

Transformative Food Politics: Sharing Our Experience, Building Our Networks



Winter/Spring 2011 Issue 1

Planting The Seeds of a Movement

This newsletter will provide periodic updates about the Transformative Food Politics and Regional Networks research

The Transformative Food Politics and Regional Networks research uses food as a lens to make connections between social justice, ecological



sustainability, community health and democracy issues, as experienced by populations across Canada and beyond.

As a collaborative, community-based project, this research involves four regional networks: The Nova Scotia Food Security Network, Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming, Food Matters Manitoba, and the British Columbia Food Systems Network.

In the past decade, an increasing number of organizations have emerged with a variety of concerns about environmental, political and economic implications of a globalized, industrialized food system. Many of these organizations aim to develop viable, localized alternatives that consider

the whole food system and embrace social and ecological goals. These initiatives cover a wide range of activities, including attempts to reconnect farmers and consumers, establishing alternative retail venues, and supporting sustainable and equitable food practices. To support these groups, provincial-level organizations have been established to make connections through building strong regional networks and a growing food movement.

Researchers from the University of Toronto in collaboration with partners in the four provinces are working on a study to learn more about the work of these regional food networks. This research will explore how provincial non-profit organizations are

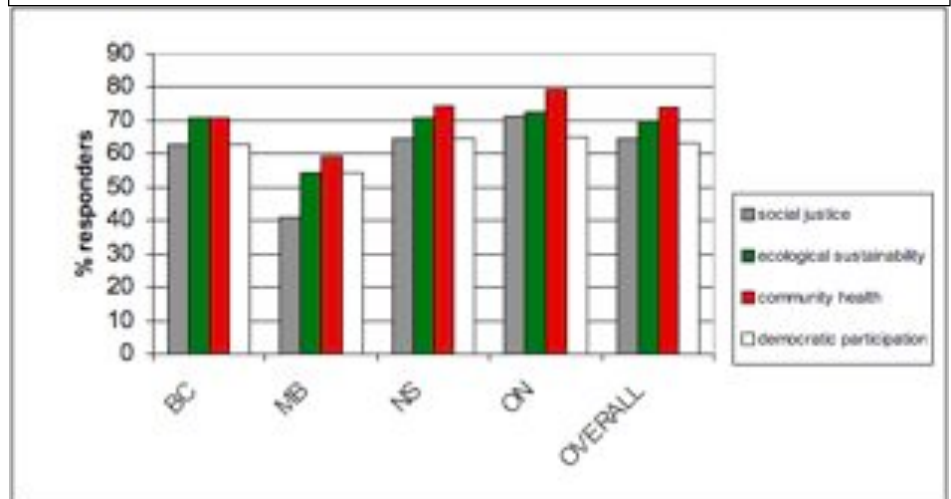


attempting to build networks that connect organizations across localities while supporting a transformative food politics.

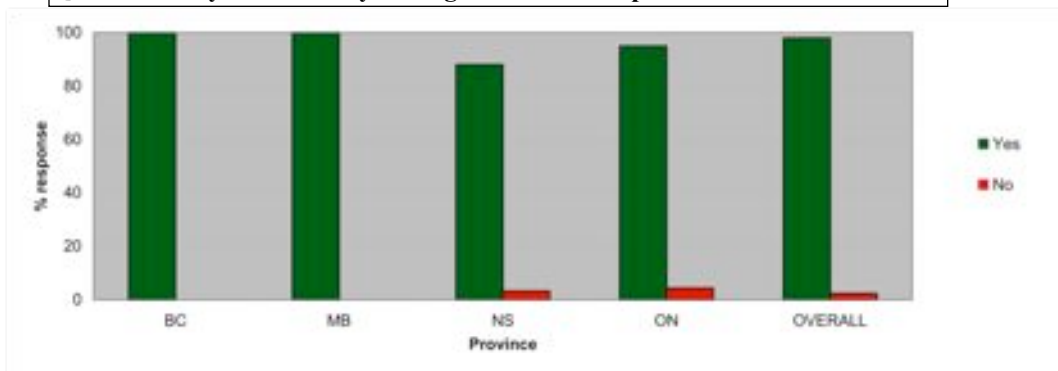
The Transformative Food Politics Survey

In the fall of 2010, a social network survey was completed by over 200 organizations working on food-related initiatives in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. One of the questions asked was how each organization related to specific issues within the current food system (see graph to the right). From the responses, organizations identified community health and ecological sustainability as the strongest with issues of social justice and democracy not far behind. In Manitoba, all issues were rated less-strongly than in other provinces.

Question: How strongly does your organization identify with the following values?



