Chapter 10

Food Policy Encounters of a Third Kind: How the Toronto Food Policy Council Socializes for Sustain-Ability

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Whenever a conversation turns to global warming and the environment, someone is bound to bring up the need for sustainability, at which point someone will inevitably talk up the need for innovation. Everyone will invariably nod agreement, not because they always know which innovation will do the trick, but because they assume that innovation refers to technology or know-how that someone else will invent to solve some other person's environmental abuse problem – not something different or innovative they will change in themselves, the way they live, or the everyday institutions they come in contact with.

I want to turn such conversations in a different direction. This chapter examines and promotes a sustainability-driving food system innovation that changes people. It empowers them, helps them work with new problem-solving skills, and thereby transforms the everyday functioning of governments – all to the benefit of sustainability in the food system. As a bonus, it improves the social life of activists and civil servants, two groups that sorely need such improvement. This multi-purpose innovation was invented in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1982, picked up over the next decade by a variety of US cities hit by a loss of traditional industries and the rise of hunger, including Hartford, Connecticut, in 1991. Toronto started its council the same year. I predict it will become the fastest-growing institutional innovation in food governance over the next 25 years and will become as commonplace as city departments of public health or recreation. This innovation is called a food policy council.

Food policy councils[1] are a crucial tool for citizens striving to shape food systems that combine food security and sustainability in the most generous sense of both terms – to condense my definition into one mouthful: food policy councils

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1 Food policy councils brings together people engaged in a wide variety of food organizations and activities to share ideas about and help initiate projects that advance community food security and food system sustainability and to develop public understanding that a sustainable and secure food system generates a wide mix of community benefits, including job training and creation, beautification, recreation and tourism opportunities, farmland protection, hunger alleviation and increased social cohesion and improved health.

support the health and well-being of farms and farmers, fisheries and fisherfolk, hunters and gatherers and their ecosystems, as well as all the people, processes and environments engaged in regulating, processing, transporting, preparing, serving, eating, and disposing of food as it wends its way along the product life cycle and through the cycle of life. Because I think food councils can do such a good job of empowering people to connect the dots and build up the indispensable social and problem-solving skills that make sustainable food security happen, I write this chapter on the eve of my retirement to persuade others to cultivate food councils everywhere – in local, regional and national governments, to be sure, but also in a variety of complex organizations (universities and hospitals leap immediately to mind) that work with the many-sidedness of food to address multiple food-related needs of their stakeholders.

Becoming an indispensable tool for sustainability is a tall order for an institution that has no formal place in already-existing food systems, and which at this point in time is a factor in about a hundred cities and states, mostly in North America. I have a decade's experience as an employee of the Toronto public health department (TPH), managing one of the oldest, best-financed and most influential of food councils in the world, the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC). I supervise one professional colleague and take direction from one super-competent secretary, 30 enthusiastic and gifted citizen members appointed to the TFPC by the Toronto Board of Health, as well as from Toronto's Medical Officer of Health. I like to think that I am the most accountable employee in Toronto: accountable to a citizen body, the civil service and elected officials. This standard of accountability is just one of the many unique and high-performance contributions that food councils make to sustainability, and corresponds to the Triple Bottom Line – of economic, environmental and social accountability – of organizations breaking trail in the journey to sustainability.

It has been my experience that food councils are well-suited to two sustainability-sustaining functions that are rarely supported elsewhere: councils can break free from narrow specialties to champion and embrace cross-disciplinary and cross-departmental collaboration; and, they can engage people as citizens from diverse backgrounds, rather than as representatives of varying special interest groups, and thereby uphold the goal of serving the public interest. Without such institutions mandated to engage governments in multi-departmental collaboration and engage citizens in deliberative democracy, sustainability efforts won't get out of the starting gate. Indeed, I believe that the slow progress on the sustainability file is a result first and foremost of 'failed states' that don't know how to manage these two crucial elements of sustainability carriage and governance, and not the inherent economic or technical difficulty of creating workable and sustainable solutions. Sustainability and food security need to become action verbs, not passive nouns, and food councils are the agencies to activate this change. That's why I think it's so urgent that the food council as political innovation set the gold standard, not, despite its many benefits, technology.

