To: NY State Council on Food Policy

From: Anna Dawson, Hometown Foods, LLC, 362 Eichybush Rd. # 5, Kinderhook, NY 12106,
Email: annadawson@berk.com, www.ourhometownfoods.com, Phone: 518 758 7342

Farm and Food Policy: Getting it Right in NY State

Date: May 15, 2014

Regarding: A policy to support training cooks of all ages to preserve the local harvest in Ag. & Mkts. inspected community kitchens using 21st century freezing and vacuum packing technology

1. **Who is teaching people modern frozen food preservation skills in order to create a local processing market for small and mid-scale farmers** for excess, imperfect, donated or stored produce?

- Cornell Cooperative Extension offers a costly "**Home** Food Preservation" training using a three ring binder that focuses 80% on canning (134 pages), 17% (29 pages) on other preservation methods and 3% (6 pages) on freezing using 1950's concepts. Many kitchens do not have the space or equipment to do this efficiently. Few working mothers have the time. Retirees do not see the need.
- Community college culinary programs teach chefs to cook for others using fresh or large scale frozen and not vacuum packed products.
- High School Vo-Tec programs focus on training restaurant and food service workers.
- Four year Food Science programs focus on preparing students with skills for large scale food processing companies.
- Cobleskill Community College trains meat processors to freeze and vacuum package meat products--a safe fifty year old technique never applied to produce.
- **No one is focused on empowering ordinary people with the skills to prepare, design and market the healthiest frozen meals possible while reducing local food waste!**

2. **Small and mid-scale NY farmers could increase their farm income** if they could sell small to large amounts of a variety of produce to a nearby Ag. & Mkts. inspected kitchen where trained cooks would freeze and vacuum pack fruits, vegetables, cooked whole grains and dry beans for year round Meal Kit production.

- **Thirty to forty percent of the farm produce harvest is imperfect**--not acceptable for the farmers markets, food hubs, or stores. They become farm food waste for the compost pile or become feed for farm animals.
- **In 2012 six million pounds of NY farm produce was donated** to food pantries. Few food pantry spaces have the equipment, staff or knowledgeable volunteers to preserve the donated produce. Few pantry clients know how to cook the food. Fresh produce goes to waste. This is a missed opportunity for training cooks to produce healthy convenience meals for cooking club members.

3. **Commercial kitchens are being planned currently that could teach cooks to use this food processing knowledge!** Many are interested in learning to design, freeze and vacuum package the harvest to create frozen Meal Kits valued between $4 to $10 per pound.

- **Sullivan County Cooperative Extension's Eat Smart NY** program has just recently offered a food entrepreneurship training course. A local commercial kitchen is being set up. **Erica Ferber** is excited about the nutritional value of healthy product design potentials--low salt, low sugar, high fiber, great taste, increased consumption of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- **The Troy Community Gardens** is working on financing a commercial kitchen in a nearby building.
- Downtown **Albany's Trinity Alliance** has plans for a three story building with a commercial kitchen on the first floor where Meals on Wheels and the Schenectady Community College Culinary program would offer classes. These organizations could add 21st century freezing and vacuum packaging training and production using local and regional foods from the Capital District Farmers Market vendors.
- Linda Trembley, a cook working in a kitchen where the Mohawk Indian Tribe is located, wants to learn. She could learn at the Malone, NY facility below that has an equipped freezing and vacuum packaging room that I designed a few years ago.
- **The Franklin County "Joint Council on Economic Opportunities" has a commercial kitchen** with equipment that can do more than just freeze and vacuum pack local food for Soup Kitchens. It could change from being a "Emergency Food Relief Organization" to be an Economical Food Resource Organization that trains local folks to create Meal Kits for individuals, families and small group feeding sites.
- **Katherine@FishkillFarms.com** wants to be trained because she can see this value added concept helping them use more of the harvest.
- **Hawthorne Valley Farm in Columbia County** is planning to offer a food entrepreneurship class soon that could incorporate preservation training at Hometown Foods' Ag. & Mkts. and Health Dept. inspected Harvest Kitchen.
- **Corporate head quarters in Saratoga Springs is examining my frozen Hometown Foods Meal Kit samples for their expanding commissary kitchen.** They have over 330 stores in the northeast. Perhaps they can offer these kinds of products instead of the typical store brands they now offer so they can become a nutrition oasis in local food desert.
- Ithacan is an organization where members can food at various home kitchens. Freezing and vacuum packaging could be added at a commercial kitchen.

