

ANALYSIS OF A REGIONAL FOOD INITIATIVE: A CASE STUDY OF THE
GREATER KANSAS CITY FOOD POLICY COALITION

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ABSTRACT

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Food policy councils (FPC) are springing up in communities all across the United States. These groups allow communities and regions to assess their local food systems and determine how they can be improved. FPCs can either be government-appointed or a grassroots efforts and are usually made up of a diverse group of people that work within various parts of the food system. Diversity within the council helps to ensure that issues within the whole food system are addressed by the council. FPCs advocate for policy change, start new programs, educate the public and government agencies, and coordinate between existing food-related groups.

In early 2007, the Kansas City-based non-profit organization KC Healthy Kids had the vision to start a local FPC in the Kansas City area. They recognized that an FPC could address issues that are deterrents to getting healthy food to the community and that it could work for a healthier food system that would in turn create a physically, socially, environmentally, and economically healthier community. This grassroots effort started as the Kansas City Food Policy Initiative and has worked to become the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition (GKCFPC) with the help of many dedicated community members.

This is a case study about the journey and evolution of the GKCFPC. This study will use interviews and observations to understand the motivation for participant involvement and the process required to form the GKCFPC. It will also discuss how an FPC can help strengthen local food systems as an alternative to the globalized food system by addressing the physical health of the community as well as issues of social, environmental, and economic justice.

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INTRODUCTION

Communities are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of taking control of their food system. The mainstream, globalized food system provides the dominant source of what we eat, but this system has taken away communities' ability to provide a healthy and just food system for its members. Local food projects, including the development of food policy groups are having a significant impact. Communities across North America, from Oakland to Toronto, are taking a stand, seeking to regain control of their food system in order to address issues of health and social justice. Specifically, food policy groups seek to implement policies or change existing policies that would make it easier for community members to meet their nutritional needs with goods and services that exist in their own neighborhoods. Local food policy groups work on issues such as local food production and sustainable agriculture, access to healthy food, food in schools, and education about healthy eating and nutrition.

This is a case study of the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition (GKCFPC). In Kansas City, there exists a need to address issues of health and justice pertaining to the local food system. The GKCFPC is a group of people working locally to address these issues, thereby, strengthening their community. The effort was sponsored by a local non-profit organization called KC Healthy Kids (KCHK). The work began in February of 2007, and came to fruition in February of 2009.

The development of the GKCFPC will be discussed along with the motivation for its formation – physical, social, economic, and environmental health of the community. The mainstream food system has left poor neighborhoods without access to healthy food and instead left them with quick shop “convenience” stores and fast food restaurants. Pesticides and monocultures increase efficiency for growing crops, but leave our once fertile agriculture lands and the food they produce lacking in nutrients. We spend our money on the convenience of an endless bounty of food that comes from hundreds or thousands of miles away rather than looking to the farmers in our own region for sustenance while keeping food dollars as close to home as possible. I will convey how food policy groups can be a means to address these issues. Through the hard work of those associated with the effort, a new food policy coalition was formed and the accomplishments of the GKCFPC will be shared.

This study begins with a review of the methods used to obtain data including observations and qualitative interviews. Next, the literature review discusses the problems of the mainstream, globalized food system; physical health of communities; social and economic justice; and environmental issues. This section is followed by a discussion of food policy groups in general - what they are and how and why they form. Then, the GKCFPC is presented; its formation and accomplishments are analyzed and a discussion is offered on how it addresses the aforementioned issues. I consider the lessons learned from the process of forming the GKCFPC and offer recommendations for other groups.

METHODS

Two methods of inquiry were used for this project. The first method was participant observation of the Kansas City Healthy Food Policy Initiative (KCHFPI) which eventually led to the GKCFPC. My job as co-coordinator of the KCHFPI enabled me to participate in and observe the process of forming the GKCFPC from start to finish.

The second method used was qualitative interviews conducted with core work group members of the KCHFPI. This method was used to provide a clear understanding of what key participants thought about the KCHFPI and also helped to confirm or refute my observations.

Participant Observation

Participant observation refers to the researcher playing a role in the social setting being observed, and they are therefore able to form an understanding of how the actors in that setting perceive and interpret it (Lofland, et al., 2006). My employment with KCHK allowed me to immerse myself in the social setting of the KCHFPI and the core work group. As a participant observer I was able to better understand what it takes to start a community group such as a food policy council or coalition. My direct interaction with participants allowed me to determine their levels of frustration or satisfaction with the process KCHK used to form the GKCFPC. I observed the meetings held by the two groups between April 2007 and February 2009. It was my job as co-coordinator of the group to take minutes at every meeting not only of what participants said, but also to note

the general feeling about the process based on participants questions and comments that came up during the meeting. Participants were informed of my involvement, not just as co-coordinator of the project, but also as an observer doing research.

Qualitative Interviews

I conducted interviews with six members of the KCHFPI and the core work group. These interviews were used to understand the participants' motivation for attending meetings of the KCHFPI, to assess opinions of key informants regarding the process used to establish the GKCFPC, and to evaluate the outcomes of the process.

Because I had worked with most of the interviewees for at least two years, the setting was generally very comfortable, and because I was only asking for their experience and opinion about a process that they had been fully immersed in, the interviews were conducted with ease. Each interview was conducted with a tape recorder which enabled me to better listen to the interviewee and ask appropriate follow-up questions after the interview was completed.

In summary, participant observation and qualitative interviews provided important information about how members viewed the process led by KCHK to form the GKCFPC. Now that I have outlined the methods used, I also have to consider past work that has been published regarding the problems engendered by the current food system which motivate communities to form food policy councils. This information is presented in the following literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our globalized food system has damaging effects. Communities are suffering from this system where the food is highly processed and travels long distances. It favors big business and corporate control of food, and is focused on profitability rather than producing a nutritious, quality product. I will address its effects on four key areas of health within a community: physical, social, economic, and environmental, and discuss the injustice that is engendered from the dominant food system.

The Problems

The Dominant Food System

Dramatic changes in U.S. agriculture occurred during the 20th century. As the U.S. economy industrialized, so too did the agricultural industry. Agriculture used to take place on a large number of labor intensive farms raising a variety of products in rural areas for nearby markets where the majority of the population lived (Dimitri, Effland, & Conklin, 2005). Most agricultural production currently takes place on a small number of very large, mechanized, and specialized farms located away from the majority of the population; and it now includes production for markets outside of the United States (Dimitri, et al., 2005). In 1900, 41% of the U.S. workforce was employed in agriculture; in 2000, only 1.9% worked in agriculture (Dimitri, et al., 2005). The number of farms has declined by 63% since 1900, while farm size has increased 67% (Dimitri, et al.,

2005). The 2007 agriculture census showed 2,204,792 farms; of this number, “125,000 farms produced 75% of the value of U.S. agricultural production” (USDA, 2007).

Today, agriculture is big business and in 2003 the industry was valued at \$920 billion (Tillotson, 2004). As described by political-economic critiques of the current agriculture and food system, the effects of the changes to these systems are, “the marginalization of small-scale primary producers and processors; loss of rural ways of life; horizontal and vertical integration, consolidation, and monopolization in the food industry and agriculture; manipulation of food and its packaging to increase profit; and alienation of food consumers from food producers and from the food that they eat (Power, p. 31-2, 1999).

According to Dimitri, Effland, and Conklin (2005) these changes in agriculture have to do with technological development, consumer influence, and integration into global markets. Advances in agricultural technology rapidly increased after World War II. Mechanized farm equipment, advances in plant and animal breeding, chemical inputs, genetic engineering, and robotics have all contributed to the remarkable efficiency of the U.S. agricultural system (Dimitri et al., 2005; Rifkin, 1996).

Demand for products of convenience also played a part in agricultural changes. As more people began working outside the home, they wanted food that was easier and more efficient to prepare. This changed not just the food that was produced, processed, packaged, and ready-to-eat, but also changed the relationships between consumers and

the food production industry (Dimitri, et al., 2005). Food processors, retailers, and marketers started to play a significant role in getting food to consumers' plates.

Integration into global markets became important to the U.S. agriculture sector early in the twentieth century as they began exporting products to take advantage of rising food prices (Dimitri, et al., 2006). Throughout the century, more and more markets continued to open, increasing the need for new products, new policies, and new ways of doing business. Corinna Hawkes (2006) explains the current globalization of agriculture like this:

Agriculture is central to this aspect of globalization and the theory of comparative advantage that lies behind it: creating efficiency by locating the production of agricultural goods where there is a comparative advantage in producing them. In a globally integrated agricultural market, the idea is that nations specialize in producing food consistent with their resource endowment, and then trade those foods between themselves. The desired result is greater economic efficiency, a more consistent food supply, lower costs of production and, in theory, cheaper food (Section I., para. 1).