Socializing is Beautiful

What do food policy councils do? Prepare food policy, most would guess, and, hopefully sustainable food security policy. As many thoughtful and inspired food policy documents illustrate, including ones that I have written, food policy councils which take the policy in the middle of their name literally do burn brightly at first. But then they burn out, for the simple reason that there is no-one in government who has a real job with serious operational responsibility who has the time or mandate to hear, deal with, champion or implement a comprehensive and sustainable food policy. Many governments have an agriculture policy or a rural policy or a nutrition policy or a food safety policy or even a health promotion policy, and sometimes even appoint an official responsible for putting such half-baked policies into practice. But food policy – with the implementable meat of resources on its bones, as well as directors with overarching responsibilities and resources to animate and orchestrate the whole food sector – exists mostly in our imagination.

We haven't reached to first base in terms of food system awareness, as can be seen in the fact that few governments even report statistics on food as a whole or on food's impact on global warming, pollution, species diversity, employment or any other indicator of sustainability. What we have is statistics on the number of farmers, amount of fertilizers, and so on, but usually none totaling the number of people who work across all sectors on jobs related to food, none totaling all the money spent on all food functions, and none totaling environmental impacts running the whole gamut from farm pesticides to the garbage dump and sewage plant. 'What you can't measure, you can't manage' the old saying goes, and government can't even see it, let alone measure it, which is one reason food sustainability is nowhere – and why it's impossible for food policy councils to find operational staff to write policy. This – unbelievable as it sometimes seems – is why food, which is as old as humanity and an absolutely essential need, is considered a 'new' issue for governments.

When discussing sustainable food policy, therefore, both the humility and the high hopes drained of false expectations come from getting a chance to work on a frontier, a blank slate or greenfield construction site. With the possible exceptions of Scotland and Cuba, no national government in the world has a comprehensive food policy that is actually being put into action. With the possible exception of Belo Horizonte in Brazil, no local government has a comprehensive food policy that is actually being implemented. 'Shambolism' is how one of my colleagues describes the more common experience of governments, which adopt a report pledging commitment to sustainability, cut a few ribbons in scenes that give a notion of motion, then leave the old ways untouched. Policy and its ingredients (a lot more than ideas, we'll learn, as soon as we deconstruct what policy is) are the very capacity that food councils must work from below to bring into being; the content of policy directives that come down from above will only come later. So we don't fool ourselves or get ahead of ourselves, it's crucial for food policy

actors to understand that this is how far back the starting line is, despite our fears that when it comes to the planet's need for sustainability, we are perilously near the finishing line.

Why is comprehensive food policy so undeveloped? I'm tempted to say that the government rule is to leave food policy as much as possible to private sector players, and governments only allow exceptions to that rule when there's a 'market failure' and looming political failure that force their hand; as a consequence, governments have specific programs, not general policies (Friedmann 2005). At any rate, Patricia Allen is very astute to notice this consequence in her discussion of the United States Department of Agriculture in her book, *Together at the Table: Sustainability and Sustenance in the American Agrifood System* (2004). 'Agricultural planning has been achieved not through regulation and directives so much as by offering various services and opportunities,' she writes (2004: 54). That's where the buried treasure is – in services and opportunities, or programs, not policy.

It's the same trial-and-error story with health and public health policy, which also evolved in response to pressing demands that imposed themselves on the government agenda despite the absence of a comprehensive government overview to put specific problems and responses in some proper place. That's why many governments have health-based services and opportunities relating to pasteurization or food safety inspection, for example; they were the response to imposing problems of some time ago. Likewise, it's the same story – agriculture and food are not studies in exceptionalism – for social security policies which evolved in response to specific disasters such as widows of soldiers trying to raise families after a war or mass unemployment during the 1930s. The support payments responding to these crises weren't placed in some accordion file for comprehensive social security programs with one file just for food security; nor was there much thought about food security as a node in the net of social security or human rights.

In all these cases, governments put the service and program cart before the policy horse. This erratic legacy creates a special problem for broadly-conceived food policy, a relatively recent arrival on government agendas, because all the parking space for government carts has been claimed and taken – a problem magnified by the untimely coincidence of the rise of food movements during the 1980s and 1990s with the overpowering surge of neo-conservative campaigns to cut back government functions and resources. For good or ill, government is mostly a messy business that is reactive to demands for services banging on the door, not proactive about opportunities to get policy alignment right. This is the tragic irony of sustainable food policy; it has fallen through the chasms left behind by individual services and departments often put in place by well-meaning politicians and civil servants long ago to fix a pressing problem of their day – which problem never included a demand for comprehensive or sustainable food policy. This brings us face-to-face with the banality of evil in sustainable food policy: government silos are a bigger obstacle and require more staying power to

overcome than corporate power or resistance. That's why campaigns that take on big business can be safely left to independent citizen groups; what surprisingly mature 1960s radicals used to call 'the long march through the institutions' to put obsolete framing of governmental department roles right side up requires food policy councils.