- **Community kitchens could be set up in local communities everywhere for this culinary training**. Simply add upright tray freezers and a commercial vacuum packager plus a food preservation trainer and year round classes can be filled with creativity and tasty foods.
    - Hudson, NY has a seldom used Catholic school kitchen just a bus ride away from the Columbia-Greene Vo-Tec culinary program.
    - Schenectady, NY has an Ag. & Mkts. approved kitchen in a former State Street school just blocks away from the Schenectady County Culinary program.

- Central school kitchens are used 185 days or less per year. Simply add an upright tray freezer, a commercial vacuum packager, and a food preservation trained teacher. Even school cafeteria workers could be trained preservers.
- Philmont, NY was donated a Stewart store. I designed a goose neck trailer (made in Hudson, NY) that could be attached to this store to create these products and more.

We need to train ordinary people ten years old and older to connect to the farmers to harvest and purchase produce for preserving. Freezing and vacuum packaging is an easy to use, inexpensive technology that can create convenience foods higher in nutritional and textural quality than existing grocery store brands. The simple packaging and laser printed labels adapt to thousands of recipes. Visit www.ourhometownfoods.com to learn more.

I have been researching this concept for over ten years. I received two NESARE grants In the past. People have said that I am ahead of my time. I said, "I am on time". But now I am 73 so I know I am running out of time. Now it is time for others to see the value of this idea and support training others to carry this concept to the next level. USDA has a Local Food Promotion Program grant application due June 30, 2014 that could support this concept. I can develop training materials--power points and manuals.

Public Comments for NYS Council on Food Policy Listening Session #2
SUNY Potsdam
May 28th , 2014

Submitted by: Jennifer Pfotenhauer, Registered Dietitian
Nutrition Coordinator
St. Lawrence County Community Development Program, Head Start
1 Commerce Lane
Canton, NY 13617
(315) 386-8574

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

-Our Head Start Program receives CACFP funding to provide healthy meals to the children in our program.
-All Head Start children are eligible to receive free meals.
-We serve approximately 240 preschoolers (aged 3 & 4) breakfast and lunch 5 days a week September through June.
-CACFP funding is essential in order for us to serve healthy meals for these at risk children.
- Healthy foods have a direct positive impact on a child's ability to learn.
- Our Head Start program has flat funding for the past 5+ years and was subject to sequestration cuts in the past year. If we do not receive CACFP reimbursement to help with our food costs we would not be able to serve adequate meals to the children as our budget would be able to support it.
-As a registered dietitan I generally agree with the "credible food" guidelines but have some questions/disagree with some choices. – Is there a process for input when these are changed (e.g. when public comment is requested on Dietary Guidelines or other such documents.)?

SNAP/WIC/Food Pantries

- Our Head Start families use the SNAP, WIC & local Food Pantries.
- We have seen an increased need for these over the past year with a downturn in the economy, high heat costs over this past winter and significant increases in the price of gas and food in this area.
- Monday morning many children are coming to our centers very hungry. We see an increase in hunger at the end of the month for some as well.
- Food Stamp participation is high among our families. (More than ½ of our families use SNAP Benefits.)
- Recent SNAP Benefit reduction had a significant impact on our families decreasing the ability for many to supply enough food for their children.
- Have accessed SNAP Outreach Coordinator for our area – VERY helpful for families. She helped several families sign up – more personal touch, able to really work with the family to see if they qualify rather than the Social Services mass numbers approach.
- SNAP Outreach for our area has just lost their grant funding – this will be a big loss and will negatively impact our families feeling comfortable in applying for and /or participating in the program .
- WIC participation is not as consistent.
- Feedback from families indicate WIC is "too much of a hassle".

- Hassle = Application and recertification is too lengthy, intrusive, difficult to get to appointments in rural setting, staff at clinics not always friendly.
- Hassle= No EBT system so checks at grocery store are cumbersome, get attitude from cashiers and other customers in line because of processing time, obvious are using WIC because of check (stigma).
- Food Pantry use – more regular in areas with a local food pantry. In rural areas need is there but families not able to access it unless it is an emergency.
- Food Pantry use is not talked about – people are ashamed to have to use this as a source of food.