This opening of agricultural markets has allowed growth of transnational food companies (TFCs), greater food trade, more foreign investment, and global vertical integration which allows a company to control all aspects of a particular food – production, distribution, and sales (Hawkes, 2006).

As efficiency in the food system has increased, our health – physical, social, economic, environmental – has felt many negative effects from this way of doing business. As agricultural technology advanced and global markets opened, agriculture turned into agribusiness (Dimitri, et al., 2005). Motivation switched from producing quality, healthy food to ensuring a healthy profit. The new farming technology is

expensive and often smaller farmers are pushed out of business because they can't afford to compete with larger more technologically advanced enterprises. Convenient, highly-processed food products were developed that lacked adequate nutrition. Although there is plenty of food produced, it is not often distributed effectively, especially quality food to the poor. The globalized food system also takes profits away from local communities and destroys farming as a way of life for many as it is more concerned with finding the best deal and cheapest producer rather than supporting local growers (Power, 1999). All of this plays a role in the more exploitative dominant agricultural system of today.

Physical Health

It is no secret that the overall health of U.S. citizens has been in serious decline for the past few decades (Campbell, 2006; Tillotson, 2004). High rates of food-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes are plaguing our communities. Today, about 36% of adults and 17% of children and adolescents are obese (Ogden, et al., 2012). In 1990, no state in the United States had an obesity rate equal to or greater than 15%; by 2010, no state had an obesity rate under 20% (CDC, 2012). The rate of diabetes has been steadily on the rise since 1990, with an estimated 5% increase annually (Goldfarb, 2007).

It is not only incidents of obesity and diabetes that have increased, but also the amount of food we eat. A 2004 study shows that calorie intake has risen in the United States (CDC, 2004). Between 1971 and 2000, daily calorie intake for women has risen 22%, from 1542 to 1877 calories per day. For men the increase is 7%, from 2450 to 2618

calories per day. The majority of these increased calories for both men and women came from carbohydrates.

The industrialization of the food system and agricultural policies have contributed to diet-related health problems by producing an overabundance of cheap food (Nestle, 2007; Tillotson, 2004; Pollan, 2003). According to Patricia Allen (2004), "food production is certainly not the problem in America, but rather quality, nutrient-rich food production. Rich and poor people alike struggle to escape the new plague of diseases caused by consuming too much and the wrong kinds of food" (p. 23).

In his 2003 article, "The (Agri)Cultural Contradictions of Obesity", Michael Pollan explains how the U.S. agricultural system began to support the overproduction of products. In the early 1970s, consumer outrage ensued over rising food prices, a result of poor weather for farming and Nixon's grain deal with the Soviet Union. In a panic, then Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz ordered farmers to plant as much grain as possible in order to drive down prices. This changed the system from one where farmers were loaned money to keep grains off the market to one where they were given money (subsidies) to produce more; this system continues today and costs the government \$19 billion dollars a year to maintain.

Overproduction of food produces more calories for consumers. This has been great for agribusiness as their raw materials are cheap and provide them incentive to create new "food" products that have become ubiquitous in ingredient lists. A recent concoction, high-fructose corn syrup, has replaced sugar in many food products such as

soda and cookies (Nestle, 2007). Corn is also fed to beef cattle and added to chicken nuggets, just to name a few of its uses. “Fat, sugar, and cereals are cheap and constitute the raw materials for energy dense and nutrient poor foods, which lead to passive overeating and obesity” (Elinder, p. 1335, 2005). Overproducing food and creating new products derived from the most highly subsidized crops, most of which are highly processed and unhealthy, contributes to food-related health problems such as obesity (Pollan, 2003).

In her book *Appetite for Profit*, Michele Simon (2006) disputes claims that obesity and other food-related diseases are solely issues of personal responsibility. These claims have been asserted by the Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF), the National Restaurant Association, and certain people in the government such as President Clinton. Clinton proposed the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996” to cut funding for the welfare system. Simon does not think that personal responsibility is irrelevant, but she does think that “government has an important role to play in helping people make better, more informed choices and lead healthier lives” (p. 23). Simon says there are assumptions made that are not necessarily true such as: all people understand which foods are healthy and which are unhealthy, everyone has access to healthy food, and marketing is not effective when making food choices. The truth is that not everyone has all the information necessary to make healthy food choices, either because they do not have the resources or because nutrition information is not given, for example, in restaurants. Even if people know what is healthy they do not always have

access to supermarkets or farmers markets with fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy food choices, for example, in food deserts.

Food desert is a term that refers to communities where healthy, affordable food is not readily available. They are commonly found in low-income, rural and urban areas where residents have limited access to transportation (White, 2009). Food deserts in urban areas have high rates of racial segregation and income inequality (USDA, 2009). According to a national food security survey, in 2008, 5.7 percent of households did not have the food they needed or wanted because of access issues – either it was too difficult to get to grocery stores or the food was not available (USDA, 2009). The supermarket industry locates stores where they can make the most money and these locations are generally not in rural areas or densely populated communities of color (Winne, 2008). Because larger food stores often have a healthier selection of food at more affordable prices than smaller ones, a lack of quality food stores is connected to a poor quality diet and increased risk of obesity (Cummins & Macintyre, 2005; Powell, et al., 2007).

Even if one has access to supermarkets, it may not always be clear what is healthy given all the advertising one sees when walking down the aisles, on television, in magazines, etc. By 2000, food companies were spending \$33 billion annually to convince consumers to buy their products (Nestle, 2007). In 1997, 70% of food advertising went towards processed foods and beverages while 2.2% went towards fruits, vegetables, grains, and beans (Gallo, 1999). “Food sales increase with the intensity, repetition, and visibility of the advertising message” (Nestle, p. 22, 2007). You can

understand why it is difficult to figure out which food is actually good for you when all of the advertising goes into the products which are not.

In Michael Pollan's, *In Defense of Food* (2008), he helps us find our way through all of the confusing information we receive about food from, in particular, the food industry and nutrition science. He says that scientists, food marketers, and the government,

have constructed an ideology of nutritionism that, among other things, has convinced us of three pernicious myths: that what matters most is not the food but the "nutrient"; that because nutrients are invisible and incomprehensible to everyone but scientists, we need expert help in deciding what to eat; and that the purpose of eating is to promote a narrow concept of physical health. Because food in this view is foremost a matter of biology, it follows that we must try to eat "scientifically"--by the nutrient and the number and under the guidance of experts (p. 8).

Pollan (2008) points out that when we are only concerned with the particular nutrients available in a food then we can easily find highly processed foods more nutritious than whole foods such as fruits, vegetables and grains. For example, in 2005 advertising whole grain in food products was the marketing focus. General Mills jumped on the bandwagon by formulating whole grain versions of their current cereals and put "whole grain" banners on their cereal boxes (Simon, 2006). Sugar is still one of the first ingredients in Lucky Charms, but the fact that it is made from whole grain leads consumers to believe that this is a better option than other cereals that do not claim to be whole grain. As Michele Simon (2006) states, "containing or not containing one particular ingredient does not a health food make" (p. 97).

Social and Economic Justice

There is no question that people all over the world go hungry every day, even people in the United States. The question is, why? “The world today produces enough grain alone to provide every human being on the planet with thirty-five hundred calories a day” (Lappé, p. 8, 1998). The U.S. government maintains large excess supplies of food products such as cheese, milk, and butter, not to mention the surplus food we ship overseas which in 1995, added up to about 3 million metric tons of wheat, flour, and other cereal products (Lappé, 1998). How then is it possible that people are going hungry in the United States?

One of the biggest contradictions in U.S. agriculture is this persistence of hunger despite having the most productive food system in the world. In 2009, 43.6 million people in the U.S. lived in poverty while in 2010, 48.8 million Americans lived in food insecure households (Feeding America.org, accessed March 6, 2012). The facts that the food system is controlled by corporations and that food is treated as a commodity are the biggest threats to food security (Allen, 1999b; Allen, 2004; Lappé, 1998; Patel, 2007; Power, 1999). The market is driven by profit, not by the needs of consumers and is inclined to keep wealth and power in the hands of only a few. This combines with the fact that many people work jobs that do not provide a living wage, therefore they pay a larger percentage of their income for food. According to one study, “households in the top quintile by income (mean income, \$77,311) spent \$1,997 per person for food in 1992 compared with \$1,249 spent by those in the bottom quintile (mean income, \$6,669)”

(Drewnowski, p. 839S, 2003). Those with low-incomes often times pay higher prices because many markets in poor neighborhoods are small and do not have the volume to negotiate low prices on food. The Economic Research Service (ERS) reviewed studies of food prices and “found that supermarket prices are 10 percent lower, on average, than those of smaller food stores, in part, due to lower per unit costs resulting in lower margins over cost of goods sold” (USDA, p. 14, 2009). These factors constrict what is truly available for people, especially the poor, to eat.

