

Canadian Association for Food Studies



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From the research desk...

Mobilization around Food Security within the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships: A National Scan

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The authors of this article, in collaboration with **Leslie Brown**, Principal Investigator, Atlantic Social Economy Research Network¹ (SES), **Noreen Millar**, Atlantic SES Coordinator, and **Annie McKittrick**, Coordinator of the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships² (CSERP), undertook a national scan of food security research within the CSERP. The CSERP includes a National Hub and National Partners, as well as six regional Nodes across Canada involved in the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded project on the Social Economy. The social economy is an economy based on human values of participation and empowerment, which includes all activities and organizations that have grown out of collective entrepreneurship, and are committed to community service, autonomous management, democratic decision making, and primacy of people over profits.³

The purpose of the scan was to fuel discussions within CSERP around potential collaborations and future food security research and to initiate cooperation among regional nodes to synthesize food security related results. The objectives were to create a document that identified food security research projects

¹ <http://www.msvu.ca/socialeconomyatlantic/>

² <http://www.socialeconomyhub.ca/>

³ http://www.socialeconomyhub.ca/hub/index.php?page_id=9

and partners within CSERP, opportunities for regional or national collaboration, and gaps in the food security research fabric, as it relates to the social economy.

The scan, conducted from July 2007 to May 2008, included a review of all online CSERP resources as well as email and telephone contacts with regional Node Coordinators and relevant academic partners. Results were organized and analyzed using McCullum's three stage continuum of strategies for building community food security.⁴

Results were as broad in approach as they were in location, ranging from building knowledge through comparative farm market studies in British Columbia, to building capacity through participatory action research in Nova Scotia, to building supportive policies through national cooperative food networks. The results will be presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Food Studies in June. Three project leads are joining the session, highlighting very different examples of projects working on food security issues in the Canadian social economy, though there are many more projects worth mentioning.⁵

The scan results demonstrate the breadth of CSERP activities, working on various levels across Canada, and paint a picture of a rich and diverse food security research network within the social economy. Regional food networks emerged in our scan as potential facilitators for collaboration both within their regions and between food networks of different regions. Collaborative efforts of food networks can facilitate meeting immediate food needs, build community capacity and strengthen advocacy efforts.



⁴ McCullum C, Desjardins E, Kraak VI, Ladipo P, Costello H. Evidence-based strategies to build community food security. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. 2005;105(2):278.

⁵ A full description of projects is available from the corresponding author.

CAFS UPDATES....

CAFS third annual conference is fast approaching...

Titled *Thinking Beyond Borders: Ideas, Values and Concerns of Food in a Global World*, and scheduled for May 30 to June 2, 2008 the meeting once again promises to be a vibrant and colourful gathering. There are three food tours scheduled for May 30: Food Unfair, Growing in Vancouver, and The Green Table Network. The tours will provide the participants with a snapshot of the Vancouver's food system from urban agriculture to restaurant.

May 31 and June 1 are packed with concurrent sessions in which over 60 papers will be presented. The participants, once again, will be coming from a variety of practical experience and academic disciplines. A reception for the participants is scheduled for Saturday May 31 and generously sponsored by UBC's Faculty of Land and Food Systems.

A joint session with the Canadian History Association, *Feeding Babies and Families, Regulating Health, Female Bodies and Communities*, will take place on June 2. For full programme and more information about the conference visit our website (foodstudies.ca) or email cafsadmin@foodstudies.ca.

We look forward to seeing you in Vancouver!

CAFS Journal

At our last general meeting we discussed the possibility of developing our own journal. In the coming months, we will explore possible sources of funding, feasibility of such a journal, potential names (e.g. *Canadian Journal of Food Studies, Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Food Studies* etc.) We have a list of volunteers for the editorial board. If you like to add your name, please contact us.

Membership to the Canadian Federation for Humanities and Social Sciences

CAFS will be applying for membership to the Canadian Federation for Humanities and Social Sciences. To qualify for this membership, we had to be active for a three-year period and have had to acquire a formal association status. We will apply for full membership in May 2008.

