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Sustainable Food System Innovations

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Series I of The Solutions Agenda
A research/practitioner partnership between Professor Ann Dale and Sustainability Solutions Group

Participants

Professor Ann Dale, Moderator, Canada Research Chair, Sustainable Community Development, Royal Roads University
Michael Ableman, farmer, author, photographer, and co-founder of Sole Food, Executive Director
Dr. Patricia Ballamingie, Board member of Just Food Ottawa, and a professor at Carleton University, cross-appointed in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies and the Institute of Political Economy
Chad Lubelsky, Executive Director of Santropol Roulant
Danielle Nierenberg, co-founder of FoodTank: The Food Think Tank
Rebecca Foon, Director, Sustainability Solutions Group
Yuill Herbert, Director, Sustainability Solutions Group.
Robert Newell, Research Associate, CRC Research Program, Royal Roads University

Dialogue

Ann Dale

Welcome to our first in a series of real time on-line conversations in The Solutions Agenda, a research project bringing together leading innovators in Canada with our research team around 11 critical sustainable development issues. The team includes myself, Rob Newell (RRU) and Rebecca Foon and Yuill Herbert of Sustainability Solutions Group. Today, we will be discussing

sustainable food system innovations. Below is a definition of a sustainable food system, and I attach a very brief survey of definitions for your information.

A sustainable food system, reconciles ecological, social and economic imperatives, and is based on a hierarchy of nested objectives.

- equitable access to local and seasonable produce
- access to local, organic produce both in local markets and local supermarkets
- access to diverse year-round local farmers' markets
- access to local and seasonable, and organic produce sold in local supermarkets
- enriches biodiversity at all levels, micro-organisms to soil to animals
- minimizes animal suffering through local access to processing, thus also mitigating GHG emissions
- committed to humane treatment of all animals
- integrated into local restaurants, hospitals, schools and public institutions

Before we begin, could I ask each of you to briefly introduce yourself?

Patricia Ballamingie

Hello, everyone! Trish Ballamingie, here.

I am a professor at Carleton University, cross-appointed in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies and the Institute of Political Economy.

My research focuses on issues related to sustainable community, broadly interpreted, and local food systems, more specifically. I am involved in two different activities that might be relevant to our discussion today, and both fuse research and advocacy.

Ann, thank you for compiling these resources! I would like to flag a text that deals with a similar set of issues:

Alison Blay-Palmer's 2010 book, Imagining Sustainable Food Systems: Theory and Practice (Ashgate)

Rebecca Foon

Thanks so much, Ann.

Hello, everyone. My name is Rebecca Foon, and I am a director with Sustainability Solutions Group and am based out of Montreal, Canada. Thank

you again for partaking in our e-Dialogue today. I am very much looking forward to our conversation.

Chad Lubelsky

Hi everybody, Chad here from Santropol Roulant.

Santropol Roulant is a volunteer-driven community organization founded and run by young people. Standing as Montreal's first community Food Hub, we employ a unique creative and collaborative approach to community building that uses food as a vehicle to bridge cultures and generations, break social isolation, and encourage a diverse group of citizens to take an active role in creating a stronger and more vibrant Montreal.

Every year, we deliver over 20,000 freshly cooked meals to elderly Montrealers living with a loss of autonomy, provide youth training to thousands of young people, hosts dozens of workshops, fix hundreds of bicycles, grow tonnes of fresh vegetables, deliver fresh food baskets, and much more.

Michael Ableman

Hello everyone. This is Michael Ableman. Bear with me as I fumble through the technology.

Robert Newell

Hello. My name is Rob Newell, and I work with Ann Dale as a research associate with her Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Community Development program. Much of my work involves looking at the dynamics of online communities and how social media can be used in research.

Yuill Herbert

Hi, all. My name is Yuill, and I work with Ann and Rebecca. Our organization (Sustainability Solutions Group) works more and more on community planning projects that often include an agriculture component. I also live on a farm and my partner runs a CSA program and sells at Halifax Farmers Market (the oldest market in Canada). We live in a town that used to have a creamy served by 2,000 family farms in the 1940s. Now there are perhaps 3 dairy farms in the area left.

Danielle Nierenberg

Food Tank is trying to bridge the major disconnect between organizations that are fighting hunger and organizations that are fighting obesity. The two groups have more in common than they think. The truth is we're all fighting to get people access to nutritious food, no matter where they are in the world, but we need to be asking the right questions and developing the right metrics for today's food system realities, not yesterday's.