Government food welfare programs have offered one way to combat the effects of poverty. According to Patricia Allen (1999b) they were first developed during the Depression not just to help feed the hungry but to provide an outlet for the agricultural surplus. The concern was more about farm incomes than the hungry as welfare programs would be cancelled if they caused a disturbance in the agricultural markets. When times get tough, these policies are always the first to be cut. “There is always another motive, another deal to be cut, before humanity’s needs are met” (Winne, 2008, p. 175). The power of the agriculture industry continues into modern times as its influence dominates over health and welfare programs in the political arena. Allen (1999a) states, “Agricultural interests contributed \$24.9 million to presidential and congressional candidates in the 1991/92 election, resulting in an average of \$76,000 for each member of the House agricultural committee and \$123,000 for each member of the Senate agricultural committee. These contributions were 50 times greater than those from groups promoting either health and welfare or children’s rights” (p. 179). Political

contributions and other lobbying efforts help ensure favorable policies for agribusiness which keep business going and profits high. Agribusiness considers these influential donations an important part of their business plan and are always included in their budgets. Despite the lack of vision for government to put basic needs first, it does not take away the fact that welfare programs have improved the ability of the poor to feed themselves (Allen, 1999b).

Mark Winne (2008) agrees that the food gap, when people lack access to healthy and nutritious food, is caused by poverty. He states, “If there is a gap that is more responsible for the food gap than any other, it is this country’s glaring disparity between the haves and the have-nots” (p. 179). He writes about the city of Hartford, Connecticut in the 1980s, when the supermarkets left and the “bottom feeders of America’s food chain” appeared - fast food restaurants and convenience marts (p. 111). While fast food chains filled the void that supermarkets left behind, a host of new issues emerged as a result. Now the population had plenty of cheap food to consume, but it was highly-processed, nutrient deficient, high-fat, and high-sugar food that led to heart disease, diabetes and obesity. While these food establishments serve the community’s need for calories, they do not serve the community’s needs for nutrition. This is not a problem unique to Hartford. Winne states, “We have in America today a tale of two food systems – one for the poor and one for everyone else” (p. 175).

Allen (1999b) argues that the food system was once two-tiered with cheap, basic foods on one tier and specialty foods that were only affordable to a small percentage of

the wealthy on another. This system was done away with once the food system became industrialized and made food – both specialty and basic food items - more readily available for everyone. She is concerned that the more recent local food movement “may be unwittingly recreating a two-tiered food system differentiated by class” (p. 126).

Many alternative food movements regard issues of access for low-income people as one of their core priorities, but must be careful not to wind up serving only those with money as they are forced to work within the limitations of the current system (Allen, 2008).

Ellie Perkins (1999) argues that locally produced food could potentially cost up to twice as much as similar, mass-produced goods. Local food products are often marketed as unique and high quality because they come from the local region or are grown in specialized ways, thereby increasing price and desirability so that they are out of reach to the poor.

Nevertheless, for many areas, creating a viable local food system is a practical way to economically invigorate a community. “These local food systems are rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices, and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community” (Feenstra, p. 28, 1997).

Environment

Today’s agriculture system is responsible for feeding 7 billion people (El Nasser, 2011). Projections for the future show the world’s population increasing 50% by 2050 (Tilman, et al, 2002). This huge spike in population will increase demand on the world’s

food supply which could be difficult for the environment to withstand if the same methods of production continue to be used. “Agriculture’s direct dependence upon natural resources and processes makes it impossible to obscure environmental destruction in the agrifood system” (Allen, p. 25, 2004), although synthetic inputs make the destruction easy to disguise as food production is enabled to flourish. Pesticides alone cause \$8 billion of damage every year (Pimentel, et al., 1992). Damage includes human and animal death and poisoning, destruction of beneficial natural predators, resistance of pests to pesticides, crop loss (when pesticides drift to non-target crops), and ground and surface water contamination (Pimentel, 1992). Other issues include resource degradation including loss of topsoil and declining water supply due to irrigation of cropland (Allen, 2004). These negative effects are externalized costs of the industry, so they are not incorporated into the price of food at the grocery store; essentially, we don’t ever pay directly for the damage done to the environment through agricultural processes (Allen, 2004; Lang, 1999; Tilman, et al, 2002). Our cheap food is not quite the bargain it is purported to be when the environment is considered.

The issues named above allude to another problem with agriculture and the amount of land it consumes. “More area is under agricultural management than is covered by forest and woodlands, and conversion continues at 13 million [hectares] per year” (Robertson and Swinton, p. 38, 2005). If these lands were allowed to continue as natural ecosystems they would provide many services to society. These services include air and water purification, degradation of organic matter and animal waste, pollination,

habitat for organisms, provision of food and fuel and material for shelter, flood and erosion prevention, regeneration of fertile soils, and moderating climate (Robertson and Swinton, 2005). As these ecosystems continue to be replaced by agricultural land, the positive effects of uncultivated lands are lost.

This literature review has elucidated the major problems within the dominant food system. The food industry has money and powerful influence on its side. Communities suffer as food corporations continue to turn healthy profits. Physical health is in decline and Americans feel the social, economic, and environmental effects of a system that separates us further from where our food comes. This is not the way it has to be though. Luckily, communities can take back control of their food system. One approach is the food policy council to be discussed in the next section.

FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

One way communities are choosing to empower themselves and create a more just and sustainable food system is to start a Food Policy Council (FPC). As defined in, *Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned*, an FPC is:

A group of stakeholders that examine how the local food system is working and develop ways to fix it; a civic advisory group, which makes recommendations to government, and/or conducts independent programs of action to address the needs of the local or regional food system. Food Policy Councils take a food system approach – looking at the process as a whole – an attempt to connect and coordinate the diverse actors and stakeholders who represent different stages of the food system (Harper, Shattuck, Holt-Giménez, Alkon, & Lambrick, 2009, p. 59).

The first FPC was established in 1982 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since then, FPCs have gained momentum, especially over the past decade. Today there are over 100 FPCs across North America (Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), 2012).

There is no one-size-fits-all model for an FPC. Every FPC--its organization, structure, and goals--is dependent on the area that it represents. Their mission is generally one of improving the food system. They might have a variety of goals including, ensuring the food supply is as healthful as possible and reaches every member of a community; increasing local agriculture, local food awareness and local food sources while minimizing degrading effects to the environment; and strengthening the local economy. The local FPC addresses food issues and policies that relate to access and hunger, urban agriculture and distribution, food in schools and institutions, and nutrition awareness and education, just to name a few. While FPCs may look different in each

community, they are unified in their belief that the mainstream food system is not serving their community's needs and that, as a community, they can work together to bring about the change they view as necessary.

Food Policy Councils vary in scale, representing regions as large as a state or as small as a city or town. FPCs can be commissioned by a government entity or they can be a grassroots effort (CFSC, 2012). Some may be commissioned by the government but housed elsewhere such as under a non-profit organization (Harper et al., 2009).

Government commissioned FPCs tend to be larger, often representing an entire state. Unlike their grassroots counterparts, which tend to operate on a smaller scale, government commissioned FPCs also frequently benefit from the support of paid staff. The main funding sources for state, county, and local FPCs are government dollars, private donations, and foundation grants respectively. Although not all FPCs are directly connected to a government entity, it is strongly advised by FPC experts that they form a relationship with government in some way, either via a FPC member or by finding a "champion" within government that supports the mission of the FPC (Harper et al., 2009).

Most FPCs strive to have a diverse group of stakeholders that represent various sectors of the food system, including producers, processors, distributors, consumers, and waste management and recovery services (Harper et al., 2009). However the diversity of an FPC does not end there. Besides the obvious members such as farmers, grocers, and consumers, it is also important to include stakeholders from food-related organizations,

such as food banks, religious organizations and charities, and schools and hospitals. They also include health care providers, nutritionists, health insurance decision makers, community garden representatives, activists, government officials, foundations, and finally, commercial food services such as restaurants.

Most food policy councils address policy issues, but some are program oriented and work on food-related programs such as community garden development, farm-to-school initiatives, and allowing food stamps at farmers markets. Whether a FPC is policy or program oriented is dependent on the needs of the area, the priorities deemed important by the community, and how the FPC was formed, for example, a grassroots effort or by governing officials. Generally, FPCs have four basic functions: “to serve as a forum for discussing food issues, to foster coordination between sectors in the food system, to evaluate and influence policy, and to launch or support programs and services that address local needs” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 19).