General Concerns

- Many people are falling through the cracks – e.g. families with 2 parents working minimum wage jobs do not qualify for assistance
- Perception of who does qualify for assistance – e.g. a senior told a staff member that "they don't give food stamps to people on Social Security"
- Working families feel "those on welfare live better than those who are trying to work to make a living"
- WIC has regulations on what you are able to purchase with WIC benefits. SNAP benefits have very few restrictions and it has been observed many times that poor choices are being made (ie chips, soda, sweets being purchased instead of nourishing foods.)

May 28, 2014

New York State Council on Food Policy
Farm, Food and Policy: Getting it Right in New York State
Listening Session, SUNY Potsdam

Good Afternoon Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and for all of your work on food policy issues in New York State.

My name is Sarah Bentley-Garfinkel and I am School Program Director at the Health Initiative, a non-profit community health improvement agency. The Health Initiative offers a variety of community, school and workplace programs to advance our agency mission: to measurably improve the health of St. Lawrence County residents, and residents of the North Country Region, through collaborative community efforts.

While we are interested in a variety of strategies to increase access to healthy food for all, Farm to School presents a significant opportunity to address this issue. As defined by the National Farm to School Network, Farm to School connects schools with local producers with the objectives of serving local, healthy food in school cafeterias; improving student nutrition; providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities; and supporting local and regional farmers. Farm to School offers many benefits, from bolstering student health and increasing participation in school meal programs to supporting area farmers and strengthening the local economy. Evidence suggests that healthier students are more likely to succeed in school and develop healthy habits that last a lifetime. Entire school communities are positively impacted by Farm to School participation.

The Health Initiative has a strong history of working with schools on issues of wellness, including Farm to School. We have offerred trainings for school food service personnel, teachers, farmers, students, parents and community members, often partnering with other organizations represented here today. We have worked closely with schools on garden projects that provide experiential education utilizing fresh, healthy foods, shown to increase the likelihood that students will select and consume these foods. The Health Initiative has also supported participation in the annual Farm to You Fest celebration through provision of resources, technical assistance and facilitation of stakeholder networking.

Currently, the Health Initiative's Healthy Schools NY project, funded by the New York State Dept. of Health, assists schools to develop and implement local wellness policies, including support for increased availability and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. This project has allowed our continued support of school garden projects and other food-based activities such as taste testing, and purchase of durable equipment such as a

Health Initiative
www.gethealthysic.org

Our Member Organizations...
Canton-Potsdam Hospital - Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center - EJ Noble Hospital - Kinney Drugs - Massena Memorial Hospital - Clifton-Fine Hospital - St. Lawrence County Community Services - St. Lawrence County Department of Social Services - St. Lawrence County Public Health Department - St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center - State University of NY at Potsdam - United Helpers Management Company, Inc.

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refrigerated vending machine to supply fruits, vegetables and other healthy options.

We also coordinate North Country Jr. Iron Chef, a competition for middle and high school teams to develop healthy recipes using a combination of local and commodity foods that could be realistically prepared in a school cafeteria. The second annual competition was held this March with great success. Twenty-three teams from six counties participated in this event that offers a positive, hands-on experience with healthy food for youth; provides an opportunity to learn about and build lifelong skills related to healthy food purchasing and preparation; is a creative approach to addressing school food issues and engaging youth in the dialogue, and; promotes the incorporation of local foods into school menus. After event day, teams report bringing their recipes back to their schools, via presentations to Boards of Education and wellness committees, as well as serving the dishes in cafeterias. Planning for the 2015 competition is now underway.

While these projects and activities present opportunities for schools to become engaged with Farm to School, a comprehensive and coordinated statewide effort may best support sustained, vibrant and effective programs. Developing and maintaining a web-based, state-specific clearinghouse could be an important tool. A hub of this kind may gather relevant resources and best practices; highlight current New York State Farm to School champions and their stories; and offer a networking platform for practitioners across the state. While a number of innovative organizations now offer some of this, we are at risk of reinventing the wheel instead of learning from one another and combining efforts. It would also be critical for this type of clearinghouse to be regularly updated and supported, ensuring timely and accurate information. Other states may provide models for statewide Farm to School coordination and support.

We do recognize the great diversity of this state in which we live and work. Organizations that currently offer services or assistance may be best positioned to support their local communities by expanding and enhancing Farm to School work, while also connecting schools, growers and other stakeholders to statewide networks. Resources made available to these organizations would help to meet the unique needs and interests of particular regions, allowing Farm to School to grow and thrive throughout the state.

