

History of Food Security Initiatives in Peterborough

Includes:
Final Report

By
Amanda Harrison

Completed for: Trent Centre for Community Based Education
Supervising Professor: Margaret Hobbs
Trent Centre for Community-Based Education

Department: Canadian Studies
Course Code: CAST 475
Course Name: History of everyday life
Term: Fall 2004
Date of Project Submission: December 2004

Project ID: 679

Call Number:

List of abbreviations

- APSC –Anti Poverty Steering Committee
- CIDA – Canadian International Development Agency
- COG –Canadian Organic Growers
- COIN –Community Opportunity and Innovation Network
- CSA –Community Shared Agriculture
- CURB –Clean Up Rural Beaches
- DHC –Kawartha Haliburton Pine Ridge District Health Council
- EFAO –Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario
- EFP -Environmental Farm Plan
- FPAC –Food Policy Action Coalition
- KWIC –Kawartha World Issues Centre
- LETS –Local Economic Trading System
- NAFTA –North American Free Trade Agreement
- OATI –Ontario Agricultural Training Institute
- OFA -Ontario Federation of Agriculture
- OFEC –Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition
- OMAF –Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- OPIRG –Ontario Public Interest Research Group
- ORCA -Otonabee Region Conservation Authority
- PCCHU –Peterborough County City Health Unit
- PDFM –Peterborough and District Farmers’ Market
- PSPC –Peterborough Social Planning Council
- WTO –World Trade Organization
- YWCA –Young Women’s’ Christian Association

We've got to feed our own families first; we've got to leave our farms better than we got them... ...You want food security for Peterborough... That's a noble goal, but that's not the farmers' goal. I didn't do it to save Peterborough; I did it to save myself (Leahy 2005).

I don't think we in community development work give enough weight to what it means to sit in a room with someone you've never met before and think, well how are we connected. It's that spark that happens there. (Lalonde 2005)

Coalition work slows you down but opens up a range of possibilities... ...it's the only way to organize. Leave agendas at the door. (Powell 2004)

It's a long term project. It took us a long time to forget about food in the first place, so it's going to take us a long time to relearn (Anderson 2005).

1. Introduction

The 1990s saw an upsurge of interest in the many issues surrounding the food we eat, spurring a high degree of citizen voluntarism and alliance building between many groups and individuals. This paper builds upon existing literature on food system sustainability produced in Peterborough (i.e. Hubay and Powell 2000; Andrée 1997), with the intention of informing future work, both academic and activist. It documents a number of initiatives that took place around food issues in the City and County of Peterborough in the 1990s. It serves as a backgrounder for current initiatives, so that these may proceed from a well informed perspective, making effective use of lessons learned in the past.

The focus of this research is to provide a historical overview of food issues work in Peterborough and Peterborough County in the 1990s, with particular attention to the ways in which County farmers were brought into conversations in the City, as these conversations progressed from food security to local food system sustainability. This overview leads to a discussion of the structural barriers impeding the farm sector from participating in a movement toward a sustainable local food system that were experienced during this time period.

After laying out the methods and limitations of the study in section 2 and defining the conceptual framework in section 3, the paper gives a description of the agricultural situation, both at a policy and extension level and at the level of individual producers, in section 4. Section 5 looks at food system education work that was done at the community level with involvement from Trent faculty and students. Sections 6 and 7 describe the

networking activities of community development and public health agencies and the food security work that emerged from two visioning processes that were held. In section 8, a period of broad cross-sectoral organizing was entered, in which participants reflected on the need for a move from a food security model to a sustainable local food system model. An account is given of the formation and activities of the Food Policy Action Coalition (FPAC), a broad based grassroots coalition which was formed to foster communication between local farmers and other members of the food chain. Section 9 looks at the cuts in public spending that were instituted by the provincial Conservatives of 1995 and their aftermath. Section 10 analyses the findings of the research, assessing the strengths and limitations of FPAC. Three practical next steps are identified, all of which are already underway, and a fourth, the research dimension, is touched upon briefly before concluding.

2. Methods and Study Limitations

A series of 18 interviews was conducted with people involved in attempts to change the Peterborough food chain of the 1990s. These included farmers, agency staff, former students and farm sector representatives. Additionally, a focus group, facilitated by the author, was held on March 16, 2005, in which 12 people, both informants of the study and Trent University students with an interest in food issues and their history locally, got together to recall the past and look toward the future. Complementing these research methods were a review of gathered grey literature including meeting minutes, pamphlets, newsletters of various organizations etc., in addition to primary and secondary literature.

It is unfortunate that none of the urban low income people referred to in this report are named. The only low income people that were interviewed for the project were farmers. The various community workers, organizers, and animators whose stories I have collected have all repeatedly stressed however that urban people experiencing food insecurity were in an increasing number of cases the visionaries, designers and motivators of the work. The study's agricultural focus is complemented by another work being done on anti hunger actions for the same period (Harrison 2005).

It is unfortunate as well that the scope of the paper did not allow for a longer look, either backward into the 1980s or forward to the present, as many of the stories of the 1990s either have their roots before then, have continued until today, or both. The period of the 1990s was chosen because, to the extent possible, it represents a self-contained historical episode, in which groups from rural and urban spheres came together to discuss the relationship they had and to improve it. It is a unique and interesting period, and one worthy of further examination.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Food Security

Discourse began to shift from 'food charity' models to exploring new models informed by ideas of 'food security' during the early 1990s (TFPC 1994, qtd. in Powers 1999, p33). In a food charity model, thought of as emergency food aid, the food provided is often 'seconds' purchased from supermarkets or the food terminal. A food security model moves beyond the emergency mode, and begins to look to ensuring the capacity of

citizens to access food into the future. Food security, as defined by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, means:

“...that food is available at all times; that all persons have means of access to it; that it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety; and that it is acceptable within the given culture. Only when these conditions are in place can a population be considered “food secure” (qtd. In Koc et.al 1999, p. 1).

This concept represents a quantum leap from food charity models, which do not look to the future, and can thus serve to perpetuate the poverty they relieve. This said, it nonetheless provides the ‘what’, without the ‘how’. Food security could be provided in a variety of ways, some of which put the onus upon those individuals experiencing food insecurity rather than other political and economic factors. It was this shortcoming of the concept of food security that led scholars and practitioners to bring in other goals. The idea of sustainability was a key addition to this discourse.

3.2. Food system sustainability

The broad definition of sustainability given by the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987) has served as a starting point, from which scholars have developed more specific definitions to be used in a wide variety of applications. The broad Brundtland definition highlights the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental, taking in virtually *all* the activities of all sectors of society. This study is concerned with agricultural sustainability, and food system sustainability as it is conceived within a

localist framework,¹ that is, at the community level. Feenstra has defined a community food system as:

A collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies -one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental, and social health of a particular place” (Feenstra 2002).