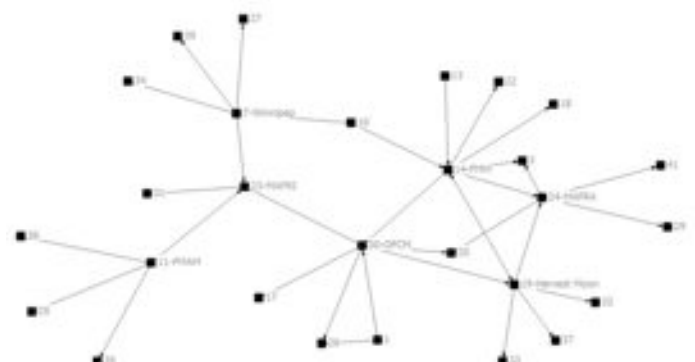
Question: Do you consider your organization to be part of a food movement?



In another question, virtually every responding organization identified themselves as part of a food movement (see graph to the left).

The survey also asked organizations to identify 6 provincial groups 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 black dots) and the relationships between them (the black lines)(see Manitoba's picture to the right). Data from this Social Network Analysis is currently being used to help understand the structure of each of the 4 provincial networks along with the position and relationships of organizations within the network.

A Social Network Analysis: Organizational Relationships within the Manitoba Community Food Security Network



Some Working Definitions

The following are some of the definitions being used in the study:

A ***transformative food politics*** refers to a collection of initiatives that attempt to address the root causes of current challenges within the food system, rather than just the symptoms. A transformative food politics demands a comprehensive approach to these challenges.

Community food security refers to a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.



Social justice refers to power and material equity through physical and economic access to sufficient amounts of food along with the circumstances and conditions of all those who produce food.

Ecological sustainability refers to (re)balancing connections between human and ecological systems along with the enduring biodiversity of those systems.

Community health refers to a region's capacity to produce and distribute adequate, nutritious, safe and culturally acceptable foods.

Democracy refers to the equity of process which includes ongoing opportunities for full public participation in decision making and system-wide control.

Transformative Food Politics Workshop Manitoba

On February 25, 2011, a popular education workshop was held as part of the provincial Growing Local Conference in Winnipeg. Well over 60 people participated in interactive discussions about community food security efforts in Manitoba. These reflections and ideas, presented on the next pages, will be part of sharing collective knowledge and experience within and across regions in order to support our work and to explore concepts of a transformative food politics.

Working in small groups, participants created a picture of

how community food security (CFS) effects 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 below).



Photo: Leanne Dunne

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.

Manitoba 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"> • speculation on food driving up prices (x3) • lack of culturally appropriate and local diet for northern peoples • cost of food in rural grocers • organic certification? • (unfair) free trade agreements • oil dependency • commodification • concentration of food processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of food skills and species • export oriented food production • technology as a response to climate change • use of fissile fuels for transport • not valuing soil • contamination/pollution of natural sources • displacement of local production • seed banks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • restaurant/fast-food-based culture • loss of small, local processors • food safety laws • corporate control of inputs, sales • food banks fill belly but not nutritional needs • declining number of farmers • no intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corporate control (x3) • GMOs (x2) • political power of vested interest • loss of traditional knowledge • war keeps people hungry/vulnerable • seed as 'intellectual property' • over-regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • convenience-based culture • consumer expectations • lack of innovation

The photograph shows a hand-drawn poster with the word 'DEMOCRACY' written in large, bold letters at the top. Below the title, several sticky notes are attached, each containing handwritten text. The notes appear to be organized into a flowchart or a list of related concepts. The handwriting is in black ink on white paper. The poster is placed on a dark surface, and the lighting is somewhat dim, giving it a candid, workshop-like appearance.

Photo: Leanne Dunne

National

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food deserts • contradictory government policy • corporate model • racism (i.e. residential schools) • high poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • policy does not recognize/support community initiatives/people • industrialization • centralization of processing • loss of food skills, poor eating habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deskilling and loss of knowledge (x3) view that farms are ‘dirty’ • health care not prevention • focus on individual not determinants of health • fear mongering • advertising to kids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘intellectual property’ of seeds • GMO seeds • CETA (Canada-EU trade) • over-regulation • lack of civil disobedience • green politicking • lack of power of small producers/business/citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • materialism • cost of living • loss of wages • little organic production • little financing for organic and small-scale farming

