Humboldt Food Policy
Minutes
June 7, 2013

Attendees (20):
Heidi McHugh – Food for People
Linda Prescott – Humboldt County Office of Education
Erin Derdin-Little – Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Ann Anderson – Locally Delicious
Anne Holcomb – Food for People
Deborah Giraud – UC Cooperative Extension
Michael Kein – Fresh Roots Humboldt
Caterina Lewis - Perry – Locally Delicious/Fresh Roots Humboldt
Alex Stillman – Arcata City Council
Connie Stewart – California Center for Rural Policy
Glenda Humiston – USDA
Dorina Espinoza – UC Cooperative Extension
Michelle Showers – HSU graduate student
Kristina Bollmann – California Center for Rural Policy
Joe Ormond – Transitions
Linda Hunt – Farm Bureau/USDA
Sandra Pedrotti – Farm Bureau/USDA
Joe Duckett - self
Kelli Reese – North Coast Coop
Laura McEwen – California Center for Rural Policy

Welcome – Laura McEwen
Dinner by Mazzotti’s – try to use as much local, organic and non-GMO ingredients
Only 9 out of 35 attendees filled out the evaluation from the last meeting – we do look at the evaluations, so please fill out.

Announcements:
Deborah Giraud - UC Cooperative Extension. I would like to welcome you to the Agricultural Center. This building was built 50 years ago. June 17th is Farm to Table Dinner at Redwood Acres. Friends of the fair are putting that on and they’re honoring Extension and Farm Bureau for our 100 year anniversaries. The Tours are also something that has been put together in honor of our 100th year celebration. September 13th is the UC Extension’s 100 year dinner at the Arcata community center.

Catarina Lewis-Perry - Locally Delicious is celebrating our 5 year anniversary on Arcata Plaza tomorrow from 10:00 – 1:00. We’re trying to close up our funding gap for our $10,000 goal to pay farmers in the community to grow food for people. It’s called the Locally Delicious Food Fund.
Ann Holcomb - Friday, June 14th, in partnership with the Coop, is the annual Thrill of the Grill, which is a fundraiser for our Child nutrition program and the children’s summer lunch program. It will be from 11:30-2:00 at the Eureka Coop. Life music from Dog Bone. It’s a zero waste event.

Laura McEwen – With CalFresh funding through DHHS, local schools are receiving school food service equipment; commercial food processor, a salad bar, or a Sunkist Sectionizer.

Connie Stewart - Thanks to DHHS, we were able to save Orick’s free and reduced lunch program. Their oven broke; they didn’t have the funding to replace it, and would have had to give up their hot lunch. This CalFresh partnership has really paid off. That is an example of what we have been able to do with the funding.

Anne Holcomb - The CalFresh funding has also been used to provide refrigeration for each of the pantry sites. This makes it possible for them to have more perishable foods.

Guest Speaker – Dr. Glenda Humiston
I’m going to do a couple of things. I’m not going to get into a great deal of detail of what’s in the current Farm Bill. It’s too big of a giant question mark at this point. I’m going to give a broad overview, a little bit of history, so you’ll understand where you might have impact in the future. I also want to discuss things we can do right here. The farm bill is huge and it does have an impact, but there is a lot more stuff we can do here that is and isn’t related to it. Let me first explain who Rural Development is.

We’re one of 29 agencies within the USDA. USDA is one of the largest departments within the federal government and we have 7 mission areas. It runs from Food and Nutritional services (food stamps, school lunch programs), natural resources and environment (natural resources conservation services, and forest services), Food safety services, the foreign and farm service, rural development (3 different agencies within our mission area; rural housing, rural utilities, rural business services - we have about 48 programs within those), marketing and regulatory programs (agricultural marketing service, etc.), and research education extension (national agriculture library, national institute of food and agriculture, any economic research service). I just wanted to give you a sense of the department, because a lot of people don’t realize how broad the mandate is. The Farm Bill writes the rules, policies and the budget for all of those things I just named.

So now we go back to Rural Development. We focus on rural development, literally, in the broadest possible sense. That includes a lot of housing; multi and single, farm worker, community facilities, rural utilities. Right now we’re doing a lot of Broadband. Seventy years ago, one of our earliest programs was electricity. We were the agency that got electricity to rural parts of the country. Also a lot of business programs, loans and grants.
Why do we have a Farm Bill? The modern farm bill started off in the 1930s. Some people claim you can go back into the mid-1800s with the Land Grant University. The founding of that was the Homestead Act, but some of that can be considered Farm policy. The modern Farm Bill came about because of the Dust Bowl and the Depression. Across the nation people were losing farms, people couldn’t get food and the economy was collapsing. So the Farm Bill was created to deal with a lot of those issues. For the next 20-40 years, a lot of other factors starting weighing in more heavily on the Farm Bill. This policy of “Cheap Food” was something that started coming in the 1930s and on. The Green Revolution in the late 1950s and 60s brought on hybrid seeds, pesticides, irrigation and chemicals. Environmental issues that came from that were seen in the 1970s. As those pesticides started wreaking havoc, we started getting environmental issues on the table and having to deal with those. International trade as the global economy started weaving its way into our life in the 1970s and 80s. More recently some of the alternative energy sources, such as methane have evolved.