Thus, while ‘sustainable community food systems’ (interchangeable with sustainable *local* food systems) certainly contains the three dimensions of sustainability broadly defined, the scope of the term is narrowed. For the purposes of this study, economic sustainability in the food system refers to the financial solvency of agri-food enterprises. Social sustainability entails the equity aspect of the system, that is, the ability to access safe, healthy, appropriate food by *all* consumers now and in the future, and the various connections that are necessary to accomplish this. A particularly useful definition of environmental sustainability to this study is provided by Andrée, as understood by area farmers: the “conservation of renewable resources that farming depends on, including soils and water, and non-renewable resources like fossil fuels”, and “protection of long term environmental quality and biodiversity” (Andrée 1997a). The particular set of means to this end examined in this paper are on-farm efforts to run more ecologically friendly operations by reducing off-farm inputs such as chemicals, and efforts to market direct to consumers that are nearby, reducing fossil fuel use in transportation.

¹ For a detailed review of literature on localism, self-reliance, sustainable community development, and local food systems, see Soots, L.K., 2003.

The three areas are inextricably linked, though they are striven for more at certain times and by certain groups than others, as some see one set of issues as being more important than another. Often, gains can be made in more than one, or all three, with a single project. For instance, a project designed to keep cattle fenced away from the river may be conceived strictly as an environmental initiative. But if the farmer is provided with a financial contribution to the costs of the project, in addition to a labour saving technology, then it becomes an economic initiative as well. And in improving the financial well being of the farmer, at the same time as helping to protect a water source, the social component of sustainability is enhanced as well, by strengthening relationships between the farmer and the agency who delivered the program, between the farmer and their community who can now swim in the river more often, and between the farmer and their customer whose source of product has been made more secure.

The concepts of a sustainable food system and food security are mutually inclusive; they require one another to exist. However, this can by no means be taken to imply that they are easy to integrate at a practical level. Numerous scholars have observed this difficulty, pointing out the many inherent complexities, both at a theoretical and case study level (Power 1999, Allen 1999, Soots 2003, Dobyns 2004). The experience of Peterborough City and County presented below is a further testament to this difficulty.

4. The Agricultural Conjuncture ca. 1990: Crisis and the cost-price squeeze

At the beginning of the 1990s, farmers were still feeling the effects of the recession of the early 80's, which saw interest rates reach heights of 22 and 23%. Crop

farmers were hit especially hard during this time, and many were squeezed out of business (Cockburn 2005). Indeed, the statistics show the number of census farms in Peterborough County decreased by 176 from 1 576 in 1981 to 1 400 in 1986 (OMAF 1995). By the early nineties, although the number of census farms in Peterborough had remained constant through the latter half of the 80's, farmers were still struggling with this problem, which exacerbated the ongoing 'cost-price squeeze', a phenomena caused by inflation and rising input costs on the one hand, and stagnant or declining prices of farm commodities on the other (Winson 1993, p90). Researchers have attributed this trend to increasing corporate concentration in the 'middle man' sector -commodity traders, processors, distributors, and retailers becoming fewer and larger, and absorbing the gains in efficiency made by the agricultural sector (Qualman 2004). Kneen published his book *From Land to Mouth* in 1992, coining the term 'distancing' to describe the number of transactions that take place in this middle terrain, and the implications both in terms of the consumer's knowledge of the origins of their food, and the inherent inefficiency of moving food over such immense physical distances, with producers (and in a different way, consumers) ultimately emerging as the losers in the bargain (Kneen 1992). There was a growing awareness, on the part of farmers and certain commodity groups during this time, of the importance of the promotion of farm fresh foods as a way to diminish this distance (Cockburn 2005). Locally, the ongoing strength of the Peterborough and District Farmers' Market since its establishment in the early 1800s was a long standing sign of this awareness.

4.1. The role of government

The government, its regulatory structures, and its representatives have the officially stated goal of supporting the functioning of the agri-food industry, which they want to be

a growing, competitive, market oriented agriculture and agri-food industry that is profitable and responds to the changing food and non-food needs of domestic and international customers; is less dependent on government support; and contributes to the well being of all Canadians and the quality of life of rural communities, while achieving farm financial security, environmental sustainability and a safe, high quality food supply. (qtd in MacRae 1999).

These goals are often at cross purposes, representing the constellation of interests that governments are expected to serve. The order in which they are listed here, though, does not seem trivial to the scholars who have characterized both federal and provincial (Ontario) agricultural policy as having been ‘captured’ by agribusiness interests and the highly concentrated processing and retailing industries, who support the neoliberal agenda of trade liberalization (MacRae 1999, Montpetit 2003, Winson 1993). They would basically see a list like this as looking after business’ interests first before getting around to the public interest. The policies that emerge from such a statement of purpose reflect this, being heavily weighted to favour the big industrial players.

Thus, the fact that during the 1990s certain local extension agents were active in lending support to small farmers’ efforts to market directly would appear to be a relative

anomaly. Local direct marketing and environmental sustainability were pursued by farmers and extension agents with limited funds and personnel, despite the larger context of the massive effort to industrialize and compete in a globalizing marketplace. These two sets of goals are largely at odds with one another, and in an exceedingly unfair contest for public money. The following section gives a glimpse of these complex relations with the farm sector as they were happening in the local work of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's (OMAF) Peterborough office.

4.1.1. OMAF Peterborough

OMAF (renamed the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) with the entry of the NDP into power in 1990) had their regional office in Peterborough until 1996. The office had a number of representatives working both at the county level and regionally, assigned to various positions either in support of specific commodity groups or other areas such as farm business management or rural community development (Maltby 2005). These were all under the coordinating position of the agricultural representative, John Cockburn. The extension function of OMAF, designed along the dominant 'technology transfer' model, basically entailed the communication of research from land grant universities (Guelph in this case) (Cockburn 2005). During the 1990s, some of the technology that OMAF was involved in transferring was no-till cultivation and new crop varieties. This was done through the use of seminars, workshops and short courses. They were also in charge of delivering various government programs, such as a grant program to support the installation of tile drainage systems, which lasted from the 1960s into the early 1990s (Cockburn 2005). These were programs

geared to large producers, but the office did have a mandate to attend to the needs of small and medium producers as well.

The farm business management specialist, Ken Maltby, ran a farm management analysis project which offered farmers the opportunity to rate their performance against others in the province using specialized software. Toward a similar end, but using a more direct technique, a dairy management club had farmers comparing their financial info with others from their area. Maltby was encouraged by this process, seeing farmers gain a “...certain amount of trust, where you get to the point of [being] willing to share. [They] knew others were doing better and wanted to know how” (Maltby 2005).

The work of OMAF representatives was forced to change with the times during Maltby’s years there, and within the same office there were those who wanted to promote change according to the export-led model and those who were interested in strengthening local marketing channels. Coming from a direct farm market background, Maltby was a strong proponent of the latter agenda. He worked extensively with community groups and groups of small farmers who were working to build more direct links in the local food chain, and was able to see the benefits to farmers of marketing direct to the consumer, rather than dealing with wholesalers. As well, he was agreeable to the trend to organic production, a rarity at the time among OMAF personnel. In terms of direct marketing, the general trend across Canadian agricultural policy was beginning to move more toward free trade, and away from a focus on domestic markets, to the dismay of supply managed sectors like dairy and poultry. Maltby’s area of experience, fresh produce, was also an exception to this trend (Maltby 2005). Ontario Foodland, the fresh fruit and vegetable

marketing arm of OMAF, even ran a series of television ads in 1991 encouraging consumers to buy local, as part of their focus on marketing Ontario produce within the province (*New Series* 1991).