Taking a closer look at two different FPCs, the Community Food & Agriculture Coalition of Missoula County (CFAC) and the New York State Council on Food Policy (NYS CFP), will help elucidate these functions. The CFAC is a grassroots effort that receives support from the City and County of Missoula in the form of a passed resolution in support of the CFAC. Both the City and the County have a representative on the CFAC (CFAC, 2012).

Education and outreach are a major focus for CFAC. They hold an annual member meeting, arrange visits from guest lecturers, and organize film festivals, farm

tours, and other events for the community (CFAC, 2012). These gatherings provide a place for the community to come together around local food issues and give the opportunity to share ideas and brainstorm possible solutions to current food system issues.

The CFAC also works on policy issues. Their main concern regarding policy change is farm and ranchland conservation. They work for policies that save land ideal for growing food and raising livestock from developers while providing guidelines stating when land can be used for development and when it should be used for agriculture (CFAC, 2012).

Another focus of the CFAC is on developing programs to “grow markets for local foods” (CFAC, 2012). Programs include Farm to School which helps get locally grown food into schools and educates children about local food by bringing in area farmers to demonstrate and give presentations about food production. Their “Buy Fresh Buy Local” program connects local farmers with chefs at area restaurants to help develop menus with as much locally-grown food as possible. They have also been successful in getting electronic benefit transfer (EBT) machines at farmers’ markets so those eligible can use their food stamps to buy fresh, local produce.

An underlying function of all of the efforts of the CFAC is to foster contact between various sectors of the local food system. The hope is that the lines of communication will begin to exist between sectors that wouldn’t normally talk, such as

developers talking with agriculture land conservationists, or school administrators talking with local farmers about healthy meals for school children.

The New York State Council on Food Policy (NYS CFP) was established by an Executive Order from the governor's office. The NYS CFP seeks to “develop and recommend policies that preserve and enhance agricultural production in New York; and ensure that all New Yorkers have adequate access to safe, affordable, fresh and nutritious foods, especially by children, low-income individuals, the senior population, and other at-risk or underrepresented citizens” (NYS CFP, p. 1, 2010).

Because the NYS CFP was established by a gubernatorial executive order it functions differently than the CFAC. The NYS CFP provides a yearly report to the governor with information about what the council did that year and recommendations for the upcoming year. The 2010 report, *History Vision and Actions: New York State Food Policy Recommendations*, states that the NYS CFP met twice that year to disseminate information between government agencies, the public, policy makers, various stakeholders, and local food experts. There were also guest speakers at the meetings to help provide information, advice, support, and possible solutions regarding current food issues facing the State. The meetings also provide a platform for public input which has been critical in bringing issues of access for low-income individuals to the table. The NYS CFP has responded by working to get Women, Infant and Children (WIC) fruit and vegetable checks accepted at farmers' markets and distributing about 40 electronic

benefits transfer (EBT) machines to farmers' markets and other local produce distribution points serving low-income areas.

Work groups have also formed around the NYS CFP's four main focus areas: support and participation for food and nutrition assistance programs, making it easier for consumers to support local food producers, strengthen local food production and infrastructure, and creating a culture of healthy eaters that makes a priority of supporting local food producers throughout the State. The work groups include council members whose specific interests lie in one of the four focus areas and sometimes local experts or stakeholders outside the council are included on a work group. Specifically, in 2010 the work groups addressed the following: "analysis of Federal food safety legislation; review of USDA Hunger-Free Communities grant; development of the "Food and Nutrition Connection Center," a web-based inventory of community resources (under construction); and preparation of recommendations for USDA geographic preference language"¹ (NYS CFP, 2010).

Given the expertise of the NYS CFP members, the council has a strong network and outreach program. They have a system for answering queries from phone calls and their website, they are contacted to speak at various events and conferences, they write articles and give interviews, and they write letters in support for those seeking grants relating to local food issues that the NYS CFP supports.

¹ Geographic preference language pertains to organizations that run Child Nutrition Programs and allows them to specify the geographic area from which they want to obtain agricultural products.

Although the NYS CFP and the CFAC vary in formation and have different ways of reaching some common goals, they both address the four basic functions of FPCs: discussing food issues, coordinating between sectors, addressing food policy, and forming and supporting programs.

THE GREATER KANSAS CITY FOOD POLICY COALITION

The formation of the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition (GKCFPC) came about at a time when support for local food was gaining momentum across the country. The Kansas City area was witnessing this momentum as well, but was missing a coordinated effort to support and properly “grow” the effort. This need was felt by many in the region who care about local agriculture and the overall health and well-being of the community. The GKCFPC was formed in response to that need, and following is an account of how it happened.

Background

The GKCFPC officially formed in February, 2009, but the spark that led to the GKCFPC began over two years before, with inspiration from a local Kansas City visionary, David Ross. Ross is a longtime Kansas City resident and continually works to make life better for those who live in the Kansas City area. He is the Vice-President of the non-profit organization KC Healthy Kids (KCHK). In 2006, Ross was in Washington D.C. for a conference about food systems sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation. At the time, the Farm Bill was being considered for reauthorization and this conference provided space to discuss possible reforms to the legislation. At this conference it became apparent to Ross that the Farm Bill involves a lot more than farms and the agriculture industry. The impacts of the Farm Bill are far-reaching beyond agriculture and actually affect mainstream citizens, probably more than most people realize. At the

conference the need arose to bring a broader range of voices to the table to discuss issues related to the Farm Bill such as physical health and food in schools. This discussion resonated with Ross and inspired him to bring the idea back to Kansas City. Upon his return, Ross spoke with his colleague, Brenda Kumm, about his vision to change the way people thought about the Farm Bill. It wasn't just a "Farm Bill," it was really a "Food Bill" (Personal communication, November 17, 2009).

The desire to change people's misconceptions about the Farm Bill provided the impetus for the Healthy Food Policy Forum (Forum) held in February 2007 and organized by KCHK. The Forum brought together over 180 stakeholders to discuss the Farm Bill. The Forum was about "aligning the nation's food policy more closely with our national health goals while supporting sustainable food systems that are good for the environment, good for the local economy" (Personal communication, November 17, 2009). Kumm, former President of KCHK, recalled that it was tough to convince some people to be a part of this Forum. People from healthcare foundations and superintendents of schools weren't sure how the Farm Bill pertained to them. Kumm and the KCHK staff persuaded them to attend the Forum and listen to what was being said. Many light bulbs went off at that Forum as people began to understand the connection between the Farm Bill and numerous areas of public life: community and individual health, child nutrition, the local food economy, and so on. At the end of this Forum, feedback from attendees indicated they had a better grasp of how Kansas City was

affected by the Farm Bill. They were also introduced to the concept of a Food Policy Council (FPC) and how it could help change food policies for a healthier community.

The formation of the GKCFPC was to be spearheaded by KCHK. As a non-profit organization, KCHK “informs, advocates and mobilizes the resources and talents of our community to improve the food and physical environments. We lead and support efforts designed to make the policy, environmental and systems changes that increase healthy eating and active living opportunities for children and all individuals in Greater Kansas City” (KCHK, n.d.).

Before I discuss how KCHK moved forward in pursuing a FPC, it is important to discuss another group that also had the vision to start a FPC in Kansas City. In January 2007, I met with a group of local activists that were organizing a conference called “Coming Home to Eat” (CHTE). They were not associated with any particular organization, but were a grassroots group of community activists. The result of this conference was the desire to start a food policy council in Kansas City, an effort which I volunteered to lead with another woman named Sarah Shmigelsky. It was through this conference that I received an invitation to the Healthy Food Policy Forum.

To clarify, there was a difference in the two groups’ visions of how and why to start a FPC in Kansas City. The group from CHTE is dedicated to working on various issues within the community. While they do not necessarily have jobs working within the food system, they spend their nights and weekends volunteering and fighting for causes that mean the most to them. They have little money available, although one of the

members had the foresight to start a non-profit so they would be eligible to receive donations and grant funding. The KCHK group, by contrast, is a small foundation; consequently, they had money available to support programs, making it easier to get things done. CHTE may have had similar ideas for implementation, but had not secured funding for proposed projects. Because KCHK has an established reputation of being a non-profit organization doing good work, they already had connections throughout the community, including many local foundations, healthcare professionals, and state government officials.

When the outcome of both the Healthy Food Policy Forum and the Coming Home to Eat Conference was to start a FPC, I had to make a decision regarding which group I wanted to work with. It was clear to me that although neither group was clear on how the FPC would be formed, the KCHK group had strong leadership and resources to make things happen as proven by other established programs already working in the area. They also offered Shmigelsky and me part-time jobs as project coordinators for this local food initiative. I accepted this position, hoping that both groups could come together to work on this common goal.