A classic Iron Triangle has been driving the Farm Bill politically since the 1930s. The iron triangle is similar to the Military industrial complex. You find vested interest groups. Some of the groups are traditional agriculture commodities’ groups (Farm Bureau, etc.); corporate agriculture business and the Land Grant Universities are part of that. It’s a circular triangle that goes round and round and round. Things were run like that throughout the 50s to the 80s. Food programs in the 60s started changing that a little bit. The world population was declining so much that if they hadn’t put food stamp programs in then they would have never got any urban votes for the pork bill.

More recently, there have been a lot of issues with global farm policies that have been evolving. A traditional advantage that our US farmers have had is access to technology, but it is not an advantage anymore; it’s pretty much worldwide. Farmers are getting bigger and making it more difficult for family farmers to compete. As we’re beginning to examine food policies, there is the entrenched distribution structure. As you’re beginning to do farm to school direct work, I’m sure you’re experiencing how hard it is to change how food moves from one place to another. The issues are very regional. There is equal support on all sides of the farm bill regardless of political affiliation.

The 1985 Farm bill is the first time we saw a Conservation Title. That’s the beginnings of when the bill was starting to discuss some of the environmental issues. It was predominately focused on soil and water conservation. The 1990 bill included wetlands. The 1996 included the environmental quality and wildlife habitat. They have been adding more and more programs with each farm bill. What does it mean to move toward sustainable agriculture and what does that look like? We have to start looking at energy. Agriculture uses a lot of it and it could also produce a lot of it. Land owner objectives and needs have to be taken into account.

The 2008 farm bill had some impacts that are still being observed. The main one was that a lot of new interest groups got engaged and really starting finding their voice. In particular, the conservative Libertarian-type groups had been trying to kill the previous 3-4 farm bills. They hated the subsidies, thought they were trade distorting, anti-market forces, etc. They finally realized they were getting nowhere with that. In 2008, they started aligning with the environmental groups who were pushing to
shift all the dollars, $20+ billion dollars a year, from those subsidies (paying farmers to farm or not farm). They wanted to shift that money from subsidies to conservation programs. They wanted to do it via Eco Systems Services, where you quantify what the value of the service is off land and somehow compensate the land owner. Farm Bureaus, for the first time ever, started doing public testimonies suggesting that they could support reductions in subsidies. They were more interested in market access, primarily international market access. The Free Trade people, big multi-national corporations, they hated the subsidies because they became a trade war all too often. Countries wouldn’t let them in or put up tariffs because of the subsidies. They started exploiting the anti-globalism activist who hated the subsidies because they were hurting small farmers in third world countries. For the first time ever, we saw the nutrition and healthcare people really weighing in on the Farm Bill. Eco system services are a concept based on landscapes, working landscapes, providing a whole lot of services (food, fuel, fiber). Some other services are irrigation, pollination, climate regulation, water and disease regulation, ground water recharge, etc. The Farm Bill should be focused on these services and move away from subsidies.

Five years later, we have a lot of new drivers; particularly global drivers. There is concern as to how we’re going to feed the world’s population. It’s not possible with the land and existing practices that we have in place now. Why is the obesity health issue so huge? One study reported that obesity costs our nation $190 billion a year. That money could be invested elsewhere. Other top tier countries (Denmark) are buying farm land in mass quantities in the U.S. Land ownership will be drastically different in the next 10 years. The vast majority of the Farm Bill is comprised of food and nutrition programs. All programs are being effected by spending cuts (sequester).

Let’s move into what you can do here locally. There are reports and publications on the California Rural Development website to help businesses. I use this documents to help communities I works with. We need to be focusing on our existing businesses and entrepreneurs. Stop focusing on CEO’s and help the other 98%. When discussing the food value chain - if we continue to focus on regional and local food - and try to bring more of that processing back home, we can produce over 181,000 jobs in 5 years. Value chain profits are being taken out of communities by multi-national corporations (Wal-Mart’s money goes back to Arkansas). Biomass is being turned into biodiesel. Value chains are linear. As we try to change our food system structure we run into these two problems; (1). Aggregation hubs are desperately needed. Food banks could become food or aggregation hubs. (2) Commercial kitchens are another problem. People need somewhere to cook food. We also need to work on technology to make slaughter houses able to work with various meat processors.

Capital - or how are we going to pay for everything? What are the roadblocks to accessing it? There are 24 viable ways to access capital in this state right now. The book is on the California USDA website. With the Community Reinvestment Act, banks legally have to invest in underserved communities (rural). There are also other creative ways to develop capital, such as lending circles or crowd funding. Several local bakeries have utilized crowd funding.
It all comes down to us tying our buy-local work into making sure that our clusters and value chains are functioning. We have to insure that the goods movement or infrastructure that we need to move stuff to market is there; and then invest locally. Put all those things together and then we’re going to start seeing some changes in our economy. We’ll start seeing more than 1% of the food that is on your plate having local origins. Groups like Humboldt Food Policy council are needed to help change occur. These groups bring knowledge, management skills, social capital and management capital together.

Dr. Glenda Humiston’s slide deck is available at the CCRP website: https://www.humboldt.edu/ccrp/humboldt-food-policy-council

The slides are all the way down at the bottom of the page under "Resources." They are called Glenda Humiston USDA slides. The original PowerPoint is on there, plus a reduced size PDF.

The next meeting is July 18, 2013.

*Special thanks to Michelle Showers for the wonderful minutes!*