4.1.2. Provincial agri-environmental programs

In the late 1980's and early 1990s, public environmental awareness generally, and of agriculture's role in a clean environment, had risen significantly (Maltby 2005). Overall, pesticide use was down over the previous decade (Gallagher 1994), as a function both of heightened environmental awareness and the rising cost of inputs generally. The public's awareness and pressure on government, especially with regards to farm runoff and streambank erosion, got to the point where the government would be forced to release some dollars to fund on-farm environmental projects (Maltby 2005). Practices such as deep tillage, unsound manure management, and cattle access to streams had led to an excess of fertility in the watercourses; associated high bacterial counts were resulting in closed beaches, and ground water quality was threatened (Andrée 1997a). In Peterborough County, the projects took two forms: the Clean Up Rural Beaches (CURB) program and the Environmental Farm Plan program (EFP).

CURB was an initiative to fence cattle away from streams and other water bodies, funded by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and delivered locally by the Otonabee Region Conservation Authority. Though CURB didn't begin until 1991, there was a history of this kind of work in the area, called the Indian River beaches program, initiated in 1986, and funded by the Ministry of the Environment Provincial Rural Beaches Strategy. The CURB program awarded funding to the Otonabee Region

Conservation Authority (ORCA) for shared cost grants for fencing and alternative cattle watering systems. The program was adopted widely by area farmers. It lasted through much of the early part of the nineties, making significant gains in water quality (ORCA; 1992). It did not live to see the end of its five year term, however, as it was cancelled prematurely when the Conservatives came into power in 1995 (Montpetit 2003).

The Environmental Farm Plan was a similar program that was the product of a more collaborative process, proposed, designed and managed by a coalition of farm organizations called the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition (OFEC). It served 12 000 farmers across Ontario from 1993 to 1998, through federal dollars from Canada's Green Plan Program. It involved participants in a participatory education workshop series, during which farmers collectively decided which were the most environmentally unsound aspects of their operations and devised a plan for improving them. The program offered a shared cost grant of up to \$1500 for improvement costs (Grudens-Schuck 2000). It was widely adopted by farmers, with 80.9 percent of census farms in Peterborough County participating (Fitzgibbon 2004). Several of those interviewed for this study expressed positive opinions on it (Anderson 2005, Maltby 2005, Leahy 2004).

Conclusions can be drawn here about the sustainability efforts of farmers in general, without differentiating between 'conventional' and 'organic'. As Cockburn emphasised, "*all* farmers are interested in sustainability. Their entire livelihood depends on that top six inches of topsoil" (Cockburn 2005). In view of the wide participation in the CURB and EFP programs, it becomes clear that assumptions that industrial farmers

are entirely disinterested in running environmentally sustainable operations are premature.

4.2. Local farmers reach out to consumers: Farm Comes to Town

Local farmers were well aware at this time of the knowledge distance between producer and consumer, and engaged in a number of efforts to reduce this distance. Among these were the annual 'Farm Comes to Town' events that began in 1990. These were held at the Morrow building in October, aimed at educating urban elementary school classes about farming. They brought in animals for the children to see, with a display from each of 10 different commodity groups. A similar event had been held for a few years in the Lansdowne Place mall, organized by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, but the impact was found to be limited in that location. OMAF rural community specialist Chuck Lamers called a series of brainstorming meetings, from which the idea of Farm Comes to Town emerged. The first year saw participation from approximately 100 volunteers for the two day event. This event was well received by the schools; attendance reached up to 2000 visitors in their biggest year. The project was funded by contributions from the individual commodity groups the first few years, before they went to charging a fee per class visit. The idea was emulated in other communities, with support and encouragement from the Peterborough group (Examiner 1990; Cornish 2005). Farm Comes to Town was held for 10 years from 1990 to 2000. 'Burnout' was the factor seen to be the cause of its cancellation. Volunteers were more than willing to contribute each year at the time of the event, but the task of arranging visit times and

coordination of displays was an all-year volunteer position that became impossible to fill (Cornish 2005).

4.2.1. The Peterborough Farmgate Sales Association

The Peterborough Farmgate Sales Association, established in 1992, was an effort on the part of area farmers who wanted to market direct to the consumer to raise their profile and earn a retail price. They did this by issuing a brochure with information on items offered at each farm, and a map to show customers how to get to the farms. Signs were made to be hung at the road by the farmers (*Farmers* 1992). The idea was brought to Peterborough by Lois Steed, who had heard of similar efforts in other areas of the province through her involvement with the Peterborough District Women's Institute. It had been used by another chapter of this group, and seemed appropriate for Peterborough (Steed 2004). John Cockburn, the OMAF agricultural representative for the area until 1995, had also seen a similar program working in Renfrew County, and thought that the size of Peterborough lent itself to such an effort. The idea went ahead, with some seed money from the Women's Institute and Ontario Foodland. The first year the association had 35 members and the brochure was updated every few years, with funding in subsequent years coming from membership fees rather than outside sources. By 1995 the brochure included 27 farms, with several having opted out, and some new entries. The idea became quite popular, and was picked up in some 25 counties around the province (Maltby 2005). Consumer response to the initiative was mixed; as beef farmer Bella Ahrens recalled: "We were expecting more of a response than we got" (Ahrens 2005). Another member, Joan Smith, saw this as an instance of the classic strain on farmers

attempting to market their own produce in what little spare time they have after the day's work is done (Smith 2004). Since the 1920s, the Canadian agriculture has been structured in such a way that farmers themselves are not responsible for marketing their products; rather, this function is assumed by national and provincial marketing boards, and wholesalers.

4.3. Farmers' individual efforts to market organically produced foods

To adequately represent the efforts of farmers to pursue sustainability, it would be inaccurate to touch only upon their collective efforts. In general, as they have mentioned, compared to other countries "Farmers are not organized" (Leahy 2005). The real efforts of farmers are more often centred around what they do on a daily basis on their individual farms. One example of this is the story of Peter and Ada Leahy of Merrylynd Farm near Douro. They were among the first in the region to convert to organic production. Theirs had always been a conventional cow calf beef farm, which, as Maltby attests, is both the most common and least profitable farm commodity group in the County (Maltby 2005). They started certifying their calves as organic, and selling finished beef. They sold the beef from the farmgate, cutting out a middle man. An additional advantage they found to the strategy was that not only did they get the full retail price, but their price lacked the volatility characteristic of the world market. "We weren't hit by BSE prices"². He told a similar story for their direct grain sales, which, like beef, is largely unprofitable to the

² Though this event happened in 2003 and not in the 1990s, Peter gave it as an illustration of price stability afforded by direct marketing. For an overview of the BSE crisis in the Canadian beef sector, see CBC online "Mad Cow in Canada: The science and the story" at <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/madcow/index/html>>.

farmer in the conventional supply chain, where Ontario producers compete against high yields in Western Canada. The Leahys certified their fields organic, but still had to send the grain to Western Ontario to get cleaned and returned to their customers here in the East/Central region, so they bought their own equipment. This strategy gives the farm “a bit of an identity” to attract local customers like Sticklings Bakery (Leahy 2005).

