Food Policy Council Notes
April 18, 2013

Announcements

- Deborah Giraud, UC Cooperative Extension on June 17th there will be a farm to table dinner at Redwood Acres for the 100th anniversary of UC Cooperative extension and 4H in the county. Contact her at 707-445-7351 for more information.
- Deborah Giraud has a document from Napa County called the Food Policy Frequently Asked Questions. We want to edit it and revise it and use their template for Humboldt County. I’d love to have a couple of people who would be willing to help. Contact her at 707-445-7351.
- Kathy Mullen of Kneeland Glen Farmstand will have a grand opening on May 19th. She is looking for local producers and home cottage producers to rent portions of the farmstand. Are you making honey, jam, or pickles? Contact her at 707496-0459.
- Debbie Perticara at North Coast Garden Collaborative is hosting a Community Gardeners’ Gathering on May 18th from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at Jefferson Community Center, 1000 B Street in Eureka. Speakers on many topics. Lunch served. Please RSVP by May 13 to debbiep@nrsrcaa.org.
- Portia Bramble at North Coast Growers’ Association reminds everyone of upcoming food events at the Farmers’ Market in late October. For more information, contact her at director@humfarm.org.
- Michael Kein wants everyone to know that Eureka has changed its cottage food laws. Now the law allows for urban food stands and selling items from home with permit. For more information contact him at mjkein@gmail.com.

Food Distribution Presenters:

Intro by Amie McClellan, Southern Humboldt

- I work for several non-profits, many of which have inadequate food distribution systems. I was partnered up with Dian Bacigalupi who also lives in southern Humboldt.
- Our first little hurdle was the definition of distribution and Dian and I had different ideas about that. Mine was the movement of food and hers was food access. So our speakers are going to talk about both of those things because we couldn’t decide.
- A couple of years ago, several people put together a food distribution network in southern Humboldt. Our mission was to take problematic food systems already in place and streamline them by adding more locations and services. We had a couple of meetings and identified key players. Ultimately after a wonderful summer of gleaning and doing all these wonderful projects, we realized we needed some structure.

Speaker 1
Jared Zystro, Organic Seed Alliance, California education and research specialist

Organic Seed Alliance is a national non-profit headquartered in Port Townsend, WA with satellite offices in California and Montana. We work to build more resilient seed systems. We do that by working with farmers, university folks, seed professionals in a number of different areas. We teach people how to produce their own seeds in a quality fashion, how market their seeds, and how to do their own plant breeding. We work actively to develop new varieties and we have a separate policy person who works in D.C. This person is trying to protect farmers’ rights to save their own seeds, push back against GMO contamination, and the concentration of the seed industry. We also encourage public research for the public good.
Seeds are fundamental to agriculture. Not just any seed, but the varieties that farmers plant really matter. The varieties can either be ones adapted to sustainable low-input agriculture or they can be ones that only work well in systems that include a lot of inputs (a lot of fertilizers, a lot of pesticides). The seeds that are chosen do impact and ripple throughout the whole food system. Not only in terms of production, but they also impact the food that we eat. Some varieties can produce food that’s more nutritious for us. And they influence economics. Farmers need good seed that works well on their farm in order to get good yields of high quality product that can help them be sustainable and successful.

**Local food distribution:** Local seed is important, just as local food is important. Local food represents community self-sufficiency, self-reliance, a certain amount of risk reduction because we can depend on our own local supply more. It supports our local farmers and local economy. It represents an opportunity for all of us to feel more confident in our food supply. An opportunity to meet our local farmers, face to face, ask them questions, go out to the farms and verify their production. How are they growing the food that we’re eating? We can do that if it’s local. So what about seed? Where do most of our seeds come from? Where do farmers buy their seeds from? Retail seed companies are not actually growing the seeds. Retail seed companies are buying their seed from wholesale seed companies (what are called breeder producers). Breeder producers are companies like Monsanto. Those companies are global companies that aren’t growing their own seed necessarily in the United States. They are contracting seed production all around the world. Hybrid plants (tomatoes) are produced in places where labor is very low, like India and China. When we’re buying that seed packet at our local store, where is that seed coming from and how is it getting to us? What does that mean that we’re getting seed from half way across the world? I think there are a couple of things we want to think about in terms of this very much removed and remote seed distribution. First, we don’t have very much control over what varieties are maintained or developed. The global companies are breeding vegetables for the largest seed markets (Arizona, Florida). We’re lucky if we find varieties that work for here too, but we’re not their target. If we buy seed from them, but larger seed markets decide it’s not working for them, then the global companies have no incentive to keep carrying it. If it’s a hybrid, then we don’t have the option to save it for ourselves. This creates a real risk point. This is something at Organic Seed Alliance that we hear a lot about from farmers. They fear that they have just few varieties that are important to their farm enterprise. They open that seed catalog and they hope there wasn’t a crop failure or they didn’t decide to discontinue it.

