



Panel Summary - National Rural Summit, October 27, 2007, Ames, IA

Connecting the Dots: Healthy Farms, Healthy Foods, Healthy Communities

Summary notes by Jan Joannides

Panel:

Facilitator: Dale Wiehoff, IATP

Dave Swenson, The University of Iowa and Iowa State University

Carol Richardson Smith, Food and Community Consultant

Susan Roberts – Direct, Thomas Jefferson Agricultural Institute's Food & Society Policy Fellow Program

Susan Roberts

The key purpose of food and farming systems and policies should be to advance the health and well being of all people. America's health and food facts – depressing! We're overfed and undernourished. The average person drinks 53 gallons of soda a year.

Ideal food systems:

1. provide for all in society
2. are safe and nutritious
3. grown in a manner that that protects health of producers, protects the environment and adds value to rural and urban communities
4. are sustainable!

Things to think about: health, peak oil, global warming viability of the family farm, and the impact of corporations.

We produce lots more commodities, more food, and more calories – but we're not producing enough fruit. Need to almost double our acreage. Even worse for vegetables - need to increase acreage by 3 times! Also, in past 15 years – fruits and vegetable prices have increased, soda and junk food prices have decreased.

High fructose corn syrup is everywhere. Didn't have it in 1966, now we eat about 62 lbs of HFCS per year!

Trends in garden crops—nutrients are going down. As we hybridize for more quantity, we're losing quality.

Organic is one of the systems that can be part of the answer. Big study of tomatoes came out in 2007 showing organic did have more nutrition.

Issues:

Pesticides: Study that gave kids conventional versus organic products – found 6 time higher pesticide metabolites in urine samples.

Antibiotics: antibiotic resistance is growing. Use of antibiotics in animals is causing this. Our food system doesn't reflect the diet that we know we should eat.

Carol Richardson Smith

Much of her work is asset-based, focused on participatory community development.

We're coming to new understanding of local.

Dwell Magazine: Headline on recent issue: Sustainability is here to stay. Keys of sustainability are: focus on place, rooted, beginning to seriously think about relocalizing all our systems.

People in rural areas focus on livelihood – not economics. It is an old concept. We need to keep this in mind.

She's part of a committee looking at local food systems. We don't know a lot about what a local food system looks like, so we're bringing people together and having them map their local food system. (*This is the model for the Homegrown Cookbook.*) We've done this in seven counties, and will do in seven or ten more.

We're working on three things:

- 1) System of support – especially for growers
- 2) Concerns about land ownership
- 3) Micro-enterprise support

INCA - Iowa Network for Community Agriculture. We're working to have conversations and make connections. This is a diversified group and we're looking to diversify further.

Land ownership is important. Women own half of the rental ag land in state. (And not all are elderly). Working on a project called Women, Land and Legacy. Women see themselves differently. They see themselves at a locus of connections to other people, to land, to past and future generations. The state outreach council of the USDA sponsors this.

Research suggests micro-enterprises are springing up in rural areas. The demographics show those involved are younger, that their commitment is not big profit, but rather staying in rural places.

What do all these things have in common? They all relate to the need for knowledge — locally and as part of the infrastructure.

Connecting the Knowledge Dots:

- 1) Find out what people know by asking them
- 2) Get people talking to each other
- 3) Extend the conversation.

What people need:

- Access to local information
- Ways to leverage public and private partnerships

Dave Swenson

Lots of new jobs are being produced in the U.S. Every ten jobs are supposed to support 15 people. But while we're adding jobs, we're losing people. The number of jobs isn't telling us what we need.

For example, Carroll County – from 1990 to 2000 – added 2976 jobs and added 1 person. From 2000 to 2004 – added 722 jobs, lost 372 people. What is happening, is that Carroll jobs are supporting people from 5 counties.

Factors influencing regional economic vibrancy:

- regional economic housing
- realities of rural community change
 - consolidation of economic activity into fewer major cities
 - large agriculture pushed people off the land

In Woodbury County - Organic Conversion Policy works to get smaller profitable farms and keep more families on the land. It basically gave people a tax break to farm organically.

Swenson compared a typical producer and an organic producer of the same crops. On a per thousand acre basis – the direct values are larger on the organic farm. Much more money gets made in terms of labor income in the organic rotation.

Fiscal impact didn't make enough to pay back tax benefits – so you have to make the argument on other grounds.

Why don't more farmers do organic then?

Opportunity cost, farmers doing things beside farm, economics may understate total involvement, risk perceptions, bucks the dominant trend

"5-A-Day" Initial Terms

An import substitution study for Leopold Center found combined economic impacts if everyone ate 5 vegetables a day (no potatoes) that were nutritionally dense and were produced in Iowa. We would have incredible economic impact – over 4,000 jobs and 12 million in economic impact. (A number of assumptions included in this study)

Lots of movement happening right now – popular sentiment, energy, natural resources, and policy.