Farm to School initiatives offer many benefits. From students to farmers to families and community members, increased access to and education about fresh, healthy New York grown and produced foods is a win for all involved. Thank you for your time today, and again, for all your work on issues of food and farming in this state.

new york state
dietetic association
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TESTIMONY by:
New York State Dietetic Association

To: New York State Council on Food Policy
"Farm, Food and Policy: Getting it Right in New York State"

Presented by Ms. Sandra J. McNeil MA, RDN, CDN, FADA
May 28, 2014

Overview

My name is Sandra McNeil. I am a Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist and am here today representing the New York State Dietetic Association, the 2nd largest state affiliate of the Academy of Dietetics and Nutrition with over 6,000 Registered Dietitians/Nutritionists. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council today.

My statement will address three (3) items:

1. the need for increased access to local foods by vulnerable populations;
2. an increase awareness and education regarding food safety; and
3. the need to reduce the use of antibiotics in all foods.

Increased Access to Local Foods

While New York State is a proud agricultural state, it is unfortunate that some communities have limited access to locally grown foods. Policies are needed to eliminate food insecurity, including

- adequate funding for and increased utilization of food and nutrition assistance programs,
- inclusion of food and nutrition education in such programs, and
- innovative programs to promote and support individual and household economic self-sufficiency.

NYSDA strongly support increased utilization of WIC, SNAP, & Farmer's Markets for low income, senior & school or institutional access to local foods. Several studies have demonstrated a relationship between food insecurity and less-than-optimal food and nutrient intake, as well as risk for nutrient deficiencies among some life course groups. In fact, evidence suggests that food insecurity or insufficiency may be associated with lower dietary quality in children, especially older children.

Food Safety

The New York State Dietetic Association supports policies that provide for the safety of our food and water supply. NYSDA believes that policies should promote the collaboration among food and nutrition professionals, academics, representatives of

the agriculture and food industries, and appropriate government agencies to ensure the safety of the food and water supply. NYSDA believes that by providing education to the public and industry, promoting technological innovation and applications, and supporting further research will create safer food products.

When developing policies around food and water safety we recommend including dietetic/nutrition professionals in your strategies. Each area of practice of food and nutrition professionals—clinical, community, foodservice management, and research—have specific roles to play in providing food and water safety education. To effectively disseminate food and water safety information, educational strategies to convey the appropriate message for the intended audience should be considered. It is important to incorporate knowledge about behavior modification and motivation techniques help in the adoptions of safe food-handling practices at home and in work settings. Finally, it is extremely important because of the changing demographics that educational materials, methods, and delivery systems should accommodate a variety of learning styles and be culturally relevant.

Reduced Use of Antibiotics

Finally, the New York State Dietetic Association believes that it is important to consider the processing of foods as the nutrients of foods. To this end, NYSDA believes consideration should be given to the reduction of antibiotics within the food supply.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council of behalf of the New York State Dietetic Association and our membership which is comprised of over 6,000 registered dietitians/nutritionists from around the state.

St. Lawrence County
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, INC.

NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

May 28, 2014

To Whom it may concern:

The Potsdam Neighborhood Center is an emergency outreach program of St. Lawrence County Community Development Program. Known as CDP, we are the Countys' Community Action program and are tasked with many anti-poverty and self-sufficiency initiatives. We work with families through our programs to get them from a state of dependence to a state of greater self-reliance.

At the Neighborhood Centers, we provide emergency programs for shelter, utility, fuel, and food assistance. We often meet households in a state of crisis, and work with them to set goals to achieve a greater independence. A major tool in accomplishing this is the food program. We meet people in need of food, and work through that immediate need to develop action plans to help them not get in that situation again. Collectively, through our 6 Neighborhood Centers, we serve approximately 1,100 households monthly with a variety of food packages. Typically, food pantries are run by volunteers, however St. Lawrence County Neighborhood Centers are staffed with persons funded via the Community Services Block Grant; meaning that services are provided in an accountable environment and on an ongoing basis with regular hours of operation: Monday through Friday. Our food pantries are able to meet the need of hunger as it happens. Hunger doesn't happen only once a month rather it strikes at any and all times.

Food programs offered at the Centers include the HPNAP program, a privately funded 5 day package, and a food purchasing cooperative known as Food Sense. Additionally, there are few schools in our area that have the capacity to serve summer meals, and as such, our pantries provide additional meals to children who lose access in the summer to the free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs. Many centers partner with schools to do a weekend and vacation back pack program.