We believe that agriculture can be the solution to some the world's most pressing environmental and social challenges. Through our on-the-ground-research, we have seen the impact that sustainable and diverse farming systems can have health and nutrition, food security, and the livelihood of farmers. We can create state-of-the-art sustainable farming systems by using a combination of traditional practices that have worked for hundreds years all over the world and modern eco-friendly technologies.

Food Tank will attempt to help propel change by fostering the growing community of voices on food issues. In 2013, we will produce published new insights and research daily, a 2013 food summit and college tour, as well as two forthcoming books. One of our most important goals is to develop new metrics for analyzing whether a food system is successful. While yields and calories are important, we also need to focus on the environmental sustainability of food systems, nutritional quality, and social justice issues. Does a particular food system enhance soil and water quality and sequester carbon? For example, does it increase micronutrient content in crops? Does the food system help empower women and youth? We need new metrics for today's food system realities. Food Tank will be working with experts to develop these metrics, as well as developing a compelling narrative for researchers and policy-makers of why these new metrics are needed.

Ann Dale

Welcome, Danielle.
I would now like to ask the participants to briefly describe their projects, and why do you think it is important for working towards a sustainable food system? I would just like to mention that the city near which I work, Ottawa, Canada's capital city, has no permanent in-door farmer's market.

Patricia Ballamingie

First, I am part of the Nourishing Ontario: Sustainable Local Food Systems Research Group (led by Dr. Alison Blay-Palmer at Wilfred Laurier University). To

find out more about this collaborative research team, go to the Nourishing Ontario website.

I work closely with my colleague, Peter Andrée (Political Science, Carleton) to coordinate research in Eastern Ontario. We are currently looking at two research questions (though this research is still preliminary):

- How to address housing insecurity and food insecurity simultaneously?
- How to ensure viable livelihoods for farmers while also improving local food access?

We should have findings to present at the Canadian Association of Food Studies (CAFS) annual conference in June 2013:

Second, I am a Board member of Just Food – a food justice organization aimed at creating a vibrant, just and sustainable food system in the Ottawa region.

To get a sense of the organization, you should read our Vision Statement, Mission Statement, Mandate, and Statement of Values:

I am most impressed by this organization because it works holistically to transform the food system, and as such, represents an exemplar for others to follow. In particular:

- Just Food collaborates with diverse stakeholders, including: established and new farmers; consumers; restaurateurs and food provisioners; non-profit and private sector partners; governmental representatives; and so on…

- We have an absolutely brilliant Executive Director, Moe Garahan, who brings strategic thinking, pragmatism, and integrity to everything she does!

- We also benefit tremendously from the leadership and vision of our wonderful Chair, Cathleen Kneen (former Chair of Food Secure Canada).

- We offer a wide range of programming (from the Community Gardening Network, to the Ottawa Buy Local/ Grow Local Food Guide, Savour Ottawa – a local branding initiative, policy work through Food for All, New Farmer and CSA Training, and the Reel Food Film Festival).

Ann Dale

Patricia, can you explain a little more why you think food and housing security are linked?

Patricia Ballamingie

Absolutely. Here are a few ways.

- People who face housing insecurity also tend to face difficulties in food access, so it makes sense to address these vulnerabilities concurrently.

- Moreover, when people have inadequate income to afford housing, food is often compromised.

- Both new and existing housing can be designed in such a way as to augment food access (siting close to grocery stores and transit ways and food banks, access to community and rooftop gardens, etc.).

Peter Andree and I have a fabulous masters candidate, Julie Pilson, who is working on these issues as a research assistant. Our findings are still preliminary, but we should have something by June to share.

Ann Dale

Or, are there integrated solutions we are missing, just as you have linked housing security and food security, one of the things that has always struck me driving through poorer neighbourhoods and the Downtown Eastside in particular, is the lake of greenery, although SOLE Foods is a brilliant innovation, because by introducing gardens into the neighbourhood, you also bring in connection to place and beauty? So, what about excess produce and plants, what about spatial justice and more equitable distribution. Thoughts, Chad?

Chad Lubelsky

I'm sure there are many integrated solutions that we are missing. In fact, given the wicked questions that we are posing, I can't imagine that there are any solutions that aren't integrated. I can't say I know what the solutions are, but I'm quite confident that to start to uncover them we are going to need spaces where a) a diverse spectrum of people feel welcome so that they can b) have conversations and build relationships that enable them to together create trust and start down the path to figuring out solutions. A sustainable food system would nourish the conversation, but it is not the end goal. It is the beginning.

I gave a brief description of the Roulant in general above, but with respect to a sustainable food system there are a couple of aspects of our work that are most relevant:

1) We have local food production and distribution. So, not only are we trying to make use of the local resources that are available to us (urban as well as peri-urban spaces), but we then distribute that food back to the local area and to the people who need it in the area. In this way we reduce our environmental footprint, respect local diversity, etc.