Joan and John Smith’s story follows a similar vein to that of the Leahys’. They spent the 1970s milking a small dairy herd and going further and further into debt. In the early 80s, when the banks started calling in their debts, they were on the brink of getting into a much larger consolidation loan from Farm Credit, who were pressuring them to expand their operation, but decided against it. Instead they opted to move in the opposite direction from what the agricultural establishment was advising and to cut their expenses by minimizing off-farm inputs, such as chemical fertilizers. They bought a Clyde horse for draft power, and spent the 1990s marketing their produce directly, through PGFSA and a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) garden. CSAs are a system of ‘subscription farming’ where customers purchase a share of the harvest and receive a basket of produce each week throughout the growing season. They also found support in their transition to organic through the various workshops and farm tours that were offered in the area, through the Ecological Farmers’ Association of Ontario (EFAO) (Rousse 1994).

4.4 Mutual support associations in organic and ecological agriculture

When the Leahys arrived back in the area in 1987, after living in Western Ontario, they were the only organic farm for miles. “Nobody was doing it... ..you didn’t even talk about it. You’re a loner...” (Leahy 2005). He was able to get support from the

(EFAO). This is a farmer run, volunteer driven, membership organization dedicated to facilitating the exchange of practical information among farmers on ecological farm management practices. They are a very effective group at fostering dialogue among farmers, especially welcoming to conventional farmers interested in making the transition to organic, as they “don’t alienat[e anyone] by getting into the organic argument” (Maltby 2005). Leahy helped to get the Central Ontario chapter started, and there were a number of workshops and farm tours in the region in the early 90s. The workshops, giving an introduction to ecological farming, and more advanced subtopics, were led by Ted Zettel and other farmers from the Western Ontario chapter. The series had financial support from the Ontario Agricultural Training Institute (OATI) (Beebe 2005; Rostkowski 2005).

The Canadian Organic Growers (COG) set up a Kawartha chapter in the early part of the 1990s, to formalize the small network of organic growers and work to promote organic gardening and farming. They published their own directory of local organic producers, and a series of fact sheets on food and gardening techniques (Anderson 2005).

To organize ecological/organic farmers in the Central Ontario region proved a difficult task in comparison to the Western region, where farmers are more geographically concentrated and there is a stronger dairy sector. The EFAO’s central Ontario chapter held its board meetings by conference call, and their annual general meeting, apart from farm tours and workshops, was often the only time chapter members would meet face to face. Getting farmers together for meetings in a region where they are so spread out was also a difficulty for the Kawartha COG chapter. This is a problem that

is not faced by larger farm organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), whose budgets are exponentially larger than these small, volunteer based associations. The larger farm organizations receive membership dues which are mandatory in order for farmers to be recognized as such by Revenue Canada. It is in ways such as this that agricultural policy creates the situation where, in one farmer's words, "The onus is always on the little guy" (Rostkowski 2005).

5. Food system education work

The phrase "think globally, act locally", popularized by evolutionary economist Hazel Henderson, was a common slogan in development and environment circles at the beginning of the 1990s (Current Biography 2003). As students and faculty began to think through what this meant, an interest in bioregional approaches to global problems arose at Trent, and people began to organize to address the negative impacts of globalization in the community. Food security became a subject of interest for students of international development, political economy, environment and other disciplines in the early nineties. Though there were as yet no courses offered with a specific focus on food issues, the subject was touched upon in a variety of other courses, and students were beginning to look at food issues and the politics of food. This interest took on increasing prominence through the work of professors like Mustafa Koc and community organizations like the Kawartha World Issues Centre (KWIC), who cooperated to organize public education events (Slavin 2004). KWIC fast became a key player in creating connections, both between the global and the local realms, and between Trent students and the local community. Through core funding from the Canadian International Development Agency

(CIDA) and ready access to program funding from a variety of other sources, they served as host to a variety of groups working on various projects and campaigns. They played a key role in facilitating the birth of a number of organizations that still thrive today, providing locally specific, vital services to the community. Among these were the various community gardens, and Peterborough Green-up.³

The product of an undergraduate student thesis by Cathy Dueck, Ecology Garden was initially located at the Rogers Street community garden. It was designed as a teaching/learning site for community members around the larger environmental effects of our interactions with the landscape in our backyards. They held a regular workshop series on food gardening, and summer organic farm and garden tours, based in the early years out of both OPIRG (Ontario Public Interest Research Group), a local organization that existed to coordinate and support student activist work, and KWIC (Anderson 2005, Andrée 2005).

KWIC had also been holding events for UN world food day, October 16, since their formation in 1989 (Morales 2004), and bringing in speakers such as Brewster Kneen. Connected with a food-minded activist and academic community in Toronto, Mustafa Koc helped to bring speakers including Toronto food policy analyst Rod MacRae and Brewster Kneen to these KWIC sponsored events (Slavin 2004). Another of the initial public education programs offered by KWIC and OPIRG was a series of supermarket tours. These were an effort to begin to bridge the gap between producer and

³ For a more thorough account of the history of KWIC and its various offspring, see Morales, Debora, “The First Fifteen Years: A History of the Kawartha World Issues Centre (KWIC) 1989-2004”

consumer, by leading a tour of the supermarket, providing environmental and political-economic information on the food chain through which many of the items available travel on their way to the household. They were held the first year, 1989, in Peterborough, Millbrook and Norwood (Morales 2004).

6. Two community visioning processes 1990-91

A number of community members and agency staff began to network around the concept of food security, in meetings initiated by the fledgling Peterborough Healthy Communities Network.⁴ This was a grassroots focussed movement which emphasised community discussions, beginning from a visioning process that asked workshop participants what a healthy community looked like, in a popular education format, inviting them to draw their vision on paper (Hubay and Powell 2000).

This was a vital, process-focused endeavour that had few immediate tangible products. Rather, the focus was on professional development and organizational capacity building. Its effect was to forge links between the various public health promotion agencies represented (including ParticipAction, the Haliburton, Kawartha and Pine Ridge District Health Council (DHC), Peterborough County City Health Unit (PCCHU), Peterborough Social Planning Council (PSPC), Peterborough Children's Services and the Victorian Order of Nurses), drawing (literally) out the commonalities of the ultimate goal toward which they were all working. This was summarized in their mission statement:

⁴The Healthy Communities movement was the product of a workshop held in 1984 called "Healthy Toronto 2000" which prompted the World Health Organization to initiate their Healthy Cities project, which in turn spawned over 20 regional associations worldwide. Ontario's Healthy Communities Coalition was formed in the late 1980s with funding from the Ministry of Health (OHCC).