Daily, we see the faces of many who are reliant on food and nutrition assistance programs. These are households who quite simply do not have resources to make ends meet, and food is

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what is not able to be in their budgets. They are those who work minimum wage jobs, those who work multiple part time jobs, those who work at wages that are not enough to provide for a family, those on fixed incomes due to disabilities or those who have put their time in and have retired. We would be remiss as well to not mention the high rate of unemployment, and the chronically unemployed. Children account for 25% of those we serve. As you can see, food insecurity touches a wide variety of people, and we would therefore all be stronger when food is accessible and affordable for all.

St. Lawrence County is excruciatingly rural, and the North Country food system is one which operates in what is known as a food desert. There are a limited number of grocery stores, and what stores are here exist in the more populated areas- leaving the rural areas underserved. Often, transportation poses a barrier to food insecure households. Many households do not have reliable transportation, and because St. Lawrence County has fragmented and inadequate public transportation, getting groceries is an issue. People are often dependent on convenience stores, paying exorbitant prices for foods that are limited in selection.

We routinely see the effect of poor nutrition, from obesity resulting from eating what is affordable to eating sporadically and suffering from poor health as a result. It is not uncommon for a person to come to the food pantry in a state of confusion or irritability as a consequence of having not eaten recently. Children are reported to having gone to school without breakfast, and behavioral problems ensue. It is not uncommon for guidance counselors to request food for families. Food programs will often gravitate towards nutrition education, helping households to understand the gravity of healthy foods prepared at home, and how to leverage food assistance programs to achieve maximum nutritional value.

Yet, through this, the Neighborhood Centers are able to provide help. Food assistance programs work in feeding the immediate need, while their roots of community action work to accomplish the longer term need of greater self-reliance. In thinking about what works in terms of food programs, it is imperative that local control is considered. Illustrative of this would be the Local Produce grant offered as a mini grant from the Food Bank of Central New York. Through this opportunity, food pantries are afforded the funds to make purchases from local producers. This enables participants of food programs to be exposed to local farmers, and local varieties of produce. It puts more fresh produce in the hands of those who have challenges with obtaining it themselves. Furthermore, it connects people together, low income households with local producers. It opens doors to conversations about Community Supported Agriculture, and even discussing ways to garden themselves. While all food programs are vital right now, this sort of program allows for the local food system to be strengthened in a way that benefits not only participants, but local producers as well.

As the Food Policy Council moves forward with the key issue of maximizing participation in food and nutrition assistance programs, please consider the rural context of programs and work towards meeting the need in all areas including isolated areas. Please understand the magnitude and impact of locally controlled projects and the successes of those projects. And

most relevantly, continue to support and endorse programs that work to mitigate and eradicate food insecurity.

Sincerely,

Daisy Cox,

Potsdam Neighborhood Center

North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc.
178 Fayette Road
Massena, NY 13662
315 769 5061

North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc. (NCGC) is a farmer owned grower's marketing cooperative that was chartered in 2005 by local farmers and is a USDA registered food hub. NCGC currently has 25 members and 10 non-member growers, including Amish, and sells to over 20 customers. NCGC supplies local foods year-round, providing vegetables, fruits, herbs, sprouts, meat, honey, maple products, and winter storage crops. NCGC supports the wider community by generating income and keeping dollars in the local economy, creating and maintaining jobs, increasing access to fresh, healthy food, contributing to food security, providing new markets for family farms and helping to preserve (or recreate) rural community based on a viable, vibrant farm sector.
General acknowledgement of the value of both small and large farms in New York State is critical. In the North Country small vegetable and livestock farms are expanding and becoming increasingly important to local economy. Much of the infrastructure needed for them to increase capacity is not available. There are no transportation systems to utilize, idle storage facilities, warehouse space, or languishing commercial certified kitchens to refurbish and put into service. In order to attain the priorities listed, many of those needs will have to be met at the local level.

Efficient and profitable agricultural production needs well-informed farmers and a basic infrastructure. Support of items like the mobile poultry slaughterhouse, commercially certified kitchens, season extending structures, transportation, cooler, and storage facilities can provide the basic needs. The local dollars spent on North Country agricultural products, will stay in the community and be circulated a number of times. Not only do the farmers benefit, but support industries that provide farm equipment and supplies, local markets, and restaurants, etc. also benefit.