2) We provide choice (an essential element of food security)

3) We use food to create relationships and to involve people in food production. Part of creating a sustainable system is encouraging people to connect to their food and also via food.

Ann Dale

Chad, so often we forget about the connectivity created through food. I often wonder if when we created the National Round Table in 1988 if we had simply linked sustainable development to sustainable food systems, how much farther ahead today we would be. Choice is a key aspect, does that include diversity of food choices, involving Canada's cultural diversity?

Chad Lubelsky

Regarding the cultural diversity question - absolutely, it is a necessity. I'm quite certain that it is part of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nation’s definition of food security and it is most definitely part of ours. We have to want to eat our food. If it's not culturally appropriate, we most likely aren't going to want to eat it.

I would also add that in general we are interested in building a food system that is healthy, just, and sustainable. As such, our urban agriculture projects are designed to support local and organic agriculture, while assuring that such foods remain accessible to all regardless of socio-economic status, level of mobility, or degree of autonomy.

Finally, from the worms in our basement to the beehives on our roof, we try as much as possible to take an integrated and holistic approach. Our aim is to be a learning and demonstration site for what is possible in an urban environment.

We also want to have a lot of fun while doing it!

Danielle Nierenberg

That's a great point! I think agricultural development experts often forget that food has to be something that communities – eaters – want to eat! Food is not only a way to get filled up or get nutrients, but it should also be delicious and fill cultural needs. It's not simply a matter of getting enough calories.

Yuill Herbert

But one major challenge is that there are lots of people out there who like the taste of cheerios and milk, or are just fine with wonder bread. Is this an education challenge? Or, a taste bud issue? It is a hard one...

Danielle Nierenberg

Taste, of course, can't be the only factor, but I think many in the food research, development, or activist movements forget that food should taste good, provide pleasure, fill cultural needs, etc. We also forget that food production is not part of some isolated system, but it impacts all of us and the environment.

Rebecca Foon

This is taking me back 10 years ago – when I was actually also involved in Santropol Roulant and we organized a festival in the park near Mont-royal bringing together local musicians, artists, tons of arts and crafts – diverse people coming together of all ages – celebrating community and culture through food, music and art. It was inspired by the One City, Many Cultures festival that was taking place in Cape Town, SA, at the time – and was an initiative to unite the city and different neighborhoods though art, music and food.

Chad Lubelsky

We have that poster on our wall! I love it. It actually speaks to the power of food to unite and even the wonder bread issue raised above. We use food as a vehicle to create broader social change. We don't hit anyone over the head with anything, just invite them to participate to the degree that they seek and are comfortable. Food forms the basis of our work since once people are eating well they are able to turn their attention to other things (perhaps that is a link to the housing question?). Our work and challenges are more complex than what I just described, but Santropol Roulant firmly falls into the Margaret Mead school of

thought that a small group of committed people is the only thing that can change the world.

Robert Newell

On this topic of festivals and education, I would like to open up a thread of conversation that I found to be critical when doing research on local food initiatives. In a recent case study on T'Sou-ke we produced in the Meeting the Climate Change Challenge (MC^3) project, we found that the Vancouver Island First Nation community of T'Sou-ke was operating a local community garden that could not support the community nutritionally. However, the interviewees we talked to noted that the symbolic value of the garden was quite significant. Food from the garden is served at local events and the garden is featured in eco-tours of the area. In reality, it serves as a symbol of the community's commitment to sustainability.

The benefit from the symbolic significance of a local food source is understandable, but very hard to quantify. Has anyone else encountered a similar situation where the local food source served more symbolically than as a nutrient source?

Yuill Herbert

I think many of the school gardens are in this same category. Critical for building a culture of food.

Robert Newell

Ah, yes. Good example. And, developing an earth to table connection at an early age is vital. It can be quite strange how disconnected some children living in urban areas can be from their food sources, not being able to identify the origins of their food. This can have dramatic consequences in terms of communities developing as self-sustaining and resilient.

Ann Dale

This idea of festivals is very crucial both in terms of building social capital and what Yuill is talking about - education, although I am surprised at his elitism around food :) I remember Herb Barbolet in Vancouver starting up the Festival of Fields, an annual event that brings together local food producers, including wine, in Vancouver, and is now even in Ottawa, a wonderful event that serves to both educate and expose people to diverse food. Another great innovation is the CSA

food baskets, where you are given a basket, often with vegetables that are new, but recipes for those new foods. How do we diffuse this system to poorer communities and people, it is about equitable access?