**Methods of seed production.** Seed crops are long season crops. Hybrids are produced with two inbred parents. Both of those things mean that seed crops require a lot more chemical inputs to keep the crops alive in order to produce the seed. Monsanto seed contractors in China are producing tomatoes not way we would like them to. So if we can control our own seed production more, we can do a couple of things. First, we can feel more confident about how the seeds are grown and the systems they are grown in. We can also do a better job of developing and adapting seeds to our own needs. Whenever you’re saving seeds and you’re doing a good job of saving an open pollinated variety; you’re a plant breeder. You can take those varieties and adapt them to, over the years, our system. To our local environment and we can do better and better at adapting varieties for Humboldt instead of hoping for cast offs big companies.

**Seed distribution.** So, the topic tonight is distribution. What can we do to foster a better distribution system for local seeds? There are a few questions to ask ourselves. Are there open pollinated varieties that local farms use relatively large quantities of seed? Can we identify a few crops where there is a good demand for seed in our area? Can seed be produced here? What kinds can be produced here? Good news is there are a myriad of micro-climates here that can be used to grow a lot of different seeds. The next thing we want to ask ourselves is how we can get farmers to trust the seed that is grown locally? You have to have trust in your seed. This is one of the biggest things for farmers. They need insurance that the seed they use will grow. That is why farmers use companies like Johnny’s or Snow, because they have long relationships with those companies. They feel that those companies will produce reliable and
consistently high quality seed. So we can help farmers feel more comfortable with using local seed by doing more trials. We can get locally produced seeds side by side with industry standards for that farm and grow those seeds in farmers’ fields so they can really see. Farmers can observe them through the whole season and determine if they have the quality that they are looking for. The second thing we can do is to build better relationships between seed and food producers. We have a number of seed producers in this area. We need to help provide more opportunities for seed and produce growers. And the rest of the distribution system, including, chefs, restaurants, and grocery stores, need to get together and talk about needs, production, and how to feel comfortable with the local seeds. Having a personal relationship with your seed producer is very important.

**Speaker 2**
**Farmer: John Finley from Garberville**
Lisa and I run the Garberville Community Farm within the southern Humboldt Community Park. We lease the land from the park and go from there. We are such an island down there. One of the first questions that came to me while sitting here thinking about distribution is “How can we help up here, down there? We’ve been focusing on the island concept of how to build a resource center that can help the community grow more independent for its own security. Regarding distribution of food, we’ve been looking at how we can build a hub in the southern Humboldt area. Down there a lot of land isn’t farmed. We’re looking at how we can continue to grow and build a hub that can help up here. Also, we want to inspire more development with other food resources. This conversation began for us when pondering the Peak Oil topic. When everything stops, this island we live on, how are we going to survive? How are we going to feed ourselves? The definition of food security is constantly changing for me. Food security is so complicated. We are no longer concerning ourselves with Peak oil because it’s evident that it’s going to continue in our lifetime. So the question becomes, what else does food security mean? For us, in southern Humboldt, it is preservation. That is our missing link in the system. We have fresh, seasonal produce system in place. We don’t have a system to preserve food to continue throughout the whole year to cut our reliance on any kind of disturbance or reliance on trucks. We’re also thinking about our next generation of farmers. The real definition of food security is where are these farmers going to come from and where are they going to go? Land is disappearing quickly and prices are rising rapidly. It’s becoming difficult for the next generation to grow. The community park is a great resource to grow. How can we inspire youth to participate and have a place to do it? We’re creating a self-sufficient facility, storage and cooling facilities. We’re looking into the future of processing facilities. We’re shifting out of fuel based agriculture, 8 row planters etc. It keeps getting bigger and bigger, so the equipment needs to be bigger. I was handed a video on horse power. We made a choice to go the other way. Abandon the way of using bigger equipment. This year we’re starting to see our fuel reduction. That’s the story from Garberville.