The CHTE group was less than pleased about my decision to join KCHK. CHTE had a passion and a vision for a food policy council that centered around educating the community on growing their own food. They seemed radically concerned about the

prospects of reaching Peak Oil² and the probability that one day we will not be able to transport food over the long distances that it currently travels. There was an urgency to create a self-sustaining local food system as soon as possible. It was my feeling that policies needed to change in all areas of the food system in order to support local food production and promotion. In that way I was better aligned with KCHK's vision.

Although the KCHK group saw the importance of empowering communities to be self-sufficient and agreed that local food should be part of the project, they were not motivated by the same considerations as CHTE. While CHTE viewed local food as a solution to a larger environmental challenge (Peak Oil), KCHK viewed the establishment of a FPC primarily as a way to address their health and nutrition mandate. While they incorporated not just children, but the community as a whole, their focus remained on public health which would trickle down to address all other issues related to health, nutrition, and food access.

The KC Healthy Food Policy Initiative

The first meeting of the KCHFPI was held on April 20, 2007. It was important for us to support local food, so the chosen venue was Lidia's Restaurant, which buys produce from local growers when possible and is centrally located in Kansas City. We scheduled the meeting during lunchtime, so attendees could incorporate it into their workday. Out of the 280 people that were invited, 27 people, not including KCHK staff,

² Peak oil refers to when oil production has reached the maximum rate of extraction and from that point forward production rates will continue to decline. This decline will cause the price of oil to increase becoming difficult for people to afford (Richards, 2006).

attended. At this meeting, the logistics of our future meetings – frequency, best day of the week, time of day, name of the initiative, subcommittees, and the best mode of contact—were discussed. Another agenda item for this meeting was to develop a list of priorities for the group. We received a lot of feedback from the brainstorming session that addressed what the attendees would like to see the group accomplish. Items included: teaching about the importance of nutrition and fitness in schools, providing local food in schools, offering sensory-based education such as school gardens and cooking classes, preventing chronic disease, increasing healthy habits, educating about hunger issues, allowing food stamps at farmers markets, working toward a localized food system thereby reducing the need for fossil fuels for transporting food, helping to develop farmers to meet demand for local food, and involving participants in the Farm Bill process. After the group named the priorities that were important to them, we developed four overarching themes and formed the following break-out groups: education and research, school wellness policies, Farm Bill process and implementation, and food production and access. Each person chose the group in which they were most interested. Each group had a staff member that acted as facilitator and note taker. The groups were to discuss realistic and achievable goals for their priority area, brainstorm immediate (3-6 month) and extended (6 months-2 years) action steps for accomplishing these goals, and identify who would commit to working on which steps. The discussion from the break-out groups was recorded and to be reviewed by KCHK staff in order to determine how to proceed at future meetings.

As the meeting ended and people were leaving, I realized there must have been some skepticism by those invited as to the meeting purpose. One person said, “I didn’t know if I would get anything out of this meeting or not, but I knew I would at least get a really delicious meal. It ended up I got both.” Many more expressed a similar sentiment, which indicated KCHK gave the community more than they anticipated.

One person responsible for the success of that meeting was Dr. Mary Hendrickson. Dr. Hendrickson is an Associate Professor in Rural Sociology at the University of Missouri Extension in Columbia, Missouri. She is also the Director of the Food Circles Networking Project and Director of the Community Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture Program, both through the University of Missouri Extension. She has the experience and knowledge about local food systems and about the Farm Bill that was invaluable to our initiative. She brought authority, vision, and energy to every meeting. She gave the initiative even more credibility than it already had and provided guidance that kept the group moving forward.

After the April 20th meeting, Kumm, Hendrickson, Shmigelsky, and I had a conference call to discuss outcomes of the meeting and to plan the agenda for the next meeting. We decided to dedicate future meetings to issues derived from the four themes (established at the April 20th meeting). We thought this would be a good way to educate everyone involved about our food system. We realized that while participants may know a great deal about their area of the food system, there were also holes and shortcomings, particularly in understanding the interconnections of the broader food system. The local

farmer, for example, may have a clear understanding of the production process and the challenges of marketing local food, but may not necessarily understand the difficulties the school food service director has in getting healthy food to students. We felt it was imperative that participants develop a broader understanding of the food system in order for people to buy into the process. We did not want people to just attend the meetings; we wanted them to become stakeholders. We wanted them to have a reason—besides a good meal—to come back. They needed something to care about, so we decided future meetings would be panel discussions on various sectors of the food system used to educate participants on *their* food system. We would have two or three people discuss what they know best about their sector of the food system, with time reserved for a question and answer session for further clarification.

We also discussed the idea to form subcommittees. Kumm suggested we hold off on doing so at this point. Her experience suggested that it would be better for staff to do the research and to share their results with the group rather than rely on the stakeholders to do this work. She also suggested we try to get people connected with folks they did not know. We hoped to see a lot of the same faces at these meetings and we wanted them to have the opportunity to get to know each other, therefore, she suggested we have assigned seating. Our invitation list shows every person's occupation, so I was to make sure each table was as diverse as possible, seating people from various sectors together.

The next meeting, titled "Understanding Our Local Food System," took place on May 22, 2007, during lunchtime, as this was decided to be the best time of day for the

majority of people present at the initial meeting. Each invitation provided a question for the stakeholders to think about before the meeting and invited them to visit the KCHK website to access meeting documents and get information about the 2007 Farm Bill.

This meeting started as most of our meetings would, with a welcome address from Kumm, then meeting logistics and announcements, a Farm Bill update from Dr. Hendrickson, followed by stakeholder introductions – name, organization, and position – and finally, the panel discussion.

The May meeting had two panelists. The first was Katherine Kelly, a farmer and Director of the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture. The second was Diana Endicott of Good Natured Family Farms, an alliance of over 100 family farms that serves the local “Buy Fresh/Buy Local” program at area grocery stores. Kelly and Endicott helped participants understand the difficulties farmers face in doing jobs they love. They want to be farmers and help others produce food, but the supports are not in place to make small family farms a viable way of life. They shared a vision of local food being a larger percent of what community members eat, of having gardens in neighborhoods and communities so children can see them as they walk or drive by, of farmers being in partnership with school and hospital food service directors, of teaching more farmers, and of developing an efficient distribution system in order to meet the demand. They shared reasons why this vision is difficult to bring to life: farmers do not make enough money and do not have investment capital, they need foundations to invest in farmer

development; there is no crop insurance for small scale vegetable production; and health insurance is difficult to get for farmers (as it is for most small businesses).

After the panelists spoke we presented three questions for the stakeholders to consider in small groups. The three questions were:

1. What did you learn from the panel discussion and will the information be useful to you?
2. Does the information shared change the way you think about policy?
3. What are some ideas to facilitate positive change in the production and distribution segment of our food system?

The third question received the most attention. Possible solutions advanced by workshop participants included educating kids early, before age eight, about where food comes from; expanding school community gardens; creating farm tour programs; making food stamps worth more if buying local food; expanding the audience by advertising, promoting community dialogue, securing media and public service announcement spots; facilitating a better understanding of how schools can incorporate local food; providing subsidies for vegetables; having face-to-face dialogue with food service directors and farmers; and changing regulations to accommodate small producers with fewer resources.

We met three more times after the May 22 meeting, in August, September, and November, (at the last minute we had to cancel a meeting scheduled for December due to a snowstorm). The format of these meetings stayed the same for the rest of the year, and they became easier to manage as people came to know what to expect and got to know each other. The panels for the meetings focused on other elements raised in the February meeting: school food service, hunger awareness and food security, and hospital food

service respectively. The meeting in December was to have been a panel of local food advocates to discuss the local food movement in Kansas City.

As 2008 approached, we decided to change the theme of the meetings and use what we learned in 2007 to take concrete steps toward creating a food policy council for Kansas City. We invited Mark Winne, Food Policy Director of the Food Security Coalition and author of, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty* to help with this effort. Winne has helped many communities organize their efforts around starting a food policy council, so his expertise would be invaluable to our efforts.

December 2007 and January and February of 2008 were spent getting ready for Winne's visit, which was scheduled to take place February 19-22, 2008. Shmigelsky and I scheduled conference calls with Winne in order to gain a better understanding of how to prepare for his visit. *Closing the Food Gap* had just been published, so he was interested in combining efforts of helping us form a food policy council with promotion of his book. This was fine with us, so Shmigelsky and I got to work scheduling events and developing his agenda.