Membership has its advantages. You can read more about it at the Federation web site at: <http://www.fedcan.ca/>

Global Food Crisis, Local Urban Food Security Strategy

A day of sharing at Ryerson University

Kelly Bronson On April 24th a group of academics and activists met at Ryerson University to discuss urban food security, following on the heels of an urgent plea from the United Nations to global leaders for an increase in food aid. It seems that food security is more urgent than ever: the sudden rise in prices for corn, wheat and rice among other crops, has sparked violence and civil unrest in Haiti, Africa and parts of Asia. “This steeply rising price of food—it has developed into a real global crisis,” said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at a recent conference in Vienna. He added that the heads of the UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund would be meeting in Bern, Switzerland, in an effort to address the problem.



During global crises, the commitments of global leaders are lauded while the extremely important and effective coalition efforts of people working on the ground in more local contexts often go un-noted. I felt privileged, therefore, to be at the Ryerson Food Security workshop that highlighted such work.

Cecilia Rocha (director of the Ryerson Centre for Studies in Food Security, CSFS) and Wendy Mendes (post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives in Toronto) began the day by recounting urban food security successes that were achieved by treating food security as a driver of policy rather than as an outcome. They both underscored the importance of participatory decision-making in achieving food security goals. Mustafa Koc reminded us that while we need to combine efforts and initiatives at all scales – from the global to the local – to tackle these pressing issues. He gave us a clear directive for the day’s conference: to revisit common indicators of food security.

The second set of guest panelists helped to prepare us for this task. James Garrett of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) shared his operationalized framework on urban food security that encompasses determinants from the community to the individual level. He listed the urban food economy as an essential determinant, especially in an environment with limited natural resources wherein most families are forced to buy, rather than to cultivate, food. As with Cecilia and Wendy, James said that from his experience, nutrition is an input into the urban environment, not a static indicator. Similarly, Luc Mougeout of International Development

Research Centre (IDRC) asked us to reflect on how we might harness urban food and nutritional security to achieve multiple urban development goals. Yves Cabannes of the Development Planning Unit of University College London shared many exciting local food security initiatives from all over the world including guerilla agriculture, participatory budgeting, and even mapping urban green spaces where food can grow. Ozlem Guclu-Ustundag, a postdoctoral research associate with CSFS, introduced a package of documents, containing samples of food security indicators used in different levels of assessments (from household to national level) and other related urban indicators, which was given to each of us to draw inspiration and guidance from, and we were tasked with collectively identifying core indicators of urban food security.



We began by brainstorming along two axes: the points of one defined by areas of the food

system—production, distribution, processing, consumption, waste management—and the other axis marked by urban priorities—social development and poverty eradication, economic development, environmental management, shelter, governance, public health, education and safety. We worked together to think of ways these two axes come together in food security strategies. Immediately someone noticed the absence of culture as a priority, especially relevant given that food security means access not simply to food, but nutritious and culturally appropriate food. Other suggestions were to redefine “shelter” to include land use, include transportation in distribution, and to think about sustainability as a more foundational goal. Yves Cabannes suggested that we differentiate between outcome/result and process (variables to measure process would be more qualitative) in order to ensure that urban food security is achieved in an ethical and a just way. It was inspiring to contribute to a group of people from multiple disciplines, of different ages and theoretical approaches, and from all over the world, come together in a healthy debate. In fact, we ultimately decided that indicators—not only among planners and academics, but also for target communities—work more as tools to encourage such discussion and inclusion, as much as being measuring sticks for community well being.

Imagining sustainable food systems

Irena Knezevic

A gathering of food scholars and practitioners took place earlier this month at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. Organized by Alison Blay-Palmer, and supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and Wilfrid Laurier University, this event asked its 30 or so participants to move beyond simply identifying the problems of the dominant food system and imagine what a more sustainable system would entail.

A new momentum in the food movement was recognized noting that the critical perspectives on food system are increasingly common and moving from the fringes to the mainstream. Interdisciplinarity and collaboration between scholars and practitioners was seen as imperative. Clare Hinrichs of Penn State University suggested that sustainability should be seen as *process* rather than an end point, and that its definitions are multiple and should remain flexible. Participants emphasized that sustainability should be environmental, social and economic, and Kevin Morgan of Cardiff University argued against compartmentalized approaches suggesting that the current emphasis on local foods leaves many concerns out, and that we need to argue for both local and green *and* global and fair.