**Speaker 3**
**Rio Anderson, Chautauqua Natural Foods, Garberville**
I’ll talk about it from my retail lens and economics background. One interesting thing about the food business is the economy of scale. With other industries, when you grow more, each unit becomes cheaper. That doesn’t really work with food. As you produce more and more, quality reduces rapidly. Customers want small farms, with low fuel produced crops (horse power produced). These things add value to food. When customers demand certain quality and are willing to pay it at the market, it shifts the economics and more people want to produce crops. Investing money is a step needed in distribution. Money invested in these systems is going to make it happen. A disturbing thing during harvest season is seeing products being shipped in from out of the area. There is a lot of waste in our local food system. An issue I have with local farmers is reliability. When I order my produce from a company, I get a fax and it’s professionally done. Local farmers know to call before I make my order. There have to be more ways of communication, such as the internet. Local produce will sell better than out of the area produce. Communication needs to be more open, seeds and production to eliminate more of the waste. The
regional food system and communication need to be easier. A vital food network is multi-layered. Food network is everywhere and there is the potential for more. Laws are changing so people can provide more local foods. More money needs to be invested.

Speaker 4
Kathy Mullen, Mullen Ranch. Kneeland Glen Freshwater Farm
Kathy runs a generational-based, grass fed farm. The problem was retail stores wanted her to box and package her soaps. She doesn’t believe in that, so she couldn’t find a retail outlet for her business. So, she opened her own store and invited community members to participate in that store. She brings what they produce into town. Renting spots in her farm stand is $25 a month. She wants to have home-based manufactured items. This is supporting the new law. She can’t do commission because the producers have to sell their products. She has planted large herb gardens for people to come in and cut their own herbs. Opening date keeps being pushed down. We’re using all old, recycled products. The area is owned by the Land Trust, which is the Nature Center. They have a nature trail that is going to go by out to the wetlands reserve. We have an antique orchard at the ranch that we have brought back to life and will be selling those trees. She is looking for people to bring products to the store so they can distribute them to the public. It’s hard to distribute products when you’re in rural areas. So it’s important to have a place to bring your products.

Speaker Questions
Question for Jared: Are you considering starting a local seed bank?
Jared: We have one; it is the Beneficial Living Center in Arcata. I haven’t considered the local seed bank. I think they’re great in a lot of ways. Quality control in a local seed bank is tricky. Who’s bringing the seed in and how do you verify that it’s good? I think that they work well for certain things like preserving some plant genetics. They work well on a gardener scale where people are willing to experiment with what they take out of the bank. They’re important, but just not my focus.

Question for Jared: Do you need growers here to grow seed and do you need land?
We need more growers growing seed and more markets for their seed. I think those are the key pieces. Land has to be the right land.

Question for Rio: What type of mechanism do you see that would allow the type of communication between local producers and buyers when problems arise?
Rio: I’ve already contacted a web developer. We’re trying to create a form where you can contact from home and let us know that you will have a “box of peaches” on Tuesday and can you take them? So then I direct my produce person to look at that website and will download to his email and he can check that before he orders peaches.

Question for Rio: Do you see something like that focusing on a community basis from all inputs?
Rio: Yeah.
Kathy: Once again, I have a computer but it’s hard with the way my life is to find time to use a computer. A lot of us farmers are in that same boat.
Rio: Now you can access the internet, via your cellphone. Undergraduate at Berkley developed an app that let people know that people have extra food that is available for distribution. Maybe get the individual to come up and discuss her app.
Rio: Even more important to know who the farmer is on the other end of the computer. We won’t be likely to buy bad produce if I know who it is. We are a small, close knit community that enables us to make the technology work. An app doesn’t allow us to know where the food comes from.

Question for Rio: What percentage of the products in your store are local vs. regional?
Rio: To be honest. 1-2% is local and this is seasonal. We have more during good seasons. 

**Question for Rio:** Reiterate what the barriers are to having more local products?

Rio: Distribution. It’s a market based thing. It comes down to economics. People have to be able to live on what they produce, how much I pay for it and what the public is willing to pay for it. The economics and demand are there. Products need to be there, because it affects others when reliability isn’t there.

**FPC Structure**

**Communications Structure**

- Base Camp is problematic. You have to have a password to log into it. The administration of it is outside of CCRP, so changes take a while and people have universally not liked it. We’ve also used Meeting Wizard, but that’s also been a problem. We’ve started a Mail Chimp, which seems to be better. Not a lot of people are using it though.
- Joe: Google mail. It’s kind of complicated. The other suggestion is Yahoo mail. Yahoo is much simpler. The bee keepers association is much simpler. Carry an account for yourself and join groups that way. Have to log into yahoo to check emails. Has a calendar so you can create meetings.
- The purpose was to hold documents and provide inter-group communication.
- The real problem is the existing system and it’s outside of our control. No one likes Base Camp.
- You can forward Yahoo information to other email accounts.
- All the documents will be on the CCRP website. Plan for Joe’s presentation next month. He was going to walk everyone through yahoo’s email process.