Several steps were taken to ensure the success of his visit. Shmigelsky and I sought out various media opportunities to promote both Winne's book and our local food endeavor. We scheduled both Winne and Kumm as guests on a local radio talk show which airs on our community National Public Radio (NPR) station. One of the stakeholders of the KCHFPI has a cooking spot during a local daytime newscast and she was able to get Winne on as a guest while she featured a recipe using local food during

her segment. Another stakeholder is a *Kansas City Star* newspaper reporter who scheduled an interview with Winne to be run in the food section of the paper. Winne was also scheduled for a speaking engagement at a local library to talk about his book and the KCHFPI. Shmigelsky and I also met with local non-profits and a Kansas City Council member to let them know about our efforts and to gain their support and invite them to some of the events scheduled during Winne's visit.

While we were engaged in planning for Winne's visit, Kumm announced to the KCHK staff that she would be stepping down as President of the organization. She would be replaced by Gretchen Kunkel who worked as a consultant for KCHK, and would accept the role of President and continue the work of the KCHFPI. This news would be announced at the next stakeholder meeting on February 22.

This stakeholder meeting was again held at Lidia's. Winne had input on our agenda for this meeting because we needed to get specific information and feedback from the stakeholders regarding their vision of what the FPC should look like. Winne had the experience necessary to get this information efficiently and effectively. Generally, the stakeholder meetings were two hours long, but this meeting was extended to three hours in order to accommodate our guest speaker and allow time for the extra work that needed to be done. We did the normal welcome and introductions, but as the stakeholders introduced themselves they were asked to state one feature of the local food system that they thought was strong and one that they thought was weak. We also wanted to show the diverse interests and perspectives of the group, so we called out various sectors and

had people raise their hand if they represented that sector. The following sectors were represented: foundations, schools, hospitals, growers/farmer, nutritionists, academia, public health, media, government, healthcare plans, anti-hunger agencies, faith communities, supermarkets, restaurants and community food activists. Although we felt good about the number of sectors that were represented, we knew we had more outreach to do, especially to communities of color. In fact, in the interviews I conducted, everyone mentioned that we needed to do more outreach or named a sector or group that still needed to come to the table.

Winne's presentation entitled, "Closing the Food Gap: Making the Right Prevalent," discussed the challenge of food access issues and how food policy groups can compliment the many projects that food organizations implement. Winne contended that food policy councils can fill the gaps that exist in governmental services resulting from the lack of a "Department of Food" in state and local governments. He gave quick overviews of various food policy councils, stating how they formed, how many members they have, how the members are selected, and how councils are funded. He stressed the importance of having local government support for the FPC. He suggested finding at least one "champion," a member of the state or local government, who believes in and supports the idea of a FPC. He also asserted the need to educate government officials on the state of the food system and explain why intervention is necessary and how it can be beneficial for the city, county, etc.; and to work with people that know how to navigate through the appropriate government entity. He discussed general purposes of FPCs;

where FPC members come from; issues that should be addressed including developing markets for farmers, increase access to food stores, school food, and loss of farmland; and lessons learned from his experience such as the importance of cultivating relationships, encouraging discussion and debate in times of conflict, educating the public and policy makers, and looking for uncommon connections.

After Winne's presentation, we moved on to roundtable discussions, in which each table was given the same three questions to discuss and then report back to the whole group. The questions were:

1. What value would a Food Policy Council bring to Kansas City?
2. Which Food Policy Council model would best suit the Kansas City area?
3. What specific policy changes or implementations do you want a Food Policy Council to advocate for in the Kansas City area?

Before considering the answers to these questions, it is important to understand the challenge that is presented by the somewhat unique geographic situation of Kansas City. Kansas City straddles the state line between Kansas and Missouri. Kansas City, MO is the anchor of the Greater Kansas City area. It has the largest land area, population, and revenue stream of all the cities included in the area. The stakeholders that have been coming to meetings regularly represent organizations that are from both sides of the state line. There is no single county, city or regional jurisdiction that resides over the area that is considered Greater Kansas City. The question of where to house the FPC weighed on the group, especially staff, for quite a while. There were people who wanted to see the FPC housed in the City of Kansas City, MO, and there were people

who opposed this for fear of alienating a large percentage of stakeholders that serve populations outside Kansas City, MO, and would therefore be in danger of not getting any benefit from the FPC. Because of this situation, we were very interested to see what the stakeholders had to say regarding the questions posed.

Answers to the first question about the value a FPC would bring to Kansas City fell into four categories: provide food system coordination, become an advocate, educate the public, and support local agriculture. Seven of the eight roundtable groups gave answers that wanted the FPC provide coordination; six groups gave answers that pertained to becoming an advocate; six groups suggested educating the public; and five groups wanted to support local agriculture.

The second question asked participants to consider which FPC model would best suit Kansas City. Three of the eight groups thought a community-based FPC would be the best way to go, noting the bi-state region as a reason for their choice. Three groups suggested the FPC be housed in a local non-profit called the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC). MARC is located in Kansas City, MO, but is known for its bi-state work. Because of MARC's collaboration on projects that involve counties and cities on both sides of the state line, they were an attractive option for housing an FPC. They already had local government connections and knew how to make bi-state projects effective. Two groups needed more research to study the options, but one of these thought it should have state governmental support and posed questions about funding and administration.

The third question asked stakeholders to identify the policy changes the FPC should advocate. Six of eight groups gave answers regarding food in schools; six groups named policies regarding access to fresh, healthy and local food for low income folks; four groups showed support for improved local agriculture policies; and three groups spoke for promoting overall healthier eating.

After all the small groups presented their answers, time was allotted for the stakeholders to sign up to be a part of a core work group. This group would lead the effort to form an FPC. Two to four hours of their time would be required each month, and tasks would include developing the initial outline of goals, identifying tasks of key participants and organizations, establishing the role or capacity of the council, addressing the timeline for outcomes and recommendations, and taking a policy inventory. Twenty-three people signed up for the core work group. This is exactly what we needed to start the next phase of developing an FPC for the Kansas City area.

At the meeting, Kumm announced to the stakeholders that she was resigning from KCHK and that Gretchen Kunkel would take over as president of the organization and would also lead the KCHFPI. There were concerns voiced, not during the meeting, but later in private conversations, about this transition. Nobody knew Kunkel. They knew she had been working for KCHK, but she had never been present at a KCHFPI meeting before. Many stakeholders felt heavily invested in the effort and had developed a strong relationship with Kumm, trusting that she would follow through with the initiative.

There is no good time for this kind of change, but considering the KCHFPI was

transitioning to a new phase in the process, this seemed to be the best time to make the change.

After the meeting was over the KCHK staff had a debriefing session with Winne. We discussed how the meeting went and our immediate next steps. One suggestion was made to secure a good facilitator who could keep people on task; one who was not associated with KCHK or the KCHFPI. Dr. Hendrickson had some contacts at local University of Missouri Extension offices and provided those names to Shmigelsky and me. This brought Charles St. Clair to our group.

Core Work Group

The Core Work Group met throughout the summer of 2008 with the goal of coming up with a strategic plan for the FPC. As mentioned above, Charles St. Clair joined the group as facilitator. The first meeting of the core group was held on April 4, 2008, at MARC located in downtown Kansas City, MO. At this point, we were unsure if MARC would lead our effort, but their facility was centrally located, so we used their conference room as a meeting space to discuss the issue further. This was a two-hour meeting that brought together seventeen stakeholders and four KCHK staff members. This became our core work group. Shmigelsky and I met with St. Clair multiple times before this meeting to get him up to date on what the group had been doing and what our goals and intentions were. I gave him the answers we received to the three questions from the February 22, 2008, meeting so he could categorize and prioritize them to use at our first core group meeting. These categories would be used to determine priority areas

necessary to form committees. Seven themes were gleaned from the answers: food system coordination, support for local/sustainable agriculture, advocacy, kids/school lunch policy, access to healthy food, education, and funding/administration. Committees formed based on individual's interest in each theme. Each committee met during the meeting to discuss first steps and assigned themselves tasks to be completed when the core work group met again in May. It was also decided that mission and vision statements were necessary in order to help focus the group and come up with next steps. The "advocacy" and "coordination" committees scheduled a meeting to start writing the statements.

We soon found out that Kunkel was an expert at developing strategic plans. After a couple meetings with the core group, any concerns about Kunkel's ability and dedication to form a FPC in Kansas City were alleviated. Kunkel presented the group with a project plan and timeline to develop the strategic plan. The steps were as follows:

1. Determine the model for the FPC
2. Develop mission, vision, and core values
3. Conduct situational assessment
4. Decide critical issues
5. Define strategic positioning and goals
6. Articulate strategies and long-term objectives
7. Develop financial performance and action plans
8. Determine implementation and monitoring mechanisms
9. Create summary strategic plan
10. Create comprehensive strategic plan

The mission and vision statements were presented to the core group for feedback and were accepted by the group in June, 2008. A SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis was conducted. This helped us realized what might hinder

us down the road and helped us figure out how to turn negatives into positives and avoid pitfalls that might occur. Long discussions regarding what the FPC should look like resulted in little success in articulating its structure.