Patricia Ballamingie

Ann, that is such an important tension, because despite the best of intentions, the farmers that engage in Good Food Markets (we had a pilot program in Ottawa last summer with a number of lower-income / social housing communities) often struggle to make a viable livelihood. In my mind, targeted subsidies and state support is appropriate in these sorts of cases.

Yuill Herbert

In reviewing the definitions posed by the moderator, I think one aspect that is missing around the farmers. I participated in the People's Food Policy project and one interesting aspect they adapted was the notion of Food Sovereignty, in direct response to the corporate control of the food system. The definition is as follows:

> *Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.*

This definition comes from La Via Campesina, the peasant farmer's movement.

Danielle Nierenberg

AGREED, Yuill!

Patricia Ballamingie

I agree, and the shift from a discussion of food security to food sovereignty is critical to sustainable food systems!

Food Security is defined as a state in which "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 1996).

Food Secure Canada's describes the Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty.

Ann Dale

Yuill, I understand the Halifax local food market, now comprising two buildings is the oldest in Canada, followed I think by Montreal. I do not mean to be elitist, but the Maritimes has had a depressed economy, so why are local and organic foods so important, when many wealthy people criticize the cost of such food?

Can you tell us about the Slow Food Conference you attended in Italy, a hell of an excuse to visit a beautiful country?

Yuill Herbert

Remarkable and overwhelming... The line ups to get in to the trade show rivaled that which you expect from a hockey game in Canada but in this it was to sample olive oil and cheese. The enthusiasm and passion for food was remarkable as was the extent of the trade show, which spanned acres and after four days I still hadn't been to every corner. Certainly an inspiration for Canada.

I also attended the National Farmers Union conference this fall. And it seriously felt like they were under siege. On one hand they have lost the Wheat Board and current negotiations with the EU on the CETA threaten supply management. On the crop side, GMO contamination and limited access to seed variety. On the production side, climate shifts mean that production is increasingly unpredictable. On the farmer side, they are generally ageing with few young people in the wings threatening transfer of knowledge. On the land side, speculators and investors are purchasing land and consolidating. Those are some of the challenges I heard discussed. It is a crazy time to be a farmer!

Ann Dale

What are the solutions, this project is called The Solutions Agenda, Mr. Herbert?

Yuill Herbert

Well yesterday I went and picked up our first batch of East Coast Organic Milk. It is a cooperative that has been trying to get going for many years and finally you can buy it. Very exciting. Cost of one container of milk is just under $8 - about twice as much as conventional stuff. People are buying it though! It is a cooperative of farms and financed itself using the Community Economic Development Incentive in NS (CEDIF). These are a special mechanism unique to Nova Scotia that allows local people to invest in an initiative in exchange for

significant tax breaks. So, lots of people invested in their operation. The farmers did the work and now it’s for sale. That is a good story!

Robert Newell

I find the previous discussion regarding the cultural appropriateness of the local foods an interesting one, and I might take a different approach with this here. I previously worked for an immigration and settlement group developing a program that encourages the involvement of newcomers to Canada in the local environmental movement. I found that community gardens (and food, in general) formed a wonderful way to transcend cultural barriers and bring together people of different backgrounds, as everyone is interested in eating.

I'm wondering how this finding fits with ensuring local food sources are culturally appropriate. Any comments or ideas?

Chad Lubelsky

The Stop's Global Food Garden is a wonderful example of using food to transcend cultural barriers. Again, it's about being creative with food and when we connect directly with the source of what we eat and help produce it. It is that much easier to be creative and to be in relationship. There is nothing new or innovative here, it's just going back to practices we have forgotten about.

Ann Dale

Always difficult as a moderator to know when to step in, I keep hearing that equity is important, our second question?

What do you think are the critical features of a sustainable food system, let's try and ignore definitions, give me some concrete features?

Rob, interesting questions, thoughts everyone.

Chad Lubelsky

If we start with the classic definition of sustainability (meeting our needs without compromising future needs) we could then weave in the various parts of the food system (soil, plant, animal and human). So, when Wendell Berry, for example, says that eating is an agricultural act he is talking about the importance of taking into consideration how soil, plant, animal and human are all affected by our

choices. So, a sustainable food system needs to take into account current and future needs of soil, plant, animal and humans.

Of course Wendell Berry would say it much more eloquently :)

Danielle Nierenberg

Safe, healthy, affordable, accessible, equitable, environmentally sustainable, socially just are all the words that are used to describe a sustainable food system - I'd be interested in hearing about examples that include all of these. I've spent a lot of time looking at different projects in SA, the U.S., Asia, Latin America and elsewhere, but it's hard for me to say if any of the projects I've seen encompass all of these traits. And, do sustainable food systems need to have all of them? Or, is one or two enough? Which one or two?

