

## PEI Food Security Network

### Making It Fair: A closer look at fair trade and sustainable food systems

Thursday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010

#### WORKSHOP REPORT

**Participants:** *Jake Bartlett, Shawn Bowman, J'Nan Brown, Marie Burge, Irene Burge, Randy Campbell, Wendy Chappell, Nancy Clement, Dominique Daoust, David Daughton, Phil Ferraro, Alfred Fyfe, Michelle Fyfe, Leo Garland, Leif Hammarlund, Louise Hanavan, Rebecca Horne, Jessie Jenkins, Dan Keaveny, Ron Kelly, Maureen Larkin, Nina Linton, Adam MacIsaac, Ian MacPherson, Jessica Matheson, Jane McNeil, Megan Mullally, Gordon Muncey, Yvette Murphy, Andrea Noftall, Irené Novaczek, Lynda Oulton, Kaylynne Parkes, Reg Phelan, Murray Pinchuk, Gerry Reichheld, Vanessa Robinson, James Rodd, Cathy Ronahan, Alex Scoti, Audrey Shillaveer, Scott Sinclair, Ernie Stavert, Owen Stewart, Jennifer Taylor, Flora Thompson, Ann Wheatley, Myrna Wicks, Jim Wicks, Jenni Zelin*

**1.0 Welcome:** On behalf of the P.E.I. Food Security Network, Nancy Clement welcomed everyone to the workshop and gave a brief overview of the agenda for the day.

**2.0 Planning for a Domestic Fair Trade System for Food Products:** Ann Wheatley presented a summary of the 2008-2010 National Farmer's Union project aimed at developing an outline for a plan to put into place a system of domestic fair trade for food products. In 2009-2010, a group of twenty people, all of whom have an interest in making a better food system, including farmers, a farm market organizer, a chef, staff of Co-op Atlantic and others concerned with community food security, came together for six consultations (facilitated by Cooper Institute) and participated in the development of an outline for a plan for a domestic fair trade system.

The *values*, upon which the system would be built and which would be reflected in processes and structure of the plan, could be divided into three categories; economic, ecological and social. They include: the right of producers to income that allows them to live with dignity, farming practices which protect and improve land and water, small-scale family farming, the right of all people to safe, affordable food, control of the food supply by the people who produce it, engagement of consumers and producers throughout the food system and the rights of workers to fair wages and workplace standards that promote good health and economic well-being.

The values would be reflected in a set of domestic fair trade *standards*. There would need to be a means of ensuring that producers adhere to standards. It was decided that a *peer certification system* would be appropriate, because it is affordable, and allows for participation of consumers and producers. It is based on meetings and farm visits, which include opportunities for farmers

to share their knowledge and experience. A domestic fair trade plan would also include the development of a *label* to reflect the standards and be easily identifiable to consumers.

Since one of the values of domestic fair trade is a fair price for the producer, it would be necessary to include in a system processes for *calculating costs of production*, and establishing premiums that would be required at each step in the system, including a premium for operating the system and a social premium for investing in local communities. Domestic fair trade is, after all, about marketing. The working group decided that the most appropriate model was an *orderly marketing system*, such as is in place for dairy and poultry, and which is demonstrated in the operation of the Canadian Wheat Board.

In order for a domestic fair trade system to have success, activities aimed at *public engagement* would need to be included in the planning. This would serve two purposes: to convince consumers of the value of buying fair trade products, and to convince purchasers, for example grocery chains, of the value of buying from fair trade producer groups. Fair trade, food security and social justice organizations would be important allies in this work. Ann suggested the *next steps* for the domestic fair trade working group will be to seek funds to actually develop an organization that would take responsibility for putting the plan into effect, and possibly selecting a farm product to serve as a model for domestic fair trade.

**3.0 Free Trade, Fair Trade and Buy Local Food Policies:** Scott Sinclair, a trade researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, talked about the impact of free trade agreements on agriculture and people - he noted that in the Global South, 50 to 80 % of people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods whereas in the North, only 3 to 5% of people do - the impact of trade agreements is more severe in the South - he gave an example of Mexico where corn, a predominant food product of cultural significance is now mostly imported - this has had a devastating effect on local economies and people.

