

**OCL Study Session  
Local Food Systems  
Nov. 12, 2009**

**Presenters:** Matt Potteiger, professor of landscape architecture, SUNY ESF and founding member, Syracuse Grows; Kyong Soh, Grindstone Farms; Becca Becca Jablonski, Agricultural Economic Development Specialist for Madison County; Jonnell Allen, founding member, Syracuse Grows

**Matt Potteiger—**

Where does our food originate? Very difficult to “map” our meals because what we eat comes from complex and extensive food system—a long-distance system.

Average distance for any given food to the table: 1,500 miles (based on a Chicago study). That’s probably conservative.

For example: Apples—New Zealand, Washington State, as well as NYS. Apple juice—China

- “We’re eating other places.”
- We’re “eating” oil. Food system is one of the major contributors to oil consumption and greenhouse gas production.
- We’re “eating” other ecologies—damage from feed lots, ie.
- We’re “eating” our economy—Central New York daily spends about \$3 million on food, but local farmers only see about 7 cents to the dollar. Used to be about 20 cents.

What is local food? Food that is grown at home, in the community, or in the region..

Have mapped regional food shed—if to consume regional or local food in Syracuse, what would that look like? Found out that CNY is most productive and diverse agricultural region of the state, yet less than 1 percent is consumed locally or directly.

So a lot of opportunity to rework food system to make more direct local connection.

Some cities are working to localize food systems: Detroit has about 100,000 vacant lots—pursuing urban agriculture. Planted orchard in public park, ie. Toronto—rehabbed old street car maintenance farm into year-round farmer’s market and greenhouse.

All aspects of food system—production, processing, markets—have potential to be integrated into economic and environmental planning of cities, counties, towns. Production as well as markets are good use of public space and can be integrated into design of city.

**Kyong Soh—**

Grindstone Farms—Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)—Do home deliveries, neighborhood deliveries, and farmers’ markets. CSA is about “knowing your farmer’s face.”

**Benefits:**

- Guaranteed revenue for farmers: Members pay at beginning of season and then share the risk, taking what comes, depending on the weather and harvest.
- Reduces farm-to-plate distance to about 40 miles.
- Benefits local farmers.

- Fresh=Healthier, Tastier
- Lower costs by eliminating grocers and distributors
- Builds community—relationship between farmer and eater.
- Cultivates palate for seasonal foods.
- Upfront payment provides immediate capital for farmers to invest in farm maintenance equipment, etc.
- Local investment. 73 percent of \$ you pay the farmer goes back into the community. Generates tax revenue. **Gives you the biggest bang for your buck.**
- Reduces carbon footprint and contributes to a sustainable world. Reflects our values.

**Some challenges** to independent farmers:

- High production costs
- Organic farms account for 3 percent of federal funding—no \$ for lobbying
- Lack of good local distribution options

Some local advocacy/educational groups: Syracuse Grows, Syracuse First, Slow Food Syracuse. Will provide information on local farms for interested consumers.

**Becca Jablonski—**

Agricultural economic development specialist for Madison County. Administered by Cornell Cooperative Extension but position is paid for by taxes.

CNY is dominated by small- to medium farms. Hilly topography prevents monoculture farms. Presents distribution challenges. Distribution systems cater to larger farms. Supermarkets want year-round produce supplies and don't have resources to call numerous farms to secure the items and quantities they need.

Small- to medium farm challenges:

- No money for marketing
- Difficult to support a staff to deal with all the regulations, especially in meat processing
- Smaller profit margins

Chenango-Madison Bounty created to address some of these challenges. Combines food grown from 90 farms to keep steady stream of supply. Like a virtual farmers' market: go online weekly, see what's available, and then place order. C-M Bounty contacts farmers, updates web site with what's available, processes orders, packs items and delivers to customers

- Farmers set prices and then C-M Bounty marks up 30 percent (compared to about 50 percent at supermarkets)
- Grant funded
- Hoping to expand customer base into Onondaga County. Have about 80-90 customers a week. Need 200 to be sustainable. Doing some outreach with East Area YMCA in Fayetteville. When get more customers, can bring in more producers.

**Jonnell Allen—**

Long history of backyard and community gardens. Industrial culture brought abundance but a disconnect between growers and consumers. Increasing hunger, rising food prices, limited and

expensive fossil fuels all reasons to get back to local gardening—urban-backyard-community-schoolyard gardens help address these challenges.

Urban agriculture a growing phenomena in cities. Has to go beyond recreational gardening to include numerous small producers who can support a sustainable food supply for the community. Some possibilities within cities:

- Greenbelt area along outskirts of city
- Community gardens
- Gardens in vacant city lots
- Beehives and backyard chickens
- Orchards in city parks
- Rooftop gardens
- Church gardens

Majority of small-, medium-, and large-scale cities across country—including Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, San Francisco, NYC—all have extensive urban gardening programs and some urban farms. Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo and Rochester have advanced urban gardening programs. Syracuse is behind times.

Benefits of local food production/processing/distribution:

- City residents, many of them low-income, have access to fresh local produce
- Enhances city's greening efforts—adds green spaces in dense urban neighborhoods
- Helps with stormwater retention
- Decreases transportation needs and costs for food
- Economic development and revitalization—cleans up vacant city lots. Have more than 1,300 vacant lots in Syracuse that could be transformed into food production sources.
- Entrepreneurial opportunities
- Community gardens increase land value and decrease crime
- Builds pride and sense of community

Syracuse Grows—group of organizations and people looking into improving urban agriculture and gardening resources. Provides programs, educational resources to support equitable food production. On the web at [syracusegrows.org](http://syracusegrows.org).

Last summer built four new community gardens in Syracuse—Westcott N-hood and North Side Tapestry Garden built in vacant residential lots that had no potential for redevelopment. Another built in abandoned train yard. Highland Park first community garden in a public park.

Challenges to urban agriculture—

- Gaining access to vacant land—need vacant-land strategy that allows for food production.
- Contaminated soil—can be remediated.
- Start-up costs—takes county/city/nonprofit/private business support.
- Grow garden knowledge and skills among adults and children.
- Seasonal limitations—short growing season. Greenhouses can help.
- Need better urban planning and policies that allow for food production.
- Vandalism and crime—but community gardens foster pride, which helps discourage crime and vandalism.