Rebecca Foon

Michael, do you have thoughts on what is appropriate to be growing in our cities and what should be left to rural and peri-urban growers. I would love to hear more on this!

Michael Ableman

After working as a farmer for the last 40 years I come to this discussion with a certain level of pragmatism.

My involvement with Solefood in Vancouver was not about saving people. Many of whom are dealing with poverty and addiction, it was simply to provide meaningful work. If the result of that helps folks change, fantastic.

When I started the Center For Urban Agriculture in the early 1980's in California no one had ever heard those two words put together. Now everyone is talking the talk, but how much of what folks call "urban agriculture" is really agricultural? I would say most of it is what I call urban "horticulture", equally important but not of a scale to really do what we have been attempting to do with Solefood - provide production quantities of food and jobs.

I do not think that cities can feed themselves entirely from within. A more appropriate conversation would be what is appropriate to be growing in our cities and what should be left to rural and peri-urban growers. What are the appropriate relationships between urban, peri-urban, and rural food production and how do we integrate them better?

Ann Dale

Brilliant question, Michael. What about by producing meaningful employment, connected with food, which connects to better health, and I would argue by connecting to different networks is critically important to moving past addiction, also brings some beauty through the greening? Ken Lyotier is a dear friend of mine, and a co-researcher on my agency project.

Patricia Ballamingie

Some features of a sustainable food system:
(not comprehensive, just a few possibilities off the top)

- Reliant on alternative production methods (organic, biodynamic, permaculture, IPM, etc.)
- Hybridity: Local resilience, regional specialization, and ethical global trade
- Integrative of social justice issues (from worker's rights, health and safety issues, to food access for vulnerable sub-populations)
- Supportive of alternative models of organization: e.g., social enterprise, cooperatives

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Ann Dale
Second Question

Chad, the other thing about 're-localization' is that people understand the consequences of their consumption. Just read Canadian Geographic, interesting article about a photographer who takes pictures of the consequences of less humane practices, another connection, folks, with health - adults do not need to consume meat more than two times a week, linked to cancer rates, and other health effects?

Patricia Ballamingie

I was vegetarian for a decade, and I have struggled with this issue for longer. I suspect that even if we are inclined to eat meat (which I now do), we should eat relatively little (1-2 times per week), and know how it was raised (i.e., humanely).

This book complicates some of the typical vegetarian arguments (many of which I am still sympathetic to): Keith, Lierre (2009) The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice and Sustainability. Crescent City, CA: Flashpoint Press.

A more sustainable food system would require all of us to eat much less meat, if at all, and humanely raised at that! Just think how significant an effect we could have if we shifted our consumption along the continuum towards eating less meat!

Ann Dale

Third question. What other innovations do you know about? I think of macro movements such as the 100 Mile Diet, the Slow Food Movement (brings in aspect of time which is the subject of another dialogue), simmering rather than nuking, what other Canadian innovations? Danielle, given your Canadian and international connections?

Patricia Ballamingie

In addition to school gardens, programs like the Canadian Organic Growers' Growing Up Organic are critical!

Yuill Herbert

Another great story is FarmWorks.

The FarmWorks Investment Co-operative Limited was incorporated as a for-profit Co-operative on May 18, 2011, by an association of community leaders concerned about social, economic and cultural needs, in order to promote and provide strategic and responsible community investment in food production and distribution to increase access to a sustainable local food supply for all Nova Scotians.

Rebecca Foon

Also, down the garden path's site has a wealth of links to organizations that do work with food security throughout Canada – you can check it out here.

Danielle Nierenberg

Meatless Mondays is another idea / innovation in the same vein as those you mention that has spread rapidly from the U.S. to other nations, particularly in Europe.

But, on-the-ground farmers from Canada to sub-Saharan Africa are realizing the importance of indigenous crops and resilient agriculture systems that incorporate agroforestry methods, intercropping, etc. Indigenous and native crops are typically resistant to pests and disease and can withstand flooding or drought or high temperatures. And, farmers in Western Africa are coming up with natural ways of fertilizing their crops with leguminous trees and green manure because they can't afford fertilizer out of a bag.

Yuill Herbert

Michael, what were the conditions that enable Solefood to work would you say? The combination of progressive government, people with the skills, etc?

Michael Ableman

First of all, while we appear to have achieved a certain level of success, there are enormous challenges with the Solefood model- financial, skill levels, etc. So, we are "working", but we have a ways to go before I would say that the project is "working".