Scott talked about orderly marketing, using the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management (milk, poultry and eggs) as examples - these are under threat (our own government wants to dismantle the CWB and does not defend supply management in its discourse with the World Trade Organization). Supply-management largely excludes imports and is presented by profiting sectors as contrary to the spirit/intent of free trade agreements.

Regarding "buy local" initiatives and purchasing policies, Scott indicated that, even where they might be covered by existing treaties, they can be crafted in a way that minimises or even eliminates the threat of a successful trade challenge. Many innovative procurement policies that apply to schools, hospitals, institutions, are still permissible, even in today's free trade climate.

Scott pointed out that the process is "complaint-driven" - there needs to be a complaint about a particular policy before it becomes an issue, and he was quite hopeful that even if there were a complaint, it could be fought. Although he advised keeping our eyes on the bigger picture, for threats to supply management, etc., he was optimistic, pointing out that as oil prices rise and the

effects of climate change are felt, moving food across huge distances will not make sense. If we can hold on to what we've got for a while longer, he felt change would happen to support the kind of food systems we are working for - where farmers/fishers receive their costs of production and local economies thrive and people have access to good quality, locally-grown food.

**4.0 Table Discussion - Obstacles to implementing a domestic fair trade system for food and actions to overcome them:** Participants divided into five groups. Each group was given on barrier or obstacle to implementing domestic fair trade for food products. At the end of the group discussion period, each of the five group facilitators participated in a panel discussion.

*Obstacle #1: Many producers do not believe that an alternative marketing system is necessary and/or possible, and are unsure about making the changes needed to produce for local markets.*

*Actions:*

- work on public awareness - education,
- create a safety net - industry or government support during transition,
- develop a functional pilot programme,
- demonstrate improved monetary return,
- implement and continuously improve standards and policies, and
- encourage a big picture view.

*Obstacle # 2: Many people are set in their ways about shopping for the cheapest food, and may not be willing to pay the possible extra dollars that fair trade food may demand.*

*Actions:*

- work towards a cultural shift,
- shut down monopolies (e.g. Loblaw's, Sobeys, Walmart),
- set prices that reflect true costs (i.e. on the environment, health),
- revoke or cancel free trade agreements - reduce globalization - get rid of NAFTA,
- increase consumer awareness - food skills, nutrition choices,
- promote economic justice - the right to a livable income,
- focus on poverty reduction, not wealth creation,
- create incentives to buy local; rewards, incentives coupons, etc.,
- develop alliances between Co-op stores and local industries, businesses,
- include local food in social assistance programmes and in food banks,
- improve labelling,
- demonstrate that maybe fair trade food doesn't need to cost more - money being made by middle people now could go directly to farmers, and
- increase access - more farmers markets, community-supported agriculture, etc.

*Obstacle #3: A small, powerful majority, including a few producers, governments and corporations, favour and profit from the current dog-eat-dog marketplace. They will use all their power and voice to discredit any attempt to set up a fair trade system, which by its nature involves new production goals and practices and orderly distribution and marketing for food.*

*Actions:*

- use the power of collective voices (Food Security Network, Healthy Eating Alliance, etc),
- create awareness - media - highlight success stories, identify benefits,
- lobby government,
- set an example - use the products - vote with your wallet,
- highlight positive examples - St. Mary's University lobbying to replace food service; UPEI looking at nutrition policy; Just Us coffee, and
- make fair trade products accessible - with a clear label.

*Obstacle # 4: A high percentage of people in the community are forced to live on low incomes and do not have enough money now for half-decent food. They may find that fair trade food is totally out of their range, of interest only to the privileged higher-income people.*

*Actions:*

- develop employment strategies to create good quality jobs,
- advocate for all aspects of livable income (factors such as transportation, healthy food),
- provide farmers with cost of production as minimum price,
- improve physical access to good food - public transit,
- get rid of middle-person - direct access can lower prices ,
- promote collective buying - to initiate support for fair trade,
- create community gardens,
- provide access to rural land for urban citizens to grow food, and
- support fair trade - popular support lowers cost.