How to Win Friends and Influence Food Policy

When the penny drops for food policy council members and they realize food policy is nowhere, they can either move to academic policy analysis or get on with rolling up their sleeves for the real policy and practice of animating, supporting, facilitating, connecting, educating, advocating for, championing and celebrating existing and emergent projects, all the while building strategic bridges for cooperative relations with people who work on projects that either link to or border on food systems.

This 'one step backward, two steps forward' approach to policy is not a matter of discretion being the better part of valor. The valor of advocating comprehensive policy is simply enriched by learning the reality of what comes first in comprehensive policy. According to Carnegie's 1930's book *How to Win friends and Influence People,* winning and influencing come from good relationships, not logical policy, for the simple reason that most people care more about themselves and their friends than they care about policy (1936). So if you want to argue about policy, Carnegie warned, you'll either lose the argument because your opponent retaliates with unsubstantiated claims that dismiss your evidence, or – worse still – you'll win the argument and your humiliated opponent will resent you forever. Faced with the prospect of being a curmudgeon who wins policy battles only to lose the policy war, I immediately resolved to learn how to foster sustaining relationships as the foundation of sustainable policy interventions. I couldn't have asked for a better institutional base than a food policy council to learn how to intervene because food councils have members who can provide introductions to these relationships and facilitate related projects. This scenario planning led me to a meditation on the zen-like paradox of food policy councils: the more council members roll up their sleeves to deal with the meat and potato issues that create food sustain-ability in their communities, the less they deal with policy in the cloistered Capital P way it is commonly understood.

The food policy council's work of supporting community food security and sustain-ability begins with the selection of food council members. In contrast to many citizen advisory boards, which have a competitive selection process to pick one individual at a time, I and the citizen co-chair of the TFPC nominate a slate to ensure diversity in the talents, potential and expertise of the collectivity; the Board of Health is free to accept, amend or replace this proposed slate, though in practice my recommended cross-section of talent has always been adopted unanimously. The Board also sets the terms of reference for the food council, specifying that the

council's job is to help the City implement the Toronto Food Charter, a charter that is founded on sustainability objectives and processes.

Before discussing work external to the TFPC (i.e. over and above maintenance of the TFPC), it's important to understand that food policy councils don't do implementation. It is inappropriate for the same agency to do advocacy and implementation because it is crucial in a democracy that people receive a public service without fear or favor of a civil servant's views on any issues; especially in public health, there needs to be absolute faith in the objectivity of the service provider. Equally important, organizations built around delivering a program have very different attributes from organizations built around innovation and advocacy; the last thing an overworked service manager wants to hear is a new idea to increase the workload. Third, implementation of any one typical measure that can be adopted at a TFPC meeting in the blink of an eye – increase community gardens, establish communal baking ovens in parks, ensure farmers markets in underserved neighborhoods, provide community kitchens, and so on – has the capacity to become a black hole of lost time. I know from experience that the staff resisting such initiatives could quickly have food council staff tied up in knots that experts at nautical training schools haven't heard of. The TFPC approach is to initiate and support community groups that will carry out negotiation and implementation of such joint community-city initiatives; we are an enabling and empowerment tool but we are not a substitute for communities taking power. Because we don't do implementation, external work refers to partnerships that we work on developing. Since we have such few resources, we can't afford to concentrate them on conflict-laden causes since one cause would absorb all our capacity; so we work with people who want to work with us like people who work on beautification or community development. We operate like the dessert tray server; people can choose to engage or not and very quickly we have more than we know what to do with. In the Toronto model for food council membership, the slate as a whole features balance and diversity, but each individual is chosen strictly on the basis of talent. Luckily, this is not a difficult combination in a city like Toronto; our council members include the former minister of agriculture from Rwanda, the executive chef from Sodexo, a founder of Oxfam, and a research director of the Canadian Urban Institute, the chair of the leading organization training organic farmers, founder of Metro Ag: North American Alliance for Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture, alongside experts from various 'communities of food practice' (refer to Friedmann, Chapter Nine for an elaboration of 'communities of practice').