Our current city government has been critical to our project, creating a progressive lease model for our land access, some innovations in growing systems that allow us to grow on contaminated and paved land, and applying a farmers skill set / instincts to the urban scene.

Yuill Herbert

That is interesting - the existence of Solefood is serving as an inspiration to many others across Canada and perhaps most importantly enables people to see possibilities and create new initiatives.

Ann Dale

Michael, so they changed the 'rules of game', made them more flexible? Interesting, I am trying to get a peace herb garden started at my university, it is interesting how so many times rules are invoked, the argument is the number of

cars going by the only accessible plot will contaminate the herbs to be used in our cafeteria?

Michael Ableman

I'm not sure that they "changed the rules" of the game, we just stretched them a bit.

Patricia Ballamingie
Ahead of the Game

With regards to innovations, Just Food's most recent, and quite ambitious project is to establish a Community Food and Sustainable Agriculture Hub on National Capital Commission (NCC) land adjacent to Blackburn Hamlet, in Ottawa.

(I have a co-authored paper on this that I can eventually share, once it has been copy edited for Local Environments!)

Another innovative practice relates to gleaning. I know similar initiatives exist elsewhere, but I am only familiar with a recent development in Ottawa. Jason Garlough (a fellow Board member of Just Food) and Katrina Siks, co-founded an organization called Hidden Harvest.

On their website, they explain why they exist:

> *"By revealing and sharing the fruit and nuts around our city, we seek to make good use of local food and inspire community members to plant trees for tomorrow which will feed us as well as mend our environment."*

In summary, they harvest existing trees across the city, and sell edible trees to raise money and increase the stock of fruit and nut tree in Ottawa. They share the harvest with food banks, the homeowner, the harvesters, and Hidden Harvest Ottawa.

Chad Lubelsky

Urban fruit recovery programs are also gaining a lot of steam.

Yuill Herbert

Chad - how much is actually harvested do you think from the urban fruit recovery programs?

Chad Lubelsky

Do you mean how much of the total fruit that is available on the Island of Montreal? I wish I knew, and I wish even more that we had a policy environment that favoured this kind of research. What I can tell you is that we couldn't keep up with the demand or the interest.

Yuill Herbert

One of my favourite places to visit and I think one of the most inspiring projects to support local agriculture is Intervale Centre in Burlington, Vermont. Intervale is a valley of several hundred acres right on the edge of the city. It supports the following,

- New farm incubation
- Farm business development
- Agricultural market development
- Agricultural land stewardship
- Food systems research and consulting and
- Celebration of food and farmers!

The combination of Intervale and City Market (Onion River Co-op) have had a major impact on local food in Burlington.

Michael Ableman

Intervale is a great model, Will Raap who started that is a friend of mine. I think it is important to remember that while there are numbers of models, they developed within a physical and cultural context and as such can be act as an inspiration, but not as a replication.

Danielle Nierenberg

Food waste is a hot issue, both in developing and industrialized countries. It's low hanging fruit on so many levels and the impacts can be immediate and very impactful, which we don't see often with other innovations. And, the solutions can often be simple and inexpensive, such as solar powered dehydrators in The

Gambia and India. Or cutting the tops off sweet potatoes to prevent them rotting in Western Africa. Or, drying grains on jute mats before they're stored in silos, etc. etc.

Chad Lubelsky

I know we aren't on scale yet, but if we look at success factors there is a lot to learn about what is going on in Vancouver: Ripe policy environment, relevant stakeholders and activists networked, resources available, municipal vision (greenest city, number of food assets, etc) allowance for things to not work out as expected, etc. When we look at what makes for a successful endeavor, we need to ensure that we have the right conditions.

Similarly, here in Montreal, we just finished a major consultation on Urban Agriculture would not have been possible several years ago. Part of the work is aligning and connecting the various available resources.

Yuill Herbert

Can you tell us more about the consultation. What it is intending to do and what were the results?

Chad Lubelsky

The goal was to create a formal mechanism for Montrealers to provide input into what they think the city of Montreal should be doing with regards to Urban Agriculture (we don't, for example, have a food policy or a FP council). The city then received a formal report from the Conseil régionals des élus (I don't think there is an English translation) with recommendations and then they will decide what to do with it. It is far from perfect, but it is a start.

We don't know the results yet, because the City hasn't yet announced what they will do (they have had a lot going on!). But one thing it has done is put Urban Agriculture (and food) on the municipal agenda.

You can read our reactions to the report, as well as our recommendations here.

Ann Dale

What do you think we need to accelerate the diffusion of local innovations across the country, should and how do we scale up? And we have lots of e-audience

questions which I will start bringing forward after your initial comments on this question.