One of the assets that is available to all farmers is the county Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) program. General and monetary support for their mission of education and research is essential. Information and training for farmers on Good Agricultural Practices (GAPS), and research and help with invasive species infestations need to continue. Through 4H, Ag in the Classroom and other programs for youth, they bring agriculture right to the children. The Small Farms Program and beginning Farmers Project, as well as extension agents are important resources for farmers. Annie's Project that provides financial and business training for women in agriculture is a very effective program that was just offered statewide through CCE this winter. It is important to note that the majority of objective agricultural research done outside of the corporate realm is done by CCE. Objective research without conflicts of interest (perceived or real) is extremely valuable and more likely to be embraced by all.

Providing the opportunity to eat healthy nutritious food to the children of NYS is a way to train them to be adults that appreciate healthy fresh foods. The Farm to School and Farm to College Programs are helpful in this area. There is a restriction in the Farm to School law located in General Municipal Law, Article 5A, Section 103, number9 that requires each individual school district to obtain a variance to buy from groups of 10 farmers or more. NCGC's very small farmers have essentially been stopped from participating in the local Farm To School programs as a group. The requirement for a variance from each school district served, is burdensome on the schools. Changing that provision would allow the local school food service directors to buy from NCGC, and to provide local fruits and vegetables to the students. It makes a huge difference in the students' willingness to try new things when they discover that an apple or other local item was grown in the same town that they live in.

NCGC has been working with the Food Bank of Central NY for a number of years to bring local nutritious food to their clients. A program was developed where NCGC would sell items to the food bank, but would deliver them locally. This has been very successful. Winter root crops such as celeriac, parsnips, rutabagas, etc. were well received and recipes provided with the vegetables helped clients to use the products. Often clients made their own recipes, such as celeriac french fries. Recently, grants have been awarded to local

neighborhood centers and others to buy local items directly. This was extremely successful in 2013 and we expect it to be so in 2014. These type of creative relationships need to be expanded. Utilizing existing community organizations to partner with farmers or farmer groups makes sense. Selling locally instead of trucking long distances to central warehouses also makes sense.
Farmer's markets are a very important source of local food in the North Country. GardenShare and others have worked to improve opportunities for farmers and consumers of all levels of income. Support for programs like providing EBT machines at farmers markets, and the Local Food Guide need to be part of a larger program to connect local farmers with the community.
In the North Country many local food related groups work together to take advantage of scarce resources. NCGC works with North Country Pastured, GardenShare, CCE, the County Health Initiative, and others. An educational/inspirational public awareness program that would make it attractive to everyone to buy local and support their local farmer would help in all of the priority areas. The "Vermont Fresh" or "Be a Local Hero" program in Massachusetts are examples of this.

There are many ways to achieve the priorities on your list. If everyone works together, then the chance of success is greater. Support of successes already attained along with support to remedy basic infrastructure needs, and education of both the public and agricultural producers will go a long way to making the priorities a reality.

Submitted by:
Sue Rau, Manager
North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc.

May 28, 2014

My name is Laurie Davis and I'm the coordinator of Adirondack Harvest, a program of Cornell Cooperative Extension. Cornell Cooperative Extension puts knowledge to work in pursuit of economic vitality, ecological sustainability and social wellbeing.
I've made a list of the most pressing issues for us at present:

- Our SNAP-Ed funding for nutrition education is being severely cut. We understand that it has to do with our population density in the North Country, but we still have persons in need. By the end of September we will no longer have the funding that used to be available for us to serve our low income population most needing this education.

- Food security – We need to make sure that all Northern New Yorkers have access to fresh, nutritious food. This can be accomplished by support for many of the following items:

- Education for farmers and consumers – Please support efforts to educate farmers in methods of sustainable production for the North Country climate and to educate consumers about the benefits of supporting local agriculture.

- Food hubs & distributions systems – The North Country is a beautiful region. But the geography and settlement patterns hinder easy delivery routes for locally produced foods. We need support for organization, aggregation centers/food hubs and efficient delivery systems.

- Value-added processing/commercial kitchens – More producers are considering value-added processing. Please continue funding that supports the development of commercial kitchens which help many farmers have an income stream in the off-season.

- Farmers' markets support – Please continue to provide grants for infrastructure, EBT machines, and try to have updated/accurate state listings on the state website.

- Organic food – Many farmers grow using organic methods but find the certification to be cost prohibitive. We encourage the continued financial support to help with beginner organic farms.

- Beginning farmers – In order to support a vibrant agricultural economy, there should be support in the form of education, grants and low interest loan programs for beginning farmers (young and old).