Local/Provincial

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poverty (x3) • lack of accountability • lack of access to food stores in low income areas • foreign aid not supporting small-scale farmers • lack of access to fresh foods • social supports engender dependency not sovereignty • research \$ for smaller projects • disconnect between people and food systems • lack of access to resources/space to grow • 'grow local' high cost products vs. affordability of food for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public access to farmers and farms as learning environments • pollution is still a real word • food literacy • land use and food integrity (i.e. moose, goose, fish, water) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only processed, unhealthy food accessible in some areas (x2) lack of food knowledge/skills • purchasing fast, cheap, overly processed food • groups working in isolation vs. a comprehensive approach • no government buy-in to collective work • inequality in food cost - north/south • food safety regulations limit use of wild meat • lack of infrastructure for local food system • less sharing of skills/service • mistrust in security of urban gardens • disconnect with land and food • lack of community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inappropriate allocation of government/industry funds in environmental action • federal control hinders local change - food production bogged down in policy/law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • homogenization of food supply built on the economy of the most powerful countries • Corporations have lots of \$ to influence the mass consciousness • individualism • lack of resource sharing amongst neighbors and groups • loss of domestic arts and time • lack of affordable housing



Photo: Leanne Dunne

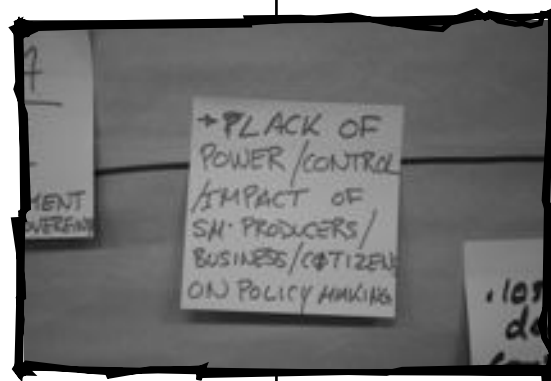



Photo: Leanne Dunne

Manitoba 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"> • fair trade movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education re: dangers of corporate food • protecting and saving seeds • attempting to revitalize species and varieties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palestinian boy creating rooftop garden in refugee camp • slow food movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • global south resisting/halting 'trade' deals • slow food movement • Council of Canadians work on water as a human right • use of new media (facebook, blogging, etc) • food cooperatives 	

National

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job creation in food production towards urban agriculture • WWOOFing • fair Trade • food cooperatives • MAFRA • moving from dependency on programs to self-sufficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 mile diet • public patents in life sciences • small scale farming • urban agriculture movement, gorilla gardening i.e. MB landless farmers coop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased interest in lost culinary arts (canning, fermenting) • family/community cooking • community kitchens • growth or demand for organic food • professional organizations becoming aware of food in their work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's Food Policy Project (x2) • slow food movement • job creation towards local economy and urban agriculture • government policy change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connections between schools/ youth and culinary programs • social media, knowledge sharing and connections • increased media attention (i.e. documentaries) -- food is sexy again



Photo: Leanne Dunne

Local/Provincial

Social Justice	Ecological Sustainability	Community Health	Democracy	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bulk food buying • community kitchens (x3) • Food Matters Manitoba • mentoring projects • F.O.O.D • lifestyle activism • cooperative living/sharing • community gardens • food education • new farmers initiative • local activism • public health authorities are working with community groups • institutions shifting their purchasing to local/organic/etc (e.g. UW diversity foods) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Shared Ag (x5) • gardens at school • helping farmers achieve their ecological goals • guerrilla gardening • providence college (gardens and composting) • farm mentorship program - OFCM • MB school food policies • Food Matters Manitoba • Neechi Coop • edible landscaping • organic nurseries • Harvest Moon Society • landless farmers initiative • planting trees (strategically) • re-educating around real food cost and taste • MB local food labeling program • intergenerational teaching food skills • 100 mile diet • open farm day • farm to school fundraiser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food skills (x4) • community gardens (x8) • fruit share/ gleaning • community kitchens (x3) • community compost (x2) • farmers market • healthy baby groups • procurement policies • Northern Healthy Food Initiatives (x3) • hiring youth to garden • collaboration between local farmers • MB school nutrition policy • more people want to become farmers • produce/whole foods in food desert • Mary Jane's Cooking School • food label movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Cooperatives (x4) • slow food movement • MB alternative food working group • Transition Towns • educating our children • food charter • community gardening • networking • sharing resources • increased knowledge of food issues in school system • growth in public interest and involvement • MAFRA • FMM • OFCM-Growing Up Organic • food security networks • boys and girls club • the Winnipeg Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition Towns Initiative (Steinbach) • The Growing Local Conference



Photo: Leanne Dunne

Next Steps:

The workshop that was held in Manitoba and the survey mentioned in this newsletter are only part of the study about regional food networks and a transformative food politics in Canada. The broader study involves interviews with specific organizations, observation of local initiatives and meetings with a number of people in the region. The study, including the workshop will be held in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia providing an opportunity to share our knowledge and experiences. As more information from other regions becomes available, this newsletter will provide a space for this sharing to take place.

Please Send Us Your Thoughts and Ideas!

If you do not want to receive future newsletters or know someone else who does want to receive them, please let us know. 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 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).



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