Alison Bell, Christie Young, Helene St Jacques, Harriet Friedman, and Wayne Roberts provided some examples of sustainable models at work. While Yael Levitte elaborated on the issue of social sustainability through the example of farm labour research, Mustafa Koc addressed the current food price crisis through the lens of political economy and historical perspectives. John Smithers, Ellen Desjardins, and Betsy Donald shared some insightful Canadian research on social interactions, community development, and planning.

Synthesizing some of the information that was shared during the workshop, Sarah Wakefield proposed that we should move away from looking at what needs to be sacrificed to achieve sustainability and instead find inspiration in imagining how wonderful it will be to have a sustainable food system.

Book, Journal and Movie Reviews

A special issue of *Local Environment: International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, edited by Robert Feagan was published in April 2008. Focusing on 'Direct Marketing', it has 7 papers that incorporate themes dealing with Farmers' Markets; Organic Food-Box Schemes; CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture); Local Food Networks; and, Local Food Procurement. The geographic locales of the papers are: Mexico, west coast of US, British Columbia, Sweden and Denmark, Scotland, and England.

Tableland is a documentary film that takes gives the viewer insights into how local, seasonal food is being produced on a small scale in diverse places like Salt Spring Island, rural Quebec, Ontario and inner-city Chicago.

Cost: \$20 Can.

<http://www.p1-productions.com/tableland.html>

Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: Markets Power and the Hidden Battle for the World's Food System* (Harper Collins, 2007)

Geoff Tansey & Tasmin Rajotte, *The Future Control of Food: A Guide to International Negotiations and Rules on Intellectual Property, Biodiversity and Food Security* (Earthscan, 2008)

As the current food crisis highlights the inequalities of food distribution, two recent books aim to explain the underlying inequalities of the system. Patel's *Stuffed and Starved* is a comprehensive assessment of the corporate food system and its consequences. Having worked at the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, Patel is well equipped to deliver a critical analysis of the market economy of food, which he identifies as the root problem resulting in both obesity and hunger. Through his eloquent story-telling, Patel both criticizes the concentration of power in the food system, and praises the social movements

in support of food sovereignty and more mindful diets. Specifically, he is very supportive of La Via Campesina, which he argues "broadens the imagination of possible politics by putting the idea of equality right back into the heart of food politics."

Tansey and Rajotte's compilation *The Future Control of Food* is an accessible inventory of the intellectual property (IP) regime and the way in which it affects food. With contributors such as Peter Drahos and Graham Dutfield, this collection provides a systematic analysis of the international IP legal framework and its key players, such as the World Intellectual Property Organization and the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV), as well as the main instruments that include the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, and the UPOV Convention. Referring to

IP as a “legal fiction” the authors see the IP regime as an extension of neo-colonialism that aims to further concentrate the power over food sources in the hands of few. The book is organized like a textbook, which makes the information highly digestible even for those with little legal knowledge on the topic. The authors’ stated goal is to provide information to precisely those readers to “help make the discussion and rubout IP, biodiversity and food security more informed and lead to fairer outcomes for all.” The entire text is available free of charge through the IDRC website at http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-118094-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

Alison Blay-Palmer, *Food Fears: From industrial to sustainable food systems* (Ashgate, 2008)

This book starts with food safety horrors that everyone can relate to. But that’s just the hook for a history tour and then a global romp through food system turmoil that’s producing so much to be scared about - and here’s the nice surprise - so much more to be hopeful about. It has great “big picture” advice for people who want to improve the food system, including cautionary tales of how some movements got trapped by their own simplistic rhetoric, and shrewd reminders about the differences between “alternative’ and “oppositional” thinking. Reading it is the perfect brainstorming exercise for volunteers and staff working to sustain community food projects, and for activists trying to coax governments into coming on side with new and environmental concerns around food. (Wayne Roberts, Toronto Food Policy Council)

From the newsletter desk...

We are happy to hear from you with questions or contributions for the next newsletter. If you would like to get in touch, please send an email to:

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