As work continued, the group decided that education and advocacy should not be separate priority areas, but should be incorporated in committee plans and discussions for each of the five remaining areas. As a result, the number of committees was pared down from seven to five. The priority areas were then: food system coordination and infrastructure, food production/local agriculture, food in schools, food in institutions (which eventually merged with food in schools group), and access to healthy food. Each committee was asked to develop an outline of their priority area that included critical issues, strategic goals, a statement of what success would look like, broad strategies to achieve goals, first year action steps, and the human and financial resources needed to accomplish the goals.

In July 2008, we had another stakeholder meeting at Lidia's in order to update the larger group on what the core work group had been doing – working on the strategic plan, committees, etc. Dr. Hendrickson and a member of the core group reviewed the purpose of food policy councils and the various models that Mark Winne presented in February. Each committee presented the outlines of their priority area. We then asked the larger group if the work we had done thus far met their expectations and if they had any concerns. The larger group was basically serving to keep the core group accountable and to keep them on track. The larger group fully supported the work of the core group.

The core group continued to meet into the fall. St. Clair and I planned the meetings to continue to get the information needed to create the strategic plan. We had many discussions about what kind of FPC we wanted and at the very least we knew it should be a bi-state food policy council, therefore, everyone agreed that we would not be able to be housed in a government agency. We were leaning towards the possibility of being housed under MARC or another non-profit or becoming an independent non-profit. It was decided that we would have to work out the structure of the FPC as the group progressed. We added to the strategic plan that the structure of the FPC would be determined within the first 18 months after the plan was unveiled. This led to the decision that we needed to change the name of the group from a food policy council to a food policy coalition. The group felt that a council brought to mind a group of people that has been appointed to carry out certain tasks, where a coalition is something we already felt we had established – “an alliance or union between groups.” If we called the group a food policy coalition then we could continue to work without the pressure of trying to force something to happen that did not seem to work for us. This is exactly what we did, keeping in mind that we could eventually become a food policy council if it evolved that way. With this issue finally resolved for the time being, we came up with the title for the group: The Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition.

Another issue that had to be dealt with was figuring out what area the GKCFPC would serve. At first we thought the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) might be a good choice. This area includes 16 counties, 9 in Missouri and 7 in Kansas. We thought

this made sense because of the data that would be readily available for future research and problem-solving. Other options were the area that MARC serves which consists of 9 counties and 120 cities and towns – 4 counties in Missouri and 5 in Kansas. Harvesters, our local food bank, serves a 13 county area – 10 in Missouri and 3 in Kansas.

Ultimately, we decided to go with the smaller 9 county area, but with the understanding that this area was fluid. If there were issues outside this area that could be served by the GKCFPC then we would be willing to be of service.

The end of the year was approaching and we wanted to have another meeting with the KCHFPI to present the strategic plan and get their approval. We wanted this meeting to have a celebratory feel to it because of all the work the core work group had accomplished. If the stakeholders approved the strategic plan, it would be a huge turning point for the group. We scheduled this meeting for December 16, 2008, which gave the excitement and festive feel that comes from the holiday season. Unfortunately, this meeting was cancelled at the last minute due to inclement weather. We quickly rescheduled it for January 8, 2009. We held the meeting at Lidia's and asked them to do a special dessert to help us celebrate and we also gave away local varieties of squash with recipes attached for each stakeholder that attended. The strategic plan was presented by Kunkel. She fielded questions and concerns after the presentation. After putting everyone's mind at ease that their issue was in the plan and would get proper attention, she recommended to approve the strategic plan made by the core group. We had a

motion to accept and the motion was seconded. The plan was unanimously accepted by the KCHFPI.

In order to formally introduce the GKCFPC to the community, we had an all day forum called the KC Healthy Food Policy Forum in February, 2009 (named the same as the forum in February, 2007). We had two prominent guest speakers, Marion Nestle, Paulette Goddard Professor in the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health and Professor of Sociology at New York University and Ladonna Redmond, President and CEO of the Institute for Community Resource Development in Chicago. We gave the background of the KCHFPI, presented the strategic plan, and introduced the newly formed Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition!

Lessons Learned

Although my observations led me to believe that everything went well with the 2007 process, interviews suggested there was some frustration felt during that time. One person who works at the local food bank said, “I continued to come for the food” and then added that she was just going to monitor the initiative and see where it went (Personal communication, January 6, 2010). She wanted to do something. Taking action was important for her, but she was not getting the action she wanted from the 2007 process. A person from the food service department at a local hospital said that he also felt frustration with the slow process of 2007. He had been part of initiatives like this before and referred to the following organizing principles: forming, storming, norming and performing as steps that are necessary for any grassroots group that is just getting

started. He said that the 2007 process was part of the first two steps, forming and storming. He understood that you can't miss a step or it doesn't work, so he had patience, "All the steps are necessary, it had to be this way, but there is frustration that we are not moving fast enough, but considering most of us had full time jobs and that this group was not our first priority, we made a lot of progress" (Personal communication, January 8, 2010).

In light of the frustration that some of the participants felt with the inaction of the early part of the process, a recommended first step for a FPC would be to do a community food assessment that includes a food policy inventory. This would be a good way for people to be and feel productive while figuring out the details of their group – structure, funding, etc. The food assessment will naturally outline problem areas of the local food system and help establish priorities for the group. The food policy inventory will be helpful to understand which policies inhibit local food production and getting healthy food to the community and which policies support it. It will also suggest areas of the local government and local food programs with which FPC groups can partner.

The process in 2008 definitely got better results than that of 2007. My communication with core group members showed people were happy to take action and they were pleased with Kunkel's role in heading up the strategic plan. They thought that it was the best part of the process. One local farmer said he liked "the way we broke it up into pieces and then reassembled it after each committee did some work and then put it all back together" (Personal communication, January 12, 2010). There was still some

frustration with the fact that we could sit with one topic for quite awhile going round and round about it and still not getting any better result than what we started with, but there was an understanding that everyone's voice had to be heard in order for the process to work. One participant said that the core group "helped give people a little bit more investment. I think the core group helped keep the long term investment of the stakeholders in the forefront" (R. Hamilton, personal communication, September 19, 2010).

The most often named benefit that participants gained from being part of this group were the connections they made with other people working in the food system. They learned about other sectors and the struggles they have trying to get healthy food to the community. A gentleman in hospital food service says, "I take all those things back [to work] and hopefully I'm able to influence things here. I'm frustrated here with the fact that I still have to buy food from a truck from California, Chile and everywhere else" (Personal communication, January 8, 2010).

Funding is crucial to the success of any FPC group (Harper, et al., 2009). For the GKCFPC, it was the means to bringing people to the table. Actually, it was our ability to provide the group with a good meal, made-up of local food that was the key, but we couldn't have done this without funding. We were lucky that KCHK had the money to support the initial work of the GKCFPI for the first two years. After that we were able to secure grants to continue funding the group, in particular, hiring a staff member that was solely dedicated to the GKCFPC. There are many grants available for local food

initiatives from foundations in local areas and across the country and from government entities including the USDA.

With so many health issues related to food and the food system it is important that FPC groups be as diverse as possible. This diversity includes food sector diversity and ethnic diversity. While the GKCFPC was conscience of this and did its best to bring together various food sector representatives, it had trouble getting some people and organizations involved in the initiative. If FPC groups have this same trouble, I advise going to the groups that will not come to you; meet them on their territory. Willingness to do this could be the step needed to get the conversation started and to elucidate common goals and connections. Once you have the diversity, it is important to seek out each person's expertise and learn about their struggles within the food system. This knowledge will enrich the FPC effort and enable it to be more effective for the entire community.

The structure of the group is important to clarify as soon as possible, but, as was the case with the GKCFPC, this is not always easy to do. It is important for stakeholders to know how decisions will be made and what the vision and mission of the group is so they are secure in their desire to be a part of the group.

The process to form the GKCFPC was long – it took two years. It can be difficult to keep everyone engaged for that amount of time. Although I think the 2007, educating the stakeholders process was useful and served an important purpose, I also see that this time could have been spent “doing something” as one stakeholder put it. I saw a lot of

people come and go from the larger KCHFPI group either because their work load outside the FPC group increased or because their interest began to wane and they wanted their energy to go to something different. It is important to check-in with your stakeholders and make sure they are happy with the process and the way things are going. Our group did not do that after we established the course of action for 2007. If I had it to do over again I would have suggested combing all the panel discussions into one half-day workshop and then moved directly into action steps such as the community food assessment as suggested above.