Chad Lubelsky

I think it's about learning the process that was followed and knowing that the same process might lead to different outcomes in different places. And in fact, probably should, since a good process would be community-based and each community would affect the result differently. The challenge with scale is that you risk losing diversity and diversity is essential to a healthy food system. So we need to learn how to work better together, not learn how to do the same things as each other.

Ann Dale

Very wise words, place-based policy making?

Patricia Ballamingie

We need so many things to scale up, but here are two:

- Better core funding for non-profits working in this area, with appropriate reporting and accountability measures (but not overly onerous).
- Better access to public land for small-scale, local and community-based agricultural production.

Yuill Herbert

There is lots of enthusiasm amongst young people and a hunger to work outside growing food. We have many visitors of people in their twenties about to start a farm but 90% only last 2-3 years - run out of money and energy and go on to more lucrative endeavours. Linnea Farm School gives people the skills and social network to get through some of that - if we had a network of schools like that across Canada, that would help: (Linnea is another solution...)

Robert Newell

I have a question from the e-Audience forum that our panelists might want to tackle. This is about the role of municipal government, what should the role of municipal government be in encouraging food security and sovereignty? Does anyone have examples of innovative policies that have helped out in this regard?

Perhaps, some of the organizations you have worked with have worked in partnership with local government?

Chad Lubelsky

Three examples come to mind:

1) Vancouver's greenest city work

2) As part of it's Citizen Charter, the city of Montreal is obliged to hold a consultation if you can obtain 15,000 signatures on a given topic. This is interesting because it democratizes the city's agenda and creates space for local orgs / networks / people to work together and influence public policy in a binding way. The next step is participatory budgeting as seen in places like Porto Alegre in Brazil

3) The Plateau Borough in Montreal is trying to integrate various issues. We for example receive funding from them to host markets as part of their anti-poverty work.

Robert Newell

Thank you for passing these links on, Chad. I took a look at the last one, as I am not familiar with the project. One thing that struck me was the note about the market items being inexpensive. I have often heard in passing conversation people referring to fresh, organic products as in the 'realm of the rich' because they are often much more expensive at supermarkets. Has this initiative of Santropol Roulant help break down this barrier?

Chad Lubelsky

I don't know if we have broken the barrier, but we do have an economic solidarity aspect to the work. In an effort to recoup the true cost of the produce, we ask individuals who can to pay more so that others pay less. It works very well. It helps that we are able to offer tax-receipts.

Yuill Herbert

On urban agriculture, there are some major investments occurring, such as Local Garden in Vancouver and there is a similar greenhouse project in Montreal but forget the name. Does anyone have any thoughts on these types of projects?

Michael Ableman

You may want to look into "Local Garden" as mentioned by someone earlier. Is this the way we want to go? I would not feed my family the lettuce coming out of a facility that is based on the recycling of chemical nutrient solutions. This is more a lettuce factory than a farm.

Chad Lubelsky

The major one in Montreal is Lufa farms.

Yuill Herbert

The concepts seem powerful - farm incubation, third party marketing and promotions support, there were garden plots there for refugees one time I went. But, I think they had strong support from the municipality and not sure how the land was secured.

Michael Ableman

My sense is that we have incredible enthusiasm around this movement, but a huge gap in skills to make things happen. I'm specifically speaking of agricultural skills.

Ann Dale

Michael, can you expand a little? Agricultural skills in urban populations, but I think then of all the Italian gardens, and how much I learned from our neighbour's garden in the barren suburbs?

Michael Ableman

We need small garden scale projects, which make up most of what people are now calling urban agriculture. But, we also need production scale projects.

Natural systems agriculture on scale, when done well requires a broad range of skills that take years to develop. For some reason, there is this idea that you can become a farmer overnight. With all the initial enthusiasm I have witnessed around farming, few of those who dip their feet in stay with it. The work is physically demanding, and good results require training, observation, and slow development. This is a slow patient art trying to insert itself into a society that values speed, technology, and instant results.

Ann Dale

Slow, patient art - how elegant. Just as good artists try to simply capture what they see, quite often we think the simple is not complex when it comes to sustaining ourselves, and the craft involved. Michael, it reminds me of when I first started gardening and a dear friend of mine came, and saw me working and said, “Ann, just hire an expert, why bother?”. What I have learned about myself, about my land, about gardening over 30 years, is irreplaceable, it again introduces the question of time, again, no time in this discussion. It contributes to my work, digging my hands into the soil to get out of my head, and so forth, moderators shouldn't be so involved :)

Yuill Herbert

We are working with a municipality on Vancouver Island as part of a planning process. We discovered that they have acres of vacant land that is in the Agricultural Land Reserve (Another remarkable policy that needs to be replicated across Canada and strengthened in BC). They are considering leasing this land to new farms at an affordable rate and partnering with a non-profit to provide support a la Intervale. Municipalities have land and in BC in particular land costs are prohibitive.

