



“How can we build communities in tune with nature’s wisdom in which no one, anywhere, has to worry about putting food – safe, healthy food – on the table?” Francis Moore Lappé, *Hope’s Edge*

We all get hungry every day. Yet we are dependent upon an increasingly vulnerable globalized food system. Not everyone realizes it yet, but feeding ourselves is becoming a big problem! This problem manifests in different ways in different places. Particularly people living in rural areas and in vulnerable economic situations are already painfully “in the know.”

Community organizations and community economic development (CED) groups are responding. Nonprofits, churches, and neighbourhood associations are running *food banks* and *food drives* to help out people who are literally hungry in the streets. This stopgap has its drawbacks, however. Charity food can increase the desperation and dependence of the people they serve. There is never enough food, and the quality of some donations has been documented as causing, or making worse, the medical challenges or predispositions of food bank clients.

Good food boxes, community kitchens, community garden programs and other collective efforts attempt to address these nutritional issues of under- and mal-nourishment but themselves require substantial, ongoing volunteer and charitable support. As neo-liberal governments screw down the hatches on income support, hunger increases, and the charitable response to hunger becomes more and more difficult to sustain.

In fact, *Canada’s farms are in crisis* even though food industries in Canada are posting record profits. Farmers are leaving food production for non-food pursuits at an alarming rate. Government policies favour commodity production but even commodity farmers are losing ground because the rising prices of inputs cancel out documented efficiencies from farmers. Options for producing directly for markets through *farmgate sales, farmers markets, and community-shared agriculture* are gaining in attractiveness. These all require that farmers take on responsibilities in marketing and even in “recreation management” in addition to growing food. Most would rather farm, thank you.

A *demographic problem* is compounding the economic dynamics facing farmers. Most of the people now growing food are heading towards retirement. The rates of replacement and succession are low as young people on and off the farm recognize that farming will not support them into the future.

To top it off, there are labour problems in the agricultural sector. Farm labour wages are low and the work is hard. On account of the dearth of Canadians willing to work under these conditions, governments are flying in migrant workers from Mexico and India!

Why Food? Why Now?

BY FRANK MORELAND & SANDRA MARK

Organic foods are going global. Growing consumer demand for organic food has unleashed corporate strategies to “outsource” these commodities offshore. Small-scale organic farmers are finding it difficult to claim the price margin that their extra labour requires. The switch to organic production is looking less like a key to farm survival than one more revenue stream for Wal-Mart, and growers in California, Mexico, and China.

Where’s the water? Community groups, the Council of Canadians, unions, and others are alerting us to the clandestine process of water privatization that’s going on world-wide. Farmers are facing competition for water not just from industry and rapacious suburbanization, but from tar sands excavation and from foreign buyers.

Looking at the big picture, the current food system is a global “food swap.” Giant, vertically-integrated companies constrain Canadian farmers to growing a narrow

in hand, but the news challenges our faith. Food-borne disease and pandemics make daily headlines. While consumers are becoming wary of genetically-modified (GM) crops, enormous corporate pressure has made governments very slow to regulate them.

No wonder fear is driving a lot of decisions in the food realm these days. *We are all food insecure* – not just the folks who depend on the food banks.

Questions, Questions, Questions

CED and co-op practitioners are already addressing food and agriculture issues in numerous communities. But many food related initiatives struggle and die as government funds dry up. There is minimal access to finance, as even the “friendliest” financial agencies are dubious about investing in a sector where profits are low and competition is fierce. Business planning and support services

Consider this an invitation to sit down, have a cup of Fair Trade tea, & consider your health, your food, & your future. Then let’s strategize, build alliances, scale up initiatives, & reclaim our ability to feed ourselves.

array of agricultural commodities for export (especially wheat, soybeans, and corn) while imposing on Canadian consumers vast quantities of food grown in the South. It’s a system with many weaknesses, not the least of which is its dependence on cheap oil. Most food travels over 2500 miles to get to the industrialized country’s eater’s table. As our fuel prices rise, so too will food prices – exponentially.

All this is happening at increasing risk to health and safety. Busy consumers keep their fingers crossed that the government has quality regulation well

may have little understanding of the principles or purpose of CED or co-operativism. As a result, many projects motivated by social concern are small and respond to the problem of hunger in a direct, specific fashion.

Initiatives that do work within a business model experience all the difficulties that any newcomer to the food industry will discover. The family farms and businesses that are growing and processing food using ecological methods struggle to survive in a system that seems pitted against them. With so much of Canada’s food retail and

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To visit the ongoing **Web Board on food issues**, go to www.ediblestrategies.com and click on **National Practitioners Dialogue**. (When asked for a password, please cite “Guest.” To post messages contact ediblestrategies@shaw.ca with “NPD posting” in the subject line and a password will be provided.)