*Obstacle # 5: The current food system in Canada is centred around the export of cash crops. This means a loss of capacity to feed ourselves. In some food areas, we are used to a wider variety, and maybe lower prices because of imports. A fair trade food system would reduce, though not eliminate the availability of off-shore food.*

*Actions:*

- develop fair trade as a separate system, one that would not eliminate export/import,
- promote and develop a livable income strategy,
- stop importing food that can be produced here,
- ensure producers at home and away get fair prices,
- make responsible choices - consumers have a responsibility,
- create public awareness to ensure consumers understand the issue, and
- determine what local market will bear.

**5.0 Panel - Obstacles to implementing a domestic fair trade system for food and actions to overcome the obstacles:** Jenni Zelin, Gerry Reichheld, Reg Phelan, Irene Burge and Cathy Ronahan all participated in this panel discussion, having each facilitated one of the table talks in the previous section. Some of the main points that were raised by panellists and in the ensuing general discussion were:

While increasing public awareness of the issues surrounding food costing and impacts on producers is necessary, education alone will not change peoples' behaviours. There is also a need for good public policy and enforcement of that policy, and for incentives to encourage people to buy food differently, so that everyone benefits.

“Cheap food” is not so cheap, once it is placed in the big picture of climate change, and the other costs of an oil-based economy.

There is a need for strategies to change the assumption that food *should* be cheap.

Farmers markets, and community-supported agriculture are good models for fair trade and could be built upon.

Retailers respond to consumer demand - public engagement is necessary for change to happen.

**6.0 Food Counts - A PEI-Ontario Food Security Indicators Project:** Irené Novaczek listed the reasons to work towards sustainable food systems: healthy diet, improved environment, more stable local economies and fairer food. She then talked about why a **report card** would help. It would provide a benchmark, for measuring progress, identify things that communities are doing right so that we can celebrate and share best practices, and promote improvement. A key element in developing a report card is to choose indicators. In choosing indicators the following factors are considered:

Is it meaningful?

Is it measurable?

Is the data source available and affordable?

Is the data reliable and credible and easy to understand?

Can it be used on a local or regional basis?

Irené gave examples from several categories of indicators:

*People* - including income levels, and employment rates.

*Farms* - including number of farms, farm income and farm debt, pesticide use.

*Human Health* - including diabetes rates, obesity rates, cancer rates.

The next step for the indicators project is to set priorities. The P.E.I. Food Security Network could play a key role by looking at indicators that could be used in the report card, deciding which are the most important, determining if there are others missing from the list, and by helping to identify where missing data may be available.

**6.1 Food Counts Indicators Group Activity:** After Irené's presentation, Jake Bartlett introduced an activity that would aid project staff in selecting priority indicators and weeding out indicators that might not be as relevant in P.E.I. Participants were asked to divide into groups according to the following themes (which are the topics of the three working groups of the Food Security Network):

- Access to Safe and Culturally Appropriate Food,
- Sustainable Food Production and Distribution, and
- Food Costing and the Promotion of Food Skills.

Each group was given a list of indicators and asked to give high or low priority to each one. If the group was aware of data sources for particular indicators, they were asked to identify them. And finally, the groups were asked to think about other indicators that might be used within the context of their topic (i.e. Access to food, Sustainable Production, etc.). *Note:* Jake Bartlett is compiling the information from all of the groups in a more complete report - this will be forwarded to participants when it becomes available.

*Food Costing and Food Skills Group:*

Income is important, and the number and distribution of food stores. The status of organic production was also identified as important. Food and nutrition programs in the community public health system was also seen as an important indicator.

*Sustainable Production and Distribution:*

Two groups worked on this topic. They identified the following indicators as important:

- number of producers
- farm income
- types of farm products
- media coverage
- support for local agriculture

*Access to safe, healthy, culturally appropriate food:*

Two groups worked on this topic as well. They gave the following indicators priority:

- minimum wage and other income sources
- number/variety of food distribution channels
- food quality
- availability of public transit
- access to ethnic and culturally suitable food
- farm products

- land use
- media - food ads
- support for local producers
- diet-related diseases
- perceptions about physical and mental health
- amount of food available according to food group
- nutrients available in food produced in Canada
- legislation/food policy

**7.0 People's Food Policy Project:** Marie Burge is an animator, representing the P.E.I. Food Security Network, with the People's Food Policy Project, a pan-Canadian group of individuals and organizations working to create Canada's first food sovereignty policy. The choice of the term food sovereignty is deliberate, as it implies that all people, including those who produce food, are involved in decision-making and are responsible for developing and maintaining relationships within the food system. More information about the People's Food Policy Project can be found at <http://peoplesfoodpolicy.ca>.