- All Farms – We would like to see support for funding and policies that support farms especially in providing environmental infrastructure and risk management.
  - fencing and alternative water systems
  - cover cropping
  - tile drainage
  - crop insurance
  - manure storage facilities

- The NYS Right to Farm Laws and Agriculture and Farmland Protection Law are very important to farms that are being encroached upon by rural sprawl. The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets does a good job of helping communities protect their farmland and farms.

- Agricultural research in Northern NY is especially expensive due its distance from Cornell. However, it is critical that cropping systems be tested in NNY due the different soils and climate and large agricultural region. Continued support for the Northern NY Agricultural Development Program is very important for our region.

- Continue to provide grant support for buy local campaigns!

ADIRONDACK MEAT COMPANY

Discussion on May 28th 2014
New York State Council on Food Policy
SUNY Potsdam-Potsdam, New York
Presented by Peter Ward, President of Adirondack Meat Company

Preface;

My discussion today will attempt to emphasize a few of bottlenecks and struggles witnessed by the much needed and sorely neglected agricultural communities in the North Country. The North Country/ Adirondack Region of New York State has, for many years successfully developed and marketed a wide variety of natural and man made recreational opportunities.

Today we find ourselves, the Ag community at the cusp of a new dawn. Many New York State residents are awakening to a new day. A common theme has been developing from Buffalo to Montauk Point and from the towns of Champlain to Jamestown. People are asking IS MY FOOD LOCALLY GROWN? Wouldn't it be great to respond "OF COURSE IT IS. IT'S PRODUCED IN NEW YORK". Other common phrases are IS IT ALL NATURAL? & IS IT FRESH? Wouldn't it be great to respond, "OF COURSE IT IS, IT'S PRODUCED IN NEW YORK.

If we could, for one minute put ourselves back a few decades when a very smart group came up with a simple phrase "I Love New York". What a great marketing plan. It was genius. If we could, for one more minute put ourselves back to those same few decades and remember two gentlemen from Manhattan named "BEN and JERRY" They were geniuses. The shame of that product is it was made in Vermont and not in New York!!!!

OK. So we're back to today. The genius is still in New York. Right now it appears in Onondaga County. It's Chobani Greek Yogurt. It's the first of the next generation of genius.

If the North Country can take advantage of the resources currently found here and develop them with the help of New York State, there is a great chance the next genius might very well be found in Plattsburgh, Tupper Lake, Westport, Speculator, Lake Placid, Watertown, Potsdam or even Ticonderoga New York.

Today, I hope to give you the perspective of a newly constructed small slaughter/ meat processor whose life revolves around those phrases previously discussed. "Locally Grown, All Natural, and Fresh".

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your time. I would also like to thank Governor Cuomo and his staff and all of the local and state agencies for their assistance in making Adirondack Meat Company the potential next genius.

Topics; Issues related to business growth in the North Country.

1. Access to New York State Procurement System by North Country businesses.

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2. Access to downstate specialty markets by North Country suppliers.

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3. MWBE approvals. Paths and timelines.

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4. Development of Farmers Markets in the North Country.

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5. Develop North Country locally branded products.

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6. North Country sustainable farm assistance.

I do have a question/comment on soups.

I am a cook manager for a local school. I used to make homemade/style soup at least once a week. I used all kinds of fresh vegetables in my soups.

I am told now even though I use, onions, broccoli, tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, green beans, peas, garlic, cauliflower, corn, celery, and other veggies it can't count as a vegetable unless I can prove all customers are getting at least 1/8 cup of each kind of vegetable or the kind I want to count.

It has caused one of the healthiest and most taken foods by children to cost money, count in other ways but not as a vegetable so it has made using it almost obsolete.

It is silly to be able to count 4 oz tomato juice as ½ cup but put it in soup and it can't count.

Isn't there a way it could be counted as an all vegetables or something? It is a shame to have such a healthy food tossed by the wayside because it can't be counted.

The same is true for things like Normandy Vegetables, California Blend, and Prince Albert Vegetables. Yet we can count ketchup as a red vegetable if we give a tablespoon full or 1 ounce.

Kathleen Whitmarsh
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GardenShare
HEALTHY FOOD. HEALTHY FARMS. EVERYBODY EATS.

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The New York State Council on Food Policy
NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets
10B Airline Drive Albany, NY 12235

May 28, 2014

Members of The New York State Council on Food Policy:

Thank you all for coming to the North Country, and for the chance to exchange ideas. I realize we're a little off the beaten path, and we appreciate your presence.

