend sales hasn’t been necessary.

A barrier is federally inspected meat/protein
- Food safety
- If the local butcher can’t do it anymore
- Local free range egg providers are not permitted to sell online

Franco’s question for everyone
  Where is the current funding coming from for each hub? What’s the sustainability plan?
  - Plan is to be fully sustainable through sales by year 3/4

**Other thoughts / actions that emerged**

How do we help food hubs to scale up to reach distribution needs?
How do we grow while maintaining our integrity and values that we started with?