“to share and promote a vision of an environment enabling the full physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and mental wellness of both the individual and the community at large” (Mitchell 1994). In a large majority of the drawings, food security was a key element of this enabling environment (Hubay and Powell 2000). The mission statement was as far as the process went in that incarnation. From there, for the most part, agencies saw for themselves to acting on it. The Healthy Communities Visioning Process is credited with building consensus around the need for a shift to health *promotion* as opposed to illness treatment in several of the participant agencies (Mitchell 1994).

These visioning sessions were taking place at the same time as the PSPC was launching a comprehensive anti-poverty initiative. This initiative was also planned by a wide range of sectors representing people living on low incomes, agency and government representatives, the faith community, and other concerned citizens. The Anti-Poverty Steering Committee (APSC) was an outcome of this initiative, and was another instance of alliance building and intersectoral partnerships which identified needs in the community and proceeded to act on them. The APSC focused on issues related to both the causes and symptoms of poverty. It was a vital first experience for many in terms of anti-poverty work that actively involved beneficiaries (low income people) in the planning process. Among the direct outcomes of the work of the APSC was the establishment of the Community Opportunity and Innovation Network (COIN) (Hubay

and Powell 2000; Powell 2004). COIN has been a vital instrument in economic development in Peterborough and the surrounding region since its founding in 1993.⁵

Jacqueline Powell, then executive director of the PSPC, highlights these processes as a vital avenue for community directed program planning:

I think it would be fair to say that the community embraced the planning processes which were manifested in both visioning processes, and proceeded to effect changes as a result of the identification of issues of common concern. (Powell 2004).

A common theme that emerged from this entire process of visioning and organizing was that food security was a vital element of a healthy community that Peterborough residents living on low incomes could not say they all enjoyed. In the years that followed, a number of food action projects were undertaken by low income people, with the staff support of various agencies like the Peterborough County-City Health Unit and the YWCA through time-limited grants, including community gardens, collective kitchens, food box programs, and field gleaning.

7. Anti poverty food actions

The following is a brief outline of the main strategies undertaken by people working at the consumption end of the food chain, working toward the goal of food

⁵ For further information on COIN, see <<http://www.coin-ced.org/ind/index.php>>

security by increasing the community's capacity to provide food for their own families⁶ (Favreau 2004).

7.1. Community Gardens

Since 1992, there have been several different community gardens active in town for those without the space to grow their own vegetables (Hubay and Powell 2000) These take on a variety of forms ranging from a large, highly organized garden at Mt St. Joseph's Convent on Monaghan St., where gardeners pay a \$20 fee per summer for a plot, to a smaller, more loosely organized one on Bonnaccord St. where gardeners can get a plot for free. Six of these were organized by cooperative housing associations, with support from the YWCA and KWIC's community food workers. (Slavin 2004, Favreau 2005), and located on land donated by churches, the City of Peterborough, and the Peterborough Utility Commission (Hubay and Powell 2000).

7.2. Collective Kitchens

A group of collective kitchens started in 1990, with short term funding from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services for programs that provided an alternative to food banks. The participants were largely working mothers of school-age

⁶ For further detail on these programs, including the extent to which they still exist, see Harrison, 2005 (forthcoming)

children with limited time and financial resources. They would come together to prepare meals to be reheated through the week, from ingredients purchased collectively either by a group member or community worker. This helped families to stretch their budgets and increase the variety of foods they could offer their families (Hubay and Powell 2000).

7.3. Food Boxes

In a similar effort to take advantage of purchasing in bulk, food box programs were initiated at this time to offer affordable groceries to low income residents, at a subsidized price. These programs were coordinated both by the YWCA and the Salvation Army (Hubay and Powell 2000). The YWCA's food box started in 1996 when a group of women who had been running their own program, distributing mostly non-perishable items approached the YWCA for staff support and a space in which to pack the boxes. This program began with 10 boxes, at a cost of \$20 each. In the late 1990s when members found funding from the Federal Child Tax Supplement to provide a subsidized \$10 box, the program grew to 500 boxes a month (Favreau 2005).

7.4. Field Gleaning

Another of these hunger relief projects, initiated in 1995 by the YWCA was the Gleaning program. A YWCA staff person arranged for transportation of groups out to area farms to harvest what was left after the market harvest was done. One farmer who has stuck with this program since its inception, Gerry Omarra, feels that the reason other farmers haven't stayed on board is that a majority of them are in debt, and find it hard to justify giving away produce that could be sold. His farm is paid for, and he does it for the

gratification of being a good neighbour. He says it doesn't affect his sales, as the gleaners, in the true sense of the word, are not taking anything he would get around to selling anyway. But the food is certainly of value to the program participants. YWCA staff have calculated his contribution, at \$18 000 for one year, in supermarket prices (Omarra 2005).

7.5. An accessible CSA garden

As an outcome of the discussions of a group of low income women, farmers and others that were meeting to discuss the possibility of establishing a community wellness centre that would be accessible to low income people, Landroute, one of the first CSA gardens in Peterborough was established in 1996 (Slavin 2004). A unique arrangement, this CSA was set up on land within biking distance of downtown Peterborough, donated by Linda Slavin. It provided members with an accessible CSA, while providing an income for its low-income organizers, Ruth and Sara Schaeffer. The bike access was a key factor in attracting members who wanted to pay for their vegetables with labour rather than cash (Hooper 2005). This was the only of the anti poverty food actions that was not a program of any particular agency; thus it required no staff support and funded itself.

7.6 Changes in staff support

In evaluating the various agency food action programs, a major drawback that became apparent was the difficulty in staffing them. As Hubay and Powell explain,

Before 1994, [collective kitchens, food boxes and community gardens] were staffed largely through short-term, start-up grants, such as the

Ministry of Health's Health Promotion Grants, but this method was too unpredictable. At the end of the grant period, while local interest in the food action program was high, there was a lack of organizational support to sustain that interest. So in 1994 and 1995, at least four local organizations –including the PSPC, PCCHU, KWIC and the YWCA–reorganized their resources to provide staff or volunteers with mandates to support these grassroots food action networks and to advocate for food security (Hubay and Powell, 2000).

That the agencies were willing to make these changes in staff positions is an indication of the level of communication and trust that had been established through the various networking processes of the previous years. Their work raised awareness of food security issues, and empowering participatory approaches were key to bringing new people on board. The years that followed saw a level of voluntarism and coalition building that would be unparalleled thereafter, establishing a whole new set of connections between community organizations, students, the local food service industry and farmers. The urban, antipoverty, food security movement had reached the point in its practice and evaluation of food security discourse from which it could envision the next step: to work toward a sustainable community food system.

8. Broad cross-sectoral organizing

KWIC's 1994 World Food Day forum, "Getting our Food onto our Tables" led to the formation of a Food Security Working Group which met the following winter to discuss issues of food accessibility and sustainability in the local food system. This group shared ideas and resources with one another, drawing on experience from visits to other projects in Toronto like St. Francis' Table, a low income restaurant run by the Franciscan monks. Another important contact that was made in Toronto was networking that Linda Slavin and others were doing with the Toronto Food Policy Council and Foodshare.