(left) Photo courtesy of **LAURA BERMAN**, who has contributed almost all the professional photography to this edition. She is a photographer, a landscape architect, and has co-ordinated FoodShare Toronto’s Community Gardening Program for over 11 years. It was through working with FoodShare that photography grew to become a passion to explore the place that food has in our lives, our cultures, and our landscapes.

Laura likes to photograph an eclectic mix of food topics: farms and their farmers, gardens and their gardeners, chefs, and their kitchens – everything about food “from field to table” (to borrow a phrase from FoodShare).

She is also an author, known in North American gardening circles for *How Does Our Garden Grow? A Guide To Community Garden Success*. Her work has been featured on an episode of the HGTV series *Recreating Eden* and her photographs have appeared in gardening magazines such as *Rodale’s Organic Gardening* and in homes around Toronto. They can also be seen at www.greenfusephotos.com. ■

processing system having fallen into the hands of a few big companies in the last 20 years, a local food business faces issues of scale and distribution that not even a strong demand for local products may be able to sway.

Moreover, the terminologies with which civil society debates many questions about food can be confused and confusing. Some talk in terms of food sustainability. For others, its “food security” or “ecological integration” that is the goal. Some understand the “commodification of food” as a recent development, driven by transnational corporations. To others it is as ancient as the shipping lanes on the Mediterranean and China seas. And just what constitutes “organic produce”? Or “real food”? Or “oil-free food”?

Questions, questions, questions. Sometimes they’re inspiring; sometimes, they’re enough to bring on tears. Fundamentally, there is a growing desire in Canada’s communities to reclaim our ability to feed ourselves. What can we

reasonably do to make our food supply plentiful, nutritious, sustainable, remunerative to farmers, yet affordable?

For the purposes of this special edition of *Making Waves* magazine, five questions come to mind specifically for practitioners of CED, social enterprise, and co-operativism:

- Can community-based food initiatives move beyond the shoestring, to become part of a regional or national infrastructure – one that is resilient to low-cost food imports and the hegemony of the big food companies?
- Can we develop models that encourage food-related community initiatives and give them greater hope of economic success?
- Which practices and experiences form the strongest basis for us to scale up initiatives locally, regionally, and nationally?
- Over which parts of the food system can communities assume some control?

- Who are our partners in this endeavour – which community groups, farm organizations, community-based movements, unions, investors, and domestic industrial players? How can we work together across Canada to build viable infrastructure?

But Sandra Mark and I are just two people in Fanny Bay, one of Vancouver Island’s many villages. (There’s nothing like living on an island for making clear the depth and the consequence of our modern dependence on imported food!) How can we be sure that our efforts would make a difference? The only way forward for us is to join our energies with others who are working in the same direction. That realization is behind the project of which this special edition of *Making Waves* represents one part.

The aim of this magazine is to help launch an important dialogue among community “foodies” across the country. It will help us to distinguish between

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emergency response, and the strategic action that can contribute to systemic change. With luck, it will inspire us to work together to scale up our successes. By these means we want to “grow hope” that Canadians can reclaim our ability to feed ourselves essentially within our bio-regions. We want to inspire ourselves with theory and stories from the field.

So consider this magazine an invitation to you to sit down with us (if only virtually), have a cup of Fair Trade tea and consider your health, your food, and your future. And then let’s strategize, build alliances, and scale up initiatives so that we can see more clearly how through community-based action we can reclaim our ability to feed ourselves.

Hungry for Food, Hungry for Action

This special edition is intended to establish the six major strategies of the Growing Hope Project.

Find a common language

It’s hard to conduct a dialogue without a common language. The dominant food system uses confusing language and incorporates structural barriers that make it difficult for food initiatives focussed on quality and co-operation (rather than quantity and monopoly) to get organized. To avoid a similar experience in this project, we propose the foundation of terminology and analysis created by the work of Drs. Tim Lang and Michael Heasman in their book *Food Wars*. They are leaders in mobilizing the British and European consciousness about the food system. See page 12 for a summary of their analysis, which casts our current situation as a contest between two major paradigms of food culture, the Life Science and the Ecological, and the decay of a third, the Productionist.

We also want to be clear about two concepts of “the market.” Lang and Heasman differentiate between the “hypermarket” of transnational corporations and global economics and the more intimate community exchange of “the market square.” The food-related initiatives and enterprises described in this

edition may not challenge the hypermarket just yet, but we hypothesize they have great potential in the market square.