**Sarah: California Food Policy Council Overview**

- Goal: To ensure California’s food system reflects the needs of all communities. So, basically the council kind of oversees and gives support for all the food policy councils in California. There are 25 different councils that are recognized and they act in different ways.
- Options: to be a voting member or supporting member. Voting members have to agree to the guiding principles, eligible to send 1 voting representative to their council meetings; have to send someone to 3 to remain in good standing. If unable to meet the requirements, we could no longer be in good standing.
- Supporting member, which I think is what we’re considered now. We’re recognized, agree to the guiding principles, can go to the meetings (not required to), eligible to serve on working groups that happen at the state level. Look at structure of the council and whether it’s possible to Skype into the meetings (since they are far away). Possible to Skype, yet participation is limited. Working groups led by a chair and examine various policies and topics and report back to the council.
- Voting members get to make decisions on the policies. Meetings are quarterly. Need to decide if we want to be voting member sooner than later. Consultant, from eastern U.S., may come to California to form and support a food policy council. Couple of proposals to help the process along. Wait to become voting member until we know exactly what we want our council to be, but we can still have someone be part of a working group to help us get more involved. Or we could become a full voting member, if someone is willing to fully commit.
- Move forward on being a more active, supporting member of the council. The measure was passed. Dorina Espinoza will represent in the short term.

**Questions:**

*How are we listed as a member already if we just decided to be a member?*
We’ve been a member as a long time, just not a voting member. There aren’t a lot of rural counties represented, but our issues are important also. Portia: We should move toward becoming a voting member in the California food policy council. Table the rest of this discussion for the next meeting.

**Portia and Debbie - Mission and Vision**
Mission and vision came from a prior meeting based on breakout sessions. Mission and vision will be defined more once we establish our structure. Mission is why a group exists, what the purpose is and what we’re trying to do. It can be describing the aims, values and overall plans of an organization or the fundamental purpose of why we exist and what we’re doing to obtain a vision. Vision is what we’re working toward. Our vision is of the future. If it’s our ideal world if we’re trying to remove ourselves from the picture or what the food policy council looks like in 5 or 10 years. It is a future benchmark that we are working towards.

With the prior work on the vision statement, we are looking at reviewing two elements. First are the key words. We will affirm the key words that we’ve already identified as being popular or add to that list. The second thing we’re looking for is whether any of these statements seem like a good starting point. Or do we want to scrap them and start a new statement. The first group came up with the Humboldt Food Policy Council envisions a local, sustainable, efficient system that contributes to the economic viability of the region. It should have local, culturally appropriate food that is affordable and accessible for all. A structure that supports local production, consumption, and beyond through the whole cycle of the food system.

- Key Words: the full cycle of the food system. It captures really well, from seed to store.
- Key words: sustainable, affordable, equitable, local, full cycle of the food system, education and access.

**Other Food Policy Councils around the country:**
- Our job was to examine other food policy council’s structures around the country. Also what it would look like if we moved into an advisory capacity into a board. Advisory commission is brought up by a community member who speaks with someone on a board of supervisors and gets it on the agenda that they’d like to form an advisory commission. In order to advise them on food or food systems in Humboldt county. Advisory commissions are sometimes legislated and that would be the case our council if we chose to go that route. We could take that route. The official name is committee.
- Three different structures. Sonoma Food Systems Alliance, formed in 2009, concerning good foods and healthy farms. They have a charter; something we could consider, that discusses their background, vision, a purpose, food systems goals, criteria for determining actions and advocacy, decision making membership and termination of membership. Our charter could have any number of those things or not any of those things. They have funding and support, that allows for staff and facilitators. They have created a Sonoma county health and sustainable food action plan. They have provided recommendations and support to their land trust in the region. Three community outreach events. Big food service training event with 80 participants. County food forum event. They are not a non-profit. Have committees with chairs and is a voluntary association of individuals.
- Portland Food Policy Council is an advisory council to the city of Portland. They look at food access, land use planning, local purchasing, and other initiatives. Local government staff at their meetings.
• Sacramento Regional Food Systems Collaborative; coalition of public, private non-profit stakeholders. Influence policy initiatives relevant to the regional food system in the 6 county capital region. They are funded by California Endowment, Kaiser and Valley Vision.
• Funding could be looked for outside of CCRP.

Next meeting
• In June, Native American Food Security Grant, bring some of the PI’s here to discuss it.
• Meet at UC Cooperative Extension in the future.