In March, Marie attended, with other animators from all corners of the country, a gathering in Québec, where they worked in teams to edit ten chapters of the book that is the basis of a People's Food Policy.

The chapters are:

- Indigenous Food Sovereignty
- Poverty and Access to Food in Rural and Remote Communities
- Poverty and Access to Food in Urban Communities
- Agriculture, Infrastructure and Livelihoods
- Fisheries, Infrastructure and Livelihoods
- Sustainability and Food
- Science, Technology and Food
- Food, Aid and Trade
- Food and Human Health
- Food Democracy and Citizen Action

## **8.0 Evaluation:**

Participants were asked to complete a written evaluation. Overall, according to the 35 people who completed the form, the workshop seems to have increased participants' understanding of fair trade and of the "Food Counts" project. Participants appreciated both the presentations and the group discussions. Several felt there could have been more use of technology (presentation using LCD projector). Many people spoke highly of the guest speaker, Scott Sinclair, and of the meal, including the explanation by the chef, Jane McNeil, of its origins. The opportunity to hear from and share information with people with such varied interests in food was also appreciated. Several people commented positively on the presence of so many younger participants.

### *Key learnings about fair trade in food:*

- fair trade within P.E.I. is more possible than I thought - it can be done!
- the importance of the CWB and supply management
- fair trade is important for everyone, in Canada as well as in the Global South
- new ideas for expanding fair trade food items
- local fair trade is achievable but will require collective action and enhanced awareness
- P.E.I. imports too much food
- people want food security and fair trade
- about the Peoples Food Policy Project
- fair trade can contribute to local food security
- the power of using indicators
- lack of policy
- work needs to be done to explain what fair trade means
- how important public engagement is to food security
- importance of marketing boards and threats to supply management
- the vulnerability of our food security
- PEI context for fair trade - seeing CSA's, lobster vendors, etc. in fair trade context
- there are like-minded people (to me)
- extreme number of barriers to overcome
- fair trade is good on a multitude of fronts and needed more and more every day
- need to minimize the perception that it is costly
- there are various factors that influence food security
- there is some room to manoeuvre around or outside of free trade agreements
- the focus on domestic fair trade - usually you only hear about international fair trade
- there are people interested and involved - we are on our way to creating action
- a local fair trade system could help the local economy

*What was most appreciated:*

- Scott's presentation - an excellent keynote speaker
- the number and mix of participants and the large number of younger participants
- small groups is where I learned the most - interaction is always more effective!
- good to have break-out sessions in morning and afternoon
- good food
- when Jane, the cook and organic farmer explained the meal
- great sharing
- the overall agenda and the flow of the day
- the hopefulness of people all over
- question periods and open discussion
- speakers were interesting
- food was great
- that it happened at all - food security is very important
- meeting new people - networking
- it was great to see so many concerned about this issue
- very happy to have the opportunity to come it's a timely topic
- the interactive nature of the workshop - great ideas and discussions
- learning about the Food Counts indicators project

*Suggestions for improvements:*

- material was dense and we could have done with more time
- clearer instructions for group discussions/exercises
- spread tables out a bit more - it was difficult to hear
- visual aids for people who are visual learners
- more time in workshop/break-out sessions - conversation is where it all happens
- supply more information on existing opportunities for contribution to Island food security
- a bit long, perhaps - hard to keep peoples' attention for a whole day
- invite aboriginal and immigrant participants who have a vast knowledge of alternate sources of food and different knowledge of food values
- sheet of terminology/concepts for those of us unfamiliar with topics & barriers
- more time for the ranking exercise
- a P.A. system may have helped - was difficult to hear at times