Try on the Theory

New economic theory created by Stephano Zamagni (University of Bologna, Italy) indicates that communities may take the lead in unravelling the seemingly impossible situation in the food sector. Zamagni’s theory (p. 40) suggests ways to create a social market that can address the core issues in reclaiming the Canadian food system. We have represented his analysis of the social market as a triangle centred upon that all-important driver of economic and social change, “the Conscious Consumer” (see p. 33). We take heart from Zamagni’s thinking since it is based on the practice of the co-operative economy of Emilia Romagna. It has been led by a locally rooted food industry that tempts palates

however, is a major building block for enterprises that can’t compete on quantity production and sales. Some intriguing enterprises, Toronto FoodShare for one (p. 28), are finding that high quality products at specialty pricing are strengthening their economic result and helping them meet demanding social and ecological commitments.

To ground our understanding of these examples we also spend some time working with some recent thinking on best practice in values-based business development. W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne from the Harvard School of Business did a recent analysis of successful business practice in the “new economy” as presented in their book *Blue Ocean*. One of the useful tools they developed is the “strategy canvas.” We apply it here in relation to the case of the Kauai Food Bank, a community and business develop-

Our passion is to build a food system that is sustainable ecologically as well as economically, secure for farmers & processors as well as for consumers of every income bracket, good tasting as well as good for us personally, for the places where we live, for our neighbours, & for the generations to follow. We are hungry for good food & we are hungry for action! What about you?

here and around the world with such specialty products as Parmesan cheese and Proscuitto ham.

Raise Up Best Practice

Advocates of the Productionist Paradigm have permeated business consciousness with the notion of the primacy of large, vertically-integrated operations in the food sector. We have gone looking for folks working from a view that is based upon co-operation, alliance-building, and quality.

Many community food enterprises struggle to provide low-priced food for people living on low incomes. Quality,

ment best practice with a systems approach that is truly exciting (p. 19).

Further counsel to our thinking comes from the Chicago Center for Labor and Community Research. It not only advocates a “High Road” to economic development but also demonstrates how striking out on this road delivers in the market square (p. 37). They also assert that part of the High Road approach involves blocking exploitative “Low Road” business practices.

The best practices we look at align with the values of community, ecological sustainability, and social justice in intriguing ways. The Growing Hope

Project will help us understand even more clearly how the value of community translates into economic value when we hold true to our convictions.

Identify Gaps & Issues

Globally and nationally, our food system is in crisis, but how is that crisis being experienced by Canadians in the towns and neighbourhoods where they live? (See p. 8.)

The Growing Hope Project is concerned with identifying that experience and the ways in which folks are attempting to redress the food system at the street level. We want to know who is addressing the real problems, strategically and comprehensively: the gap between what a shopper pays for food, and what a farmer earns from it; the contradictions that can arise between local, affordable, organic, and environmentally responsible food production and their respective proponents; the implications of defining food as a “right” or as a “commodity”; or the role of mainstream food processing and retailing in feeding populations more numerous than ever before in the history of humanity.

In Québec, Équiterre’s model of Consumer Supported Agriculture provides family farmers with respectful revenue and affordability for consumers, as well as supporting educational community programs (p. 22). And they are scaling up in a fashion that is encouraging farmers to participate across the province.

Take on Policy

Many of these gaps and issues are rooted in international, national, and provincial policies. We invite practitioners of CED, social economy, and co-operativism, and their allies into the planning and positioning of a model ecological policy that takes account of community food concerns. This process, co-ordinated by the Policy Committee of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet), will offer essential, additional values and insights in the redrafting the Canadian Agricultural Policy Framework between now and 2008.

Join in Solidarity

Globalization has had a huge impact on the way we feed ourselves and on the role we play in feeding others. In understanding that, we quickly realize that we have a lot to learn and a lot to share with communities all over the world. For example, the Via Campesina is an international farmer-led movement that is taking courageous steps on the international stage in support of sustainable agriculture. Colleen Ross tells us of how the Canadian National Farmer’s Union is strengthened through its participation in Via Campesina and other international bodies (p. 44).

From stories such as these we too can gain courage and insight by realizing that people all around the world are struggling to reclaim local food economies. The problem is bigger than what we see every day, but working together in solidarity can help make sense of our daily experience.

It is in that spirit that we have designed a learning process that includes this magazine and a national web-board based discussion as contributions to a number of events, such as the “Bridging Borders Towards Food Security Conference,” organized by the Community Food Security Coalition in partnership with Food Secure Canada (October 7-11, 2006, Vancouver, B.C.), and the National Conference on CED and Social Economy (April 18-21, 2007, St. John’s, Newfoundland).

This magazine brings you ideas, resources, and connections in the growing hope that you too will be infected by this passion to build a food system that is sustainable ecologically as well as economically, secure for farmers and processors as well as for consumers of every income bracket, good tasting as well as good for us personally, for the places where we live, for our neighbours, and for the generations to follow. Let’s strategize, build alliances, and scale up initiatives so that we can see more clearly how to reconstruct the community marketplace and compromise the hegemony of the global hypermarket.

We are hungry for good food and we are hungry for action! What about you?



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