It is also helpful to use resources in your community to help with your endeavor. University Extension offices can be very helpful in providing support and information for FPC groups. University Extension representatives helped us facilitate our core group meetings and can provide assistance completing strategic plans and can provide contacts within various food sectors. Local university students can also help with research that needs to be done either with the local food assessment or other related food issues.

The lessons we learned from forming the GKCFPC will hopefully help other groups learn from our mistakes and benefit from our successes. The following discussion elucidates how the GKCFPC addresses the problems brought about by the mainstream food system as presented in the literature review.

Discussion

The GKCFPC is one way our community seeks to address the problems caused by the mainstream, globalized food system. The stakeholders involved with the KCHFPI

developed the priority areas of the GKCFPC which are included in its mission statement and address the health problems engendered by the food system as presented in the literature review. The mission of the GKCFPC is, “To advocate for the Greater Kansas City food system and promote food policies that positively impact the nutritional, economic, social, and environmental health of Greater Kansas City.” The following core values guide the work they pursue: cooperation among all sectors of the food system; access to healthy, safe, and affordable food for everyone; solutions that are local and sustainable; health promotion; and education - how food choices impact individuals and the community.

Many issues were discussed in the literature review about access to healthy food and how too much access to the wrong kinds of food has led to high rates of food-related diseases. A discussion of food deserts was presented where they were defined as communities where healthy, affordable food is not available and are commonly found in low-income, rural and urban areas. Winne says that grocery stores locate themselves where they can make a profit and this is not usually in these rural and low-income urban areas. Cummins and Macintyre point out that larger food stores generally have a healthier selection of food at affordable prices and when an area lacks this resource, poor quality diets and an increased risk of obesity ensues. Winne and Allen discuss how hunger issues are related to poverty. Pollan, Simon, and Nestle point out that it is very confusing to understand what is healthy when highly-processed packages of food are

adorned with messages of “whole grain”, “high fiber”, “cholesterol free”, “fat free” and “packed with vitamins”.

These issues are very important for the GKCFPC to address. In the strategic planning process they acknowledged the probable existence of food deserts within the community and the need for more research on this issue. They discussed the concept of access and said it can be interpreted in three separate ways: physical access, financial access, and lack of food knowledge. They indicated that physical access to food stores can be difficult if the stores are distant, the shopper is elderly or infirm, the area is unsafe, public transportation links are insufficient, or if the consumer has no car or is disabled. Financial access is a problem when the consumer lacks the money to buy healthy foods which are generally more expensive calorie for calorie than less healthy, sugary, and fatty foods or if the consumer needs, but cannot afford the bus fare to get to the store. A lack of knowledge about food can also hinder access to healthy food. If the consumer does not know why eating a healthy diet is important, if they lack cooking knowledge (do not know how to prepare vegetables, grains, etc.), if they do not know which foods are healthy, or if they are influenced by the marketing of unhealthy food, they will not make buying healthy food a priority even if they are able. The GKCFPC also acknowledged the need to develop strategies to increase the availability and affordability of local, fresh fruits and vegetables and to provide education on what healthy food is, where to find it, and how to cook, process, and store it.

In the literature review, Pollan discusses the overproduction of food supported by government subsidies which allows the production of large amounts of cheap food for U.S. consumers. Perkins and Allen talk about the concern over the price of local food which might prohibit low-income people from accessing it. The GKCFPC acknowledges that the mainstream food system provides food that is artificially cheap; that is, much of the food is subsidized with government support, therefore consumers do not pay the true cost of the food they buy. This makes it difficult for small, local producers that grow fruits and vegetables to offer their goods at comparable prices to that of larger producers as there are no subsidies available for small-scale fruit and vegetable production. The GKCFPC seeks to develop strategies to help local farmers reduce their costs, increase their production, and educate consumers so they better understand the value and impact of their food dollar and that supporting their local farmer supports the community at large.

The environmentally destructive nature of modern agricultural production was also considered in the literature review. Pimentel discusses the cost of pesticides – the financial cost and the cost to our health. Allen notes that agriculture's dependence on the natural environment makes it impossible for it not to incur some degradation including loss of topsoil and declining water supply. Allen, Lang, and Tilman point out that the damage done to the environment is not included in the price of food which contributes to the low cost of food the mainstream food system supplies and the difficulty of local farmers to compete. The GKCFPC did not give this issue as much attention as it did

other issues of local food production or access, but it was addressed during the strategic planning process. One of the core values of the GKCPFC states that the local food system should be ecologically sound. The GKCFPC also stated that one measure of success for the local production of food is that locally grown food would fit into the following criteria for healthy food: food should be healthy (that will not make you chronically ill), food should be produced fairly (no one along the production line was exploited for its creation), food should be affordable (people of all socioeconomic backgrounds can afford it and have access to it) and food should be “green” (produced in a manner that is environmentally sustainable). They know that supporting local food purchasing and production inherently provides a more environmentally-friendly food system by reducing the amount of fossil fuel used to transport food long distances. There is an understanding that the local food production system has to take care of the land now and for future generations.

The GKCFPC seeks to address the problems brought about by the mainstream food system. The stakeholders know everything cannot be done all at once, but it is important to have them in the long-term plan and focus on what can be done at the present moment.

CONCLUSION

Food systems should be a part of building healthy communities rather than being a part of destroying their health. The case study of the formation of the GKCFPC shows how one community seeks to put its health first and address issues brought about by the dominant food system. The literature review expressed problems within the mainstream, globalized food system as it focuses on bottom line profits. Communities suffer physically, economically, socially, and environmentally when the food system is ran by global food corporations. Incidents of food-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes are increasing, we purchase food from thousands of miles away instead of buying products from local producers, hunger persists and people struggle to get access to nutritious food despite having an efficient food production system, and the environment deteriorates as efficiency is deemed more important than sustainability. Empowering people to take control of their food system can engender healthy, strong communities. The GKCFPC seeks to improve its community by being a proactive part in making changes to its food system.

FPCs have been increasing in number over the past decade. These groups look at the food system as a whole and bring together people from various food system sectors to address issues specific to their local food system. As the name implies they address policy issues, but can also promote or start food programs. Their structure can vary too. Some groups are established by gubernatorial Executive Order such as the New York

State Council on Food Policy or they can be a grassroots community group that is recognized by the local government as is the case with the Community Food & Agriculture Coalition of Missoula County. Regardless of their structure, they all address four basic functions: discussing food issues, coordinating between food sectors, addressing food policy, and forming and supporting food programs.

In 2007, Kansas City began its effort to change the local food system. The KCHFPI brought together a diverse group of stakeholders with the vision of starting a FPC. The first nine months of the initiative were dedicated to educating everyone on various elements of the local food system. Although there was some frustration with how long this process took, it was very useful in understanding what many of the problems were within our food system.

In 2008, the KCHFPI started on the specific work of starting the GKCFPC. Mark Winne was invited to Kansas City to help start the process and give us guidance on how to proceed. Members of the KCHFPI formed the core work group and began developing a strategic plan and forming committees based on priority areas including food system coordination and infrastructure, food production/local agriculture, food in schools and institutions, and access to healthy food. During this time the core work group met periodically with the larger KCHFPI for accountability purposes, making sure that the strategic plan met their expectations. In February, 2009, we formally introduced the GKCFPC to the community at an all day forum.

The GKCFPC has been busy since its formation in 2009. They have hired an Executive Director and formed a website which is currently being updated. They are still housed within KCHK as they do not have the funding to become independent of the organization at this time. They have a steering committee of 21 members that serve 2-year terms and must be re-nominated to stay on the committee. The GKCFPC focuses on two policy initiatives: increasing institutional purchasing of locally grown foods and improving access to healthy affordable food in food deserts. They continue to work on a food system assessment. As part of that assessment they conducted a Food Habits Survey which asked about the type of food respondents buy, where they shop, and other questions regarding their food habits and access to healthy food. Other work includes: GKCFPC representatives provided testimony in the Missouri Senate on a bill that would increase the amount of food government institutions purchase from local producers; they assisted in changing chicken ownership ordinances to make them less onerous in the city of Kansas City, MO; and, along with partner organizations, they developed a resolution highlighting the area's food desert problem which was accepted by the city of Kansas City, MO.

Dimitri, et al. (2005) suggests that consumer demands have had a great influence on changes in the food system, for example, demands for more convenient, less labor intensive food choices. This same influence can be used by community members that want to take back control of their local food system and provide overall healthier neighborhoods. FPC groups can be this voice for their communities. By being inclusive,

organized, and informed, they offer powerful leadership to create positive change in their area.

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