My name is Aviva Gold, and I'm the executive director of GardenShare, a small non-profit organization based in Canton working to build a robust, equitable, accessible, and environmentally sound food system in St. Lawrence County for more than a decade.

Many of our programs work double-duty by helping connect low-income families with greater access to healthy food choices, while at the same time, connecting our local producers with that expanded market. We were one of the first to jump on board when the state started offering Farmers' Markets the ability to accept EBT benefits, and we help provide that service at markets throughout the whole county. We offer a CSA subsidy, called CSA Bonus Bucks, that helps make CSA more affordable for low-income families.

We are also busy promoting farmers' markets throughout the county; we publish an annual Local Food Guide which is also available online at gardenshare.org; we host a biennial Food Day Youth Summit that connects high school students with important food issues and helps them develop action plans to take back to their schools; we've offered countless workshops through the years for producers looking to better market their products; we do a lot of general outreach to the public on all of these issues, and a lot more.

We are currently exploring the potential for a Food Policy Council in St. Lawrence County at the county level.

Just a quick primer on St. Lawrence County. We are, by many measures, one of the poorest counties in the state outside of NYC. We have high unemployment, nine food desert census tracts, 25 percent of our kids rely on food stamps, we are tied for first place as the most obese county in the state, we have the third highest rate of heart disease, the eight percent of us with diabetes cost our county 42 million dollars annually, and, well, you get the picture.

Food and farming issues have a very different face in these more remote, rural areas of the state than they do in more urban centers, or even in the rural areas that have easier

access to urban centers than we do, so the models that work well in other places do not prove as successful here. We need to be extremely inclusive and creative to find local policy solutions to agriculture and nutrition issues that work to ameliorate problems, benefit our local economy, but that don't burden our under-resourced local policy-making bodies.

For the past several months I have been interviewing different food system stakeholders including farmers big and small, a farmer co-op, educators, health professionals, ag lenders, parents, policy makers and more, and have been surprised and gratified by the response. There does seem to be solid interest in developing a broad statement or vision of what our food system should/could look like and what we can do locally to help that along. The Village of Canton is currently considering a resolution of support, and we hope to be on the radar of the other towns and villages in the county soon.

This community is building an awareness of how sound food and agriculture policy can help mitigate some of the poverty and stagnant economy we face. We would love to see more support for developing low/no-cost local policy solutions that integrate with the work you do at the state level.

I'll also take just another minute to express appreciation for the work Ag and Markets has been doing to incentivize farmers' markets for EBT through the Fresh Connect program, and we'd love to see continued streamlining of that process for farmers and markets as well. And if there is some way to broaden that, so that New York state becomes a leader in finding ways for SNAP benefits to incentivize healthy and local choices at regular retail operations, that would be fabulous.

I know our organization struggles to find funding annually for our CSA subsidy program, as do other organizations that I communicate with throughout the state, and we'd love to see some efforts statewide along those lines.

Again thank you so much for coming up here and hosting this exchange.

Sincerely,

Aviva Gold

Aviva Gold, Executive Director

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Northern New York Food Policy and Local Food

My name is Steve Ledoux and I am the Local Foods, Farmers' Markets, and Livestock Community Educator for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County.

Our Association utilizes several methods to help develop the local foods system in the North Country. We start by educating producers about production agriculture and sustainable business practices. We collaborate with consumers marketing local foods to make connections between the consumer and the producer. Our local food initiatives are designed to improve profitability, develop stable markets, and increase local food availability. One focus is to help low income audiences access healthy foods and use their available food resources for the synergistic benefit of both consumers and farmers alike.

We must develop the local food system to insure profitable farms, improved access to healthy, local food, and to grow the rural economy. A study done at Pennsylvania State University by Economist Stephan Goetz states that locally grown food is an economic engine that helps drive rural New York. The results of his study from 2002 to 2007 showed that for every dollar increase in direct farm sales in the Mid-Atlantic states, including New York, overall farm sales increased nine dollars. The study also showed that every dollar increase in agricultural sales had an increase in personal income of 22 cents. More information can be found in the February 2014 issue of the Economic Development Quarterly.

Technical assistance is needed to grow the local food movement in Northern New York. Additional support would help provide stronger coordination of local food production, collaboration with channel partners and distribution outlets, access to capital, and consumer education.