Learning about these organizations' accomplishments was helpful in devising a strategy for larger scale food policy organizing that would be appropriate to Peterborough. Discussions were underway to develop the idea of forming an organization that would perform a community food systems research function. The Food Policy Action Centre Steering Committee, an alliance between KWIC and PSPC with support from Trent University, was formed to plan the project, develop proposals and approach potential partners. Their proposal for jobsOntario Community Action funding, to be used for the initial phases of the project, "was killed by one low level bureaucrat who didn't like it" (Slavin 2004). Despite this rebuke, and in classic Peterborough form, the efforts continued. A Community Food Mapping Workshop was held in April of 1995, engaging some 40 people involved in food and agriculture in Peterborough County in a popular education exercise to determine where the food we consume originates from, and where the food we produce in the County ends up. Debbie Field and Mary Lou Morgan from Field to Table and Foodshare in Toronto came up to help Peter Andrée, a graduate student at Trent and member of the Food Security Working Group, with facilitation. This was a useful session in bringing to participants' attention some of the dynamics of long food chains, including inaccessibility to some consumers, low prices (but a measure of stability) to farmers, and a failure to support the local economy. A key barrier to changing this dynamic, identified by restaurateurs, was a lack of consumer demand.

8.1. The FPAC years

In the organizational space that would have been occupied by the Food Policy Action Centre/Community Food Policy Institute, the Food Policy Action Coalition

(FPAC) was formed. Their mandate was the same as that of the proposed Action Centre/Institute, word for word: “to create a just, healthy, and environmentally sustainable food system that would strengthen the local economy” (Hubay and Powell 2000). FPAC was a broad grouping of representatives from all areas of the food system, and was the first concerted attempt in Peterborough to bring producers into the discussion that had been arising in the city around food security, among consumers, academics, agency representatives and people living on low incomes (Lalonde 2005). It was a vital first step, but in Slavin’s view, “people weren’t ready for it” (Slavin 2004).

The first event they sponsored, even before they had decided on the name FPAC,⁷ was “Corn day” in August of 1995. Designed to raise the profile of local produce, this event was publicized in the Peterborough Examiner and involved restaurants and other food service venues,⁸ all offering local sweet corn on the same day, in addition to stands in front of the Peterborough Square and at the Festival of Lights that night. A map to the local farms that had sweet corn was printed in the Examiner on the day of the event, and FPAC had the chance to gain some publicity as well, through an interview with Linda Slavin (Examiner 1995).

Other initiatives of FPAC were continued outreach to labour groups like the Peterborough District Labour Council, which saw the creation of a position for a

⁷ The Examiner article from July 26, 1995 has FPAC as ‘Food Policy Action Centre’, though the memory of Peter André is that they would have been called ‘Food Policy Action Coalition’ by this time, as Corn Day was an initiative of the latter.

⁸ Participants were: Hot Belly Mama’s, Civic Hospital cafeteria, Marriott Foods at Trent University, Electric City Gardens, Kayos Cafe and Revue Cinema, the Peterborough Arms, The Parkhill Café, Paradiso and Ohh My Goodness Café.

community development worker in food issues. The position allowed FPAC to hire two part-time staff members responsible for holding a workshop series with union members to educate them about the food system, and the experience. Items explored were consumer demand (or lack thereof) for local or organic foods. This was also a useful opportunity for the FPAC staff, whose awareness of the issues was high and who had already modified their consumption patterns accordingly, to learn about the perspectives of those whose awareness and consumption patterns were more ‘mainstream’⁹. Though the union members’ awareness was found to be high with regard to the importance of buying Canadian, the idea of buying local as a further extension of the same concept had not been reached (Andrée 2005). This would be key information for FPAC to work with in planning action and policy recommendations.

8.1.1. Food Access Workshop and Fair

The Food Access Workshop and Fair was held at St Paul’s Church, involving a morning workshop between food producers and food access workers, with guest speaker Tina Conlon from OXFAM, who talked about her experiences, both in Toronto and in Latin America. In the afternoon, the fair was opened to the public.¹⁰ Giselle Lalonde, a community worker with FPAC at the time recalls one of the booths:

⁹ Taken from meeting minutes, and project report: Andrée, P and Woolcott, L. “Getting our food on our tables” Available at KWIC.

¹⁰attendance - Breakfast clubs, Local bulk store, Cen/cam catering, Collective Kitchens, Community Gardens, CSA Deva Gardens, LETS, OPIRG, COG, Ecology Park, Farmgate Sales, Good Food Box Program, Frugal Gourmet Cooking, KWIC, Landroute, Latin American Cooking, Meals on Wheels, Native Friendship Centre of Peterborough Food Programs, Vegetarian Cooking.

I remember that there was a close friend of mine, Rachel Carol, who is a chef, and she did a workshop on cooking with whatever's around on the half price rack. It was a gift to me, because I'm not a cook... It was, for two single moms, great injecting some fun and some style into the cooking (Lalonde 2005).

FPAC had developed a set of policy proposals in preparation for the event. They then revised these to include community input gathered from graffiti boards on the walls of the hall, which asked a few key questions, and produced their resolutions:

That all levels of government:

-Implement an Integrated Food Security Strategy based on the right of all citizens to access affordable, nutritious fresh and safe food

-acknowledging the desperate need for jobs in rural communities and cities, ensure fair wage, provide training for existing jobs, training and support for job creation, self-employment and community economic development as strategies toward food security

-ensure an integrated food security strategy between federal and provincial ministries of health, agriculture, labour, education, and community and social services, natural resources and economic development & trade (FPAC 1996).

The resolutions were endorsed widely among the food access agencies participating in the day.

8.1.2. Public forum on Bovine Growth Hormone

Another well received FPAC event was the public forum on recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH). This was organized by FPAC worker Cam Collyer, a Trent student who had recently finished writing a paper on the subject. The idea had flowed out of discussions among Linda, Jackie and others at FPAC, as it was a hot topic at the time.

The event, held at St. John's Anglican Church, consisted of a panel discussion with a dairy farmer from the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Rod MacRae, and Cam Collyer as facilitator. He recalls:

The room was full, and even local news and television media showed up. In fact, CHEX requested a pre-event interview at their station before the event took place. The event was a success in that there was lively and heated discussion. ...there was a good amount of time for discussion and [for] those in attendance to provide comments and request responses from the speakers. As a student at the time, I remember being surprised by how many people did come out, the fact that media showed up and how passionate people's perspectives were on the subject (Collyer 2005).

The discussion was lively, yet well enough channelled that consensus was reached on what would become the contents of a report that was sent to an MP, who presented the concerns in parliament (Hubay and Powell 2000).

The Bovine Growth Hormone forum, the Food Access Workshop and Fair, the FPAC labour workshops and corn day are actions that can be said to have been undertaken by FPAC primarily. As a broad based coalition, however, FPAC was also involved in lending support to several other initiatives. These included the Wednesday Market, the Kawarthas' Own, Locally Grown campaign, and a feasibility study on incubator kitchens. These are outlined in the next three sections.

