

Transformative Food Politics: Sharing Our Experience, Building Our Networks



Summer 2013, Issue 4

Propagating a Healthy, Just and Sustainable Food System

This newsletter provides periodic updates about
the Transformative Food Politics and Regional Networks Research



Since 2009, our research team has explored the structure and constitution of networks of food initiatives in British Columbia, Manitoba,

Ontario and Nova Scotia, working in partnership with four provincial network organizations: The British Columbia Food Systems Network, Food Matters Manitoba, Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming, and the Nova Scotia Food Security Network. The research involved a survey, interviews, popular education workshops, site visits and reflections from participants.

We were interested in the provincial network organizations because we see them as a place where people and organizations doing different things in different places come together around the broad goal of transforming the food system. We see the potential of this collective effort as developing a transformative food politics: that is, the collaborative strategies and activities that attempt to address the root causes of current challenges within the food system, rather than

just the symptoms.

The main purpose of this study has been to enhance our understanding of how organizations in Canada are mobilizing around food related issues. In particular, the research explored the role that food networks, rather than individual initiatives, play in developing resistance to the corporate led industrial food system. This research also sought to support and strengthen the activities of each provincial network by providing useful information about how they work. The Canadian Food Network Map, on page 3, highlights some of these food initiatives and the provincial organizations that are working to create connections across issues, sectors, and geographies.

Findings from the research revealed that the participating organizations held a diversity of core values and are collectively addressing a wide variety of issues, as opposed to focusing on one particular issue area. The majority of respondents indicated that they felt a shared collective identity as part of a broader "food movement." Calculating the different connections within each provincial food network, the findings revealed that all four networks have high



levels of interconnectivity and are decentralized with no actors who completely dominate the network. Charts developed in popular education workshops indicated many cross-provincial similarities as well as specific areas for future consideration.

Analysis of these findings suggests that organizations are using networks to challenge existing rules and institutions and to develop new participatory and democratic practices. These place-based experiments demonstrate how a different kind of food system could function, and thereby push the logics of system transformation. Thus, besides developing viable alternatives to the dominant food system, organizations are involved in prefigurative ways of being - establishing democratic governance structures, building new institutions, and engaging in different kinds of social relations - in the belly of the existing food system.

The challenge for network actors is to continue to propagate development of the network without overly centralizing and controlling it. This task includes reflecting on the constitution and context of the existing collaborations, identifying where diverse transformative experiences exist, and then shifting and realigning network configurations accordingly. This may mean that one or more organizations take a leadership role for a limited period of time, but it also demands ensuring that power is equitably distributed throughout the network. This would include ensuring that those that have been most marginalized by the dominant food system are at the forefront of leadership and decision-making. Recognizing the wealth of existing relationships and continuing to build new ones ensures that different perspectives and strategies are always available.

Finally, we should be under no illusion that the food system can be transformed in isolation from broader struggles for an alternative future. Food-based organizations, regardless of how well they function, cannot transform the existing system alone. However, using the networks strategically to build relationships, many organizations have developed collaborative solutions in the here and now and could impact other movements through encounters around food. Establishing alliances with others in Canada (and beyond) such as labour groups and Indigenous peoples, are an important starting point. Thus, food could provide an object of unity for a broader and more politicized social movement.

The research findings have been shared through three other issues of this *Transformative Food Politics Newsletter* as well as through a major report entitled, *Propagating the Food Movement*, released in November 2012. The research has also been discussed in a number of academic journals, popular books, non-academic journals, and magazines as well as numerous conferences.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this project from the four research partners to the hundreds of individuals within the food networks who participated in the interviews, popular education workshops and reflexive conversations. These findings will set the foundation for future research and action with the goal of food system transformation.

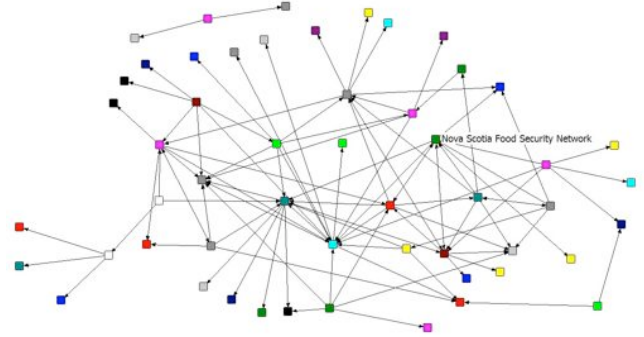


Interview with a Foodie at the Nova Scotia Food Gathering

Social Network Analysis

A survey of food initiatives in Nova Scotia asked organizations to identify 6 groups in the province that they are involved with most frequently and that they believe are valuable in helping address food issues. A computer program called UCINET was used to illustrate and analyze each organization (represented by the coloured dots) and the relationships between them (the black lines)(see NS's picture to the right). Data from this Social Network Analysis was used to help understand the structure of provincial networks in BC, MB, ON and NS along with the position and relationships of organizations within the network. One of the main conclusions from this illustration is that there is a high level of interconnectivity and very low centrality. This means that it is a decentralized network with few actors holding substantial power.

