

Local Food Summit Summary

On Thursday, January 29th, 2009, a small group of community members working with the HomeGrown Festival and Slow Food Huron Valley organized a day-long conference-style meeting called the Washtenaw Local Food Summit. The motivating idea of the Summit was simply to bring together area stakeholders interested and involved in improving and re-localizing our food system, and to make connections that would strengthen and build the network of people who demand healthy, secure, safe and fair food for our community. The goals of this Summit were to “map our current food system, find gaps, identify priorities, and coordinate efforts leading to a healthy, just and secure local food economy.”

Our Overall Priorities

The following five priorities were synthesized from the notes of the morning brainstorming session and afternoon working group meetings. See below for a transcript of the full notes from each group.

1 Expand and diversify local food production and distribution systems (which includes marketing, processing, and infrastructure.)

Examples include:

- Season extension - hoopouses, year round production
- Non-traditional land, parks, yard, urban parcels
- Awards for production, recognition of “doing good stuff”
- Permaculture systems
- More local food distributors
- Getting local food in supermarkets
- Gleaning programs to connect producers w/ those in need
- Washtenaw county wholesale distributor of local produce
- Mentorship programs
- Incubator for new farms (like tech startup incubator)
- Land and capital for new growers
- Protected continuous blocks of land
- Subsidized organic conversion
- Job training for unemployed/laid-off workers

2 Catalogue and characterize extent and types of local food availability and create communication channels with network of stakeholders (includes database work already started, but other avenues as well).

Examples:

- Clearing house/wiki for local food information
- Online resources connecting growers and buyers

- Model of existing assets involved
- GIS information system, maps, spatial tools showing where things are, permanent version of asset mapping
- Repository of statistics of health implications with non-local vs local food production

3 Advocate for new policy, legislation and politicians that encourage, support, and strengthen local food infrastructure and accessibility at the local, regional and state levels.

Examples:

- Create food policy council
- Encourage efforts via FSEP, and try to get more information coming from FSEP
- Improve cottage industry law, now in the making
- Change trade policies to protect local agriculture
- Get commitments from institutions and government administration to purchase local food
- Encourage tax support of land purchase/use for diversified agricultural purposes
- Re-institute local/state organic certification program

4 Increase awareness, skills and knowledge about food through school-based, community and experiential education.

Examples:

- Local Food Campaign
- Recognize consequences of choices
- Incentives for attending cooking or food classes
- Education on cooking in general
- Farmers Forum
- Teach-in / Skill Share / Bar Camp (spontaneous conferences)
- Farmer education on the environmental costs of mainstream farming
- School gardens
- Teaching kids how to cook shop and eat

5 In service of a strong local living economy, ensure justice, accessibility, collaboration and sustainability in action toward these goals.

Examples:

- Community forum for food sharing
- Joint events between non-profits
- Pre-season contracts between consumers and growers, like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

- Local support for and education about EBT, FMNP, WIC and other food assistance programs
- Barter system for organized trade system for food and services
- Local currency for local food