8.2. The Wednesday Market

The FGSA, having seen mixed success from their brochures, was brainstorming around further ways to raise the profile of their products. It was always a difficulty getting people to come to the farmgate, and they agreed that the Farmers' market was always the best way to make contact with consumers (Ahrens 2005). Several of the

members of the FGSA were selling on the Peterborough and District Farmers' Market (PDFM) on Saturdays, but were frustrated with the lack of awareness of the shoppers there as to which farmers were selling their own products and which were reselling produce bought at the Toronto food terminal (Smith 2004). Two ways were identified, both centred on differentiating themselves from purveyors of non-local food. These were the creation of a local label for use in their promotional material, and the establishment of an alternative farmers market to the PDFM, to deal only in locally produced food and crafts. Joan Smith was delegated to take this idea to the annual general meeting of the PDFM, and as she related:

You could have cut through the hostility with a knife. They were threatened! There was even the threat of a suit for breaking the 25 year deal they had with the City saying there would be no other farmers market on City property... ..Anyway, we just went for it, gambling that [the PDFM] wouldn't make a court case out of it, and they didn't, seeing that their numbers were not affected (Smith 2004).

The Wednesday Farmers' market was established in the summer of 1996, located on Charlotte Street between George and Water. It was a testament to the ability of FGSA to accomplish their goal of a grower-only market in the downtown, despite a lack of support from a variety of quarters, including their fellow farmers and various members of the Downtown Business Improvement Area. FPAC support was extended in the form of a letter to the mayor (Andrée 2005). AON, the giant land developer and high-rise builder that owns so much of downtown, was in favour of the idea, saying that it would bring in business. Concerns from other downtown food stores that the market would steal their business were softened by the market's offer of a free stall to this handful of businesses (Smith 2004; Ahrens 2005).

8.3. 'Kawarthas' Own, Locally Grown'

The label idea was taken up by Linda Slavin, who worked with the Peterborough and District Labour council to get labour funding for a summer grant. Peter Andrée and Leslie Woolcott worked on this project. In the summer and fall of 1996, a committee of farmers from the FGSA was formed to discuss the matter. They ran a logo contest and put the entries to a vote at a booth at the Saturday market. The winner was “Kawarthas’ Own, Locally Grown”, which was used by FGSA as well as vendors at the PDFM to differentiate locally grown or self-processed foods (Andrée 2005).

8.4. Incubator Kitchen Study

In 1997 came a study, at the request of COIN and as a result of FPAC discussions, into the feasibility of establishing an incubator kitchen in the County. This was also carried out by Peter Andrée, on a position paid for by PSPC, through Human Resources Development Canada (Andrée 2005). Information was gathered on the local agricultural demographics, including products available in the region, and several case studies were looked at, representing three models: shared use, non-graduating, and graduating. The shared use model is a health certified facility that is made available to groups to prepare food products or run catering businesses. They do not necessarily offer industrial equipment, and can be run in rented church kitchens. In the non-graduating model, commercial scale facilities are built for existing food processing enterprises, with low lease rates subsidized by such funders as community economic development corporations, to allow these enterprises to ‘grow into’ increased production capacity. The facilities are custom built for these enterprises to stay in them, rather than moving on to

their own facilities. The graduating model, which was the focus of Andrée's report, entails the construction of a multi purpose commercial scale facility that is designed to accommodate different types of food processing enterprise. After utilising the incubator kitchen for the period of time when their business is growing to a desirable level, clients move on to purchase their own facility (Andrée 1997b).

The results were not as promising as we had hoped. [A common tendency is that] people never... .. graduate. The key was to not take on too many participants, and to train them really extensively. My suggestion was to focus on a careful market study for products to be developed, good business building sense, niche market potential in the local foods, [and to begin at] Sir Sanford [Fleming College's] teaching kitchen (Andrée 2005).

COIN sent proposals to several funders, to no avail. The study came out of a growing contention, resulting from the various dialogues between producers and retailers that one of the key gaps in the local food system is in the processing area. This was but one of the valuable lessons learned by those committed to the goal of FPAC to create a just, healthy and environmentally sustainable food system that would strengthen the local economy. The publishing of this report, however, marked the last evidence of FPAC as a working coalition.

9. The Cuts

In June 1995, Mike Harris' Progressive Conservatives were elected into provincial parliament. It would be during this time that the notorious deep cuts to social programs and all other types of public funding began to make themselves felt in Peterborough. KWIC lost its core funding from CIDA, leaving them mortgaged on the house they had bought, and needing to cut back on staff (Morales 2004). This created

immense challenges for all of the programs and groups that were operating out of the KWIC office, as KWIC would be forced to sell the house in which they were located at a loss, and move into a small temporary space for the next few years. FPAC was one of these groups. They had drawn extensively on the staff support of KWIC and other agencies, including OMAF, who would now be stretched far thinner than they had become accustomed to. A structural advantage of FPAC though, was that they were an umbrella group comprised of paid staff people and volunteers from a wide range of sectors, so for the few years that they remained active, they were able to garner support from sources such as labour that had not yet begun to feel the effects of the austere public budgets that would become common from this point on.

At the same time as the funding cuts, social assistance rates in the province were cut by 22 percent (Powell 2004), instantly increasing the food insecurity problem of recipients that the anti poverty food action projects had been addressing, while the program grants that had been supporting the work also began to dry up. By a stroke of the same pen at Queen's Park, the problem became worse, and the organizational capacity to combat it was drastically diminished.

The farm situation was similar, as OMAFRA's office was moved out to Lindsay and several positions were lost in the shuffle. This came at a time when Canada had just signed on to NAFTA and the WTO had just taken effect. Commodity groups and other farm organizations were starkly divided on the free trade issue, and it was especially the supply managed commodities that were fearful of losing their marketing systems. But

OMAF representatives would be fewer, and less available to assist farmers and their associations in weathering this storm of change (Maltby 2005).

Overall, it cannot be said that the effect of these cuts was anything but attritious to the community work around food issues. This said, however, it is instructive to note just how much volunteer momentum was behind the movement¹¹. Community interest in food security issues remained strong throughout these couple of years, as was shown in the attendance at The Food Access Workshop and Fair, and the Public Forum on Bovine Growth Hormone. By the beginning of 1998, however, this attrition had set in, and activities around the idea of a sustainable food system seemed to drop off entirely.¹² The cuts were now being felt across the entire public and non profit sector, putting a major strain on all of the agencies that supported FPAC, as was demonstrated by a relative lack of new programming and events.

10. Analysis

Many of the food security programs that had begun in the early part of the decade, and especially those that had already ‘taken off’ and required very little agency staff support, were able to continue, such as the community gardens, the gleaning program, and the CSA gardens. The Wednesday market gathered momentum, and took on new growers. Although KWIC’s capacity to fund and support projects had had been almost

¹¹ This volunteer momentum was partially diverted into opposition to the cuts themselves, however, and away from the actual work that had been going on previously. Some, like Powell, saw the cuts as having had a galvanizing effect on social movements. Others, like Slavin, contend that action ‘galvanized’ by outrage is ultimately ineffective compared to action which departs from a place of love.