A Social Network Analysis: Organizational Relationships within the Nova Scotia Provincial Food Network



Transformative Food Politics Workshop at the Nova Scotia Food Gathering



On May 10, 2013, a popular education workshop was held as part of the Nova Scotia Food Gathering at Dalhousie University in Halifax. The workshop consisted of interactive discussions about community food security efforts in Nova Scotia. These reflections and ideas, presented on the next few pages, are part of an effort to share our collective knowledge and experience. The purpose is to encourage and facilitate communication within and across regions in order to support our work and to explore concepts of a transformative food politics.

On May 10, 2013, a popular education workshop was held as part of the Nova Scotia Food Gathering at Dalhousie University in

Working in small groups, participants created a picture of how Community Food Security (CFS) affects our communities using a *What's Happening Chart*: First, participants discussed things that make it more difficult to establish CFS in our communities, and second, participants discussed ways we are working to increase CFS (see pages following).

Ideas were posted on the chart in 5 areas that impact us: Social Justice, Ecological Sustainability, Community Health, Democracy, and “Other”; as well as looking at 3 different levels where people are affected: Local/ Provincial, National, and Global.



Nova Scotia - What's Happening Chart Summary: What Decreases Community Food Security

Global

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commodification • social and economic inequality • price of food • neoliberal economics • outsourcing labour • lack of affordable housing • industrialization • WTO/GATT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corporatization of food business • sprawl and development consuming farmland • consolidation of agriculture • rural-urban divide (i.e. lack of connection to farming community) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited time to connect with others 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corporate consolidated and control of the food system • trade agreements • not enough communication



National

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • globalized labour markets • lack of funding for income assistance • cost of housing (rising faster than wages) • student loans as a barrier to innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no incentive for small and unconventional farmers • embedded conventional farming system • lack of food skills • externalized environmental services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of nutritional knowledge (e.g. food preparation, healthy eating) • education (food and health literacy) • no awareness building of food security • crappy welfare (social assistance) • cultural undervaluing of farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inadequate human rights legislation (e.g. income assistance) • lack of legal right to food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misleading advertising • disconnect/alienation of tradition



Local/Provincial

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cost/lack of transportation (especially in rural areas) • low wage economy • little disposable income • genetic modification • seed insecurity • food deserts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food safety policy • agri-chemicals • consumer expectations • loss of connection to food • land use policy • water and soil management • social under-valuing of food • lack of access to land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food education • distribution systems • insufficient local supply • accessibility • transportation • changes in family and cultural norms • little processing knowledge • loss of farmers • lack of community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food consumption as an individual issue (people alienated from social aspects of food) • lack of voice for people living in poverty in decision making at all levels of government • voting with your dollar breeds inequity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of transportation • lack of awareness or sensitivity to CFS issues • people ignoring their bodies • inadequate municipal land use planning • lack of infrastructure

Nova Scotia - What's Happening Chart Summary: What Increases Community Food Security

Global

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via Campasina • protest movements • food charters • food sovereignty • food justice movement (integrating marginalized voices) • fair trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • growth in flows of ecological agriculture 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased global connections and communications • awareness (growth in popular media and literature) • internet resources • social media • UN Right to Food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lobbying for food as a human right • discussions with UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food • farmworkers rights



National

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Farmer's Union traditional knowledge Community Food Centres People's Food Policy demonstrations (e.g. GMO, Monsanto) linking producers and consumers fair trade Food Secure Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> traditional knowledge farmers' markets People's Food Policy Bauta Seed initiative local value chain development (e.g. Think Farm, Off the Hook) new farmer's initiatives Seeds of Diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new food policies institutions changing in small ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Secure Canada Conference Board of Canada People's Food Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increasing knowledge and skills (e.g. gardening, cooking)



Local/Provincial

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> food costing research Provincial government goal of 20% local food procurement Blockhouse school project new Community Food Centre in Dartmouth The Loaded Ladle Partners for Care @ Capital Health Common Roots Urban Farm multiple university partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gardening initiatives community shared agriculture community supported fishing Community Food Centre in Dartmouth Deanery Project Common Roots Urban Farm support for farmers (e.g. ACORN, Think Farm) expansion of farmers' markets Ecology Action Centre's Food Action Project local procurement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cooperatives community and school gardens (e.g. Mount St. Vincent community garden, Common Roots, St Catherine's School) Select Nova Scotia Thrive community shared agriculture ACTforCFS food skills training school curriculum community oven in Dartmouth Think Farm growth in farmer's markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition Towns movement in St Margaret's Bay, Eastern Shore, Lunenburg increased education and awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increasing food knowledge and education Slow Food community building activities community supported fisheries (Off the Hook) engaging discussion Ecology Action Centre's Food Action Committee FoodARC intergenerational skills development participatory food costing research

For More Information:

All the documents mentioned in this newsletter are available for distribution. Please feel free to contact us any time to receive copies of the articles and/or reports at charles.levkoe@utoronto.ca.

Please Send Us Your Thoughts and Ideas!

You are welcome to use any part of this newsletter for your own work, but if you do, please let us know where and how you are using it. If you do not want to receive future newsletters or know someone else who does want to receive them, please let us know. If you would like to receive past issues, have any questions or comments about this newsletter, the broader research or anything else, feel free to contact us at the Department of Geography and Program in Planning, University of Toronto: Charles Z Levkoe (charles.levkoe@utoronto.ca); or Sarah Wakefield (sarah.wakefield@utoronto.ca, 416-978-3653).



Charles Z Levkoe
Department of Geography and Program in Planning
University of Toronto
100 St. George Street
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3G3