Ann Dale

Another question from our audience. Another example may be the community gardens, which here in Ottawa seem the majority of times to be located nearby to low-income housing / co-operatives. Or do they play a multitude of roles: supplementing the lower income earners' diet; provide contact with nature; achievement of producing a harvest?

Patricia Ballamingie

Ann, the community and allotment gardens in Ottawa are often located within close proximity to low-income and social housing. And yes, they serve multiple functions, including those you cite above, but they also:

- build social capital :) (to draw on your work!);
- and, connect immigrant populations to traditional foods that they may find difficult to access here.

Ann Dale

I want to get back to the importance of changing the rules of the game. In our latest book, Urban Sustainability: Reconciling Space and Place, there is a chapter on government regulations about raising chickens in the city, and the fight to change them. Often, factors such as security and safety are used as arguments against innovation?

Yuill Herbert

In Orlando, it's illegal to have gardens in the front yard. But some people are persisting. Check out this story.

Rebecca Foon

Interesting! My cousin actually did the same thing in his front yard in suburban Detroit - and it caused major neighborhood drama!

Danielle Nierenberg

And it's not only urban farmers in North America who experience backlash for farming the cities - in sub-Saharan Africa, many cities, including Nairobi, have zoning restrictions that prevent urban farmers from growing food or raising livestock. These laws are mostly ignored and not enforced, but urban farmers are forced to practice farming under the radar, instead of getting the support, extension services, inputs, and other things they need to be successful.

Robert Newell

This relates closely to the question and comments we have early on the role of government in encouraging sustainable food systems. It's one matter for local

government not to provide incentives for local foods, but I can see definite issues arising when local food production is made to seem 'illicit'. In this manner, it becomes an us-against-them situation where the community is trying to protect themselves or achieve independence from their government leaders. Consequently, even from strictly a social perspective, it seems critical for local government to encourage local food production.

Michael Ableman

Governments do change, slowly. In the early 1980's on one of the urban farms I developed in California (Fairview Gardens) I was threatened with jail time over the compost we made (recycling vast amounts of nutrients that used to head for the landfill), the crow of our roosters, and the signs advertising our fresh produce. At the time it made national news in the states. Now, that same municipality is sponsoring programs that support these endeavors.

Robert Newell

This is an encouraging story, and a good one for near the end of the dialogue to end on a positive note. That is a dramatic change for a 30-year period.

Ann Dale

Another audience question from a dear colleague of mine, a CRC in Food Security and the Environment, at the University of the Fraser Valley.

> *“Hi everyone. A while back a student challenged me with the statement that ultimately meat eating is not a sustainable activity; only a vegetarian system can meet all three imperatives of sustainability. She made some excellent points. What do you folks think?*
>
> *Full disclosure: I'm roasting a side of pork while I watch the dialogue... “*

Robert Newell

The vegetarian question is always a controversial one. I will provide the first run at this one. Personally, I am vegetarian but I'm not convinced that it's the only route to sustainability. The caloric value and protein that I could get from eating a 'happy cow' is much higher than what I could supplement from vegetable matter. And, to add to this, we can't say that all vegetable-based farming practices are

sustainable, i.e., GM, monoculture, pesticide-usage, land clearing. In our current paradigm, our meat harvest (particularly, what happens in North America) is not making efficient use of food source, but I am not entirely convinced that a meat industry is mutually exclusive to sustainability.

Michael Ableman

Growing food without some integration with livestock presents some real challenges. Much of the winter organic produce that Canadians consume comes from large-scale organic producers (former colleagues) in California. Much of their soil fertility programs (the blood meal, meat meal, and manures) is based on the byproducts of the animal concentration camps like Harris ranch. If we are going to eat organic carrots or anything else from other places, we still may be participating in meat production, and sometimes at its worst. Better to support integrated farming systems in our regions that incorporate animals in an intelligent and considerate manner.

Ann Dale

I cannot thank you enough for your time and commitment to our research. I owe each of you a fine glass of wine when we meet in person. Any last concluding remarks, une mille fois merci and thank you again.

Rebecca Foon

Thank you everyone for participating, it was truly a pleasure.

Patricia Ballamingie

Just gratitude! Thank you, everyone, and have a great evening!

Trish

Chad Lubelsky

I learned a lot. Thank you! Good luck with the next steps

Robert Newell

Thank you everyone. It was a pleasure having this conversation with you!

Danielle Nierenberg

Thank you!