¹² In the focus group session held as a part of the research for this paper, and in individual interviews, no one recalled any events or activities for 1998 or 1999.

decimated, the various organizations that came out of it in the early 1990s, continued to grow and do vital work. And food issues had come more squarely onto the agenda at Trent during the middle to later part of the decade, with the offering of a course in ecological agriculture in 1994, and a course looking at food in the international development context in 1999. Ecological agriculture had certainly gained popularity among farmers by the late 1990s (Leahy 2004, Maltby 2005). The kinds of connections that FPAC had tried to forge between farmers and urban low income people, however, had not been made (the key exceptions being the field gleaning program and the Wednesday Market), and the dissolution of the Coalition left little forum for them to become established. As Maltby reflected:

The difficult part was, how do you take the problems of an ag sector that's become commodity oriented and can barely break even, how do you then take care of the poor? Some of the farmers that were coming out to meetings were going because they thought it would prop up their industry by selling direct, and would come away cloudy as to what the impact was going to be. ...Many people get to the point where, you can't solve both with one strategy; you have to solve poverty from a social point of view and food from a different perspective. To me it was trying to bridge that gap, and I think when we tried to bridge the gap it got so... such a big bridge... (Maltby 2005).

10.1 Why was this the case?

Just as the shift from food charity thinking to food security thinking represented a quantum leap, the move from food security thinking to sustainable food system thinking which was the *raison d'être* of FPAC represented a very important step, and one for which, as Slavin commented, "people weren't ready" (Slavin 2004). Those versed in the discursive differences between these concepts may have understood the promise that a sustainable local food system holds both for farmers and those experiencing food

insecurity. But the farmers at FPAC's meetings did not see this promise as anywhere close to attainable¹³. The farmers and extension workers interviewed for this study are immersed in a market logic that has little to do with the goals of a sustainable food system.

Two key criticisms of Canadian agricultural policymaking have been advanced by food systems and food policy analysts. The first is that the agricultural sector has long been fragmented along commodity lines, not only creating the political weakness that comes from energies being spent on divergent agendas, but causing farmers to act politically as commodity producers rather than food providers. The second is that the large farm organizations that do span across commodity lines, like the OFA, have gained a size and permanence that "dominates farm level input into the policy system" (MacRae 1999 p. 183, Montpetit 2003). On the whole, the bent of these large organizations is in the interest of agribusiness. Small producers, who are well positioned to market their products in the communities and regions where they live, receive precious little support from this context. Agribusiness interests are so thoroughly entrenched in the entire structure of the sector that small producers' agendas are crowded out, at times even from their own capacity to conceive of them.

The challenge that faced FPAC was one of a fundamental tension that exists in popular education processes, between directiveness and group ownership of the learning. For a group to engage in a learning process which they will *own* the results of, they must

¹³ Joan Smith's take on these conversations was that "It seemed to me like a lot of interminable planning. I didn't get too involved" (Smith 2004).

lead the way, starting where they are. Often the initiators of these processes hold some of the answers, but it would detract from the group's ownership of the results to simply tell them what they are envisioning. This problematic leads to gaps between academic discourse and actual on-the-ground movements. In the case of FPAC, this translated to the limited resonance of the food system discussions with the farmers' situation as they were experiencing it.

FPAC was also formed at what turned out to be an inopportune moment in the political climate, and funding cuts took their toll before a common vision was widely elaborated upon in the way that this had been done in the Healthy Communities and anti poverty visioning processes. This has had the effect for some of leaving a memory of an organization that may have been ill-conceived, rather than simply ill-fated. This memory has led some, as Maltby's reflection illustrates, to wonder whether or not a sustainable food systems approach is the best way. I contend that it is the only way. I believe that the conclusion that farmers issues should be dealt with in one way by one group while antipoverty issues are dealt with in another by another is only partially correct. Ultimately, production issues and consumption issues *are* connected, and the concept of a sustainable local food system is a highly useful tool in reminding us what we are working toward.

10.2. Next Steps

A few key points emerge from this research in the way of future directions. As the five years between 1999 and the present are not accounted for in this paper, and food systems work has of course continued, most of these avenues are already being pursued:

- *Public education around food issues.* This was a key element of the work in the 1990s and has continued. To the extent that the public, including food service workers, is made more aware of the connections between their food, their environment and their health, consumer demand for sustainable produced local food will continue to increase.
- *Development of locally oriented production capacity.* As the demand continues to rise, producers need to develop the capacity to meet this demand. Growers are preparing to meet this demand by exploring season extension and storage systems to better serve the consumer year round. The establishment of more CSAs that are within biking distance of downtown, and more community gardens in town would also contribute to this capacity.
- *Development of local processing and distribution capacity.* Only a small portion of consumers' food dollars are spent on primary farm products. The majority of the demand is for processed foods. The kinds of processing facilities that could find a home in Peterborough and Peterborough County range from incubator kitchens to abattoirs. A vital first step in setting these up is market research.

10.2.1. Further research

Research will increase the effectiveness of efforts in each of the three areas outlined above. Currently, this function is not adequately met as the money is not available to fund this research. This stands to change, however, as Trent University's newly established food and agriculture emphasis gains momentum. To the extent that

research projects for Trent students can be devised by community groups working in these and other food action areas, a vital link can be established between the University and the community, and small producers and other food action initiatives will be able to enjoy the support they need from an academic institution.

The proposal for a Food Policy Action Centre was an attempt to fill this research niche in a community driven way. It would be of use to review the principles upon which the Centre was to be founded in planning for the community's role in Trent food issues research.

Finally, it is abundantly clear that each and every one of the community based food actions described in this report have staffing requirements that are inadequately met in the current funding scarcity. A course on fundraising should be offered at Trent as part of the food emphasis.

11. Conclusion

This study has outlined some of the events, actors and interactions that took place in Peterborough around food issues in the 1990s. The decade saw a number of positive developments, in the agricultural sector, in food security work in the city, and in general public awareness of food issues. In the agricultural realm, farmers made improvements in the sustainability of their operations. They moved away from the worst environmental practices of the previous decade, like excessive pesticide use, and destructive tillage and husbandry practices. They, particularly smaller producers, made some gains in capturing a retail price by organizing to market directly to the consumer. Among this group of

farmers, the ones who occupy the position furthest from the gaze of policymakers, it can be said that some level of consensus was built around the importance of direct marketing.

This said, the anti poverty/food security sphere was able to achieve a far deeper level of consensus around what the community should look like, and inter-agency cooperation was fostered. New community based organizations were formed to pursue a commonly held vision of a healthy community, in ways specific to the character of Peterborough.

In FPAC, the production and consumption spheres converged for a brief period of 3 years during which dialogue was initiated based upon the idea of a sustainable community food system. Many of the outcomes of this convergence are impossible to measure. The general public's awareness of food issues was heightened, increasing the demand for local, ecologically produced food. Vital links were formed between those who produce food and those who consume it, bringing Peterborough closer to being able to envision the potential for a sustainable local food system. These gains were made at the community level, and we as a community get to keep them. Because they were formed at the grassroots, they have a certain durability that is impervious to the vagaries of outside governance and global capital.

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