There are several reasons for putting an equal premium on individual talent and collective diversity, all of which relate to sustain-ability. First, as social work theorist John McKnight has long stressed, it is crucial that members of downtrodden groups see themselves, and are seen by others, as people with exceptional gifts, not just high needs, and therefore primed for empowerment (McKnight 1989). People should feel pumped when they become members of a food council. Second, having visibly-qualified members is the equivalent of the power dress for success; city staff and politicians need to appreciate that a food

policy council proposal comes from a representative, credible and expert group. Food policy council members need to be, and be seen to be, among the best and brightest and most endowed with gravitas of advocates, because they must win the confidence of authorities who are reluctant to change policies and practices that have many powerful supporters and that have stood some test of time. Since we are the ones who most want change, the onus is on us to convince others they are better off to switch from the status quo.

Third, the membership norms of the TFPC help it function as a collectivity and practice the policy equivalent of the golden rule: do policy unto others as you would have policy done unto you. This notion represents a rupture in the 'fix that problem' approach of the past, which more often than not fixed one problem while unintentionally and unmindfully creating another. That's what happened, for example, when simplistic food safety rules favored junk food chains, which can afford all the stainless steel kitchen equipment and ready access to washrooms that are thought to guarantee food safety; such regulations end up backfiring on health determinants because they prohibit sales of fresh and unprocessed fruits, veggies or meats by street vendors who tend to be independent entrepreneurs from disadvantaged groups. As the street vending example illustrates, overarching sustainable policy serves up an amalgam of health benefits, from support of low-income entrepreneurs to culturally diverse and nutritious food choices to clean air, traffic safety and crime-free streets. This latter set of claims may seem far-fetched, until it is acknowledged that street and pedestrian access to take-out reduces air pollution from stop-and-go traffic at drive-through take-outs, increases traffic safety by reducing the numbers driving under the multitasking influence of eating junkfood,[2] and by adding to a bustling street scene that makes streets busier and therefore safer. I call policies that addressed so wide a range of benefits elegant: the holy grail of efficient and effective sustainability (Roberts et al. 1995).

Food councils, which seek input and consensus from people of many distinct interests and perspectives, are pretty much a guarantee that elegant solutions will be favored over the quick fixes chosen by people in monocultural departments with one-track mindsets who are far less likely to catch recommendations suffering from hardening of the categories. The membership norms of the TFPC provide the human group equivalent of a closed loop in natural systems, and thereby help food councils develop a capacity to think holistically and assess unintended and unwanted effects – what are usually and illogically called side-effects as if they are not predictable consequences of the prescription. Thanks to its membership prism that captures the full spectrum of light in terms of health determinants, the TFPC has been able to play a leading role in a number of Toronto Public Health initiatives. In 2008, for example, TFPC promoted a fish advisory that, alongside recommendations of two servings a week of heart-healthy fish, added a recommendation to purchase sustainably-harvested fish: a first, to the best of my

2 It is estimated that one quarter of meals are eaten in the car (http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/the-latin-diet).

knowledge, in public health advisories. In 2009, the TFPC played a significant role in expanding the fresh, healthy and diverse options available from street vendors at City Hall, putting a foot in the door that could open to a range of sustainability-enhancing options. Both examples of change mark a shift by a city government toward health-focused but broadly-conceived food security and sustainability.

Finally, the TFPC model of personal membership recruitment on the basis of individual talent contributes to sustain-ability by highlighting the centrality of the public interest, not just market interests, as drivers of sustainability measures. In many areas, particularly in the US, food council members are chosen because they represent a specific stakeholder group, such as supermarket retailers or food banks. I believe this undermines the reputation of the food council as a public purpose group, since the stand-out qualification of members becomes the organization they work for and their obvious purpose on the council is to ensure that the turf of the stakeholder paying their salary is protected. Moreover, such stakeholder groups inevitably gravitate toward delay, while people seek voting instructions from their organization, and drift toward the lowest common denominator of projects or policies that all stakeholders can agree on, even if the policy or project does little to advance health, community food security or sustainability objectives. The purpose of membership diversity is not to provide representation, but practical knowledge of all sectors to strengthen the value of the council's holistic perspective.

By contrast with a stakeholder model, TFPC members, chosen because of their personal accomplishments and intensive knowledge of at least one population groups' needs, are not beholden to organizations. They are free to vote on the spot with their conscience, while pursuing a consensus that addresses their needs as well as needs of other members. As a result of norms established around this foundation, during the ten years I have worked there, the TFPC has settled all internal issues through consensus, negotiated a consensus on working relations and budget with Toronto Public Health, and won unanimous support from key committees of City Council on all but one occasion.

We've Got to Start Meeting this Way

Effective relationship-based sustainability initiatives are also evident at TFPC meetings, which are normally held on alternate months. The meetings are always held in prominent committee rooms at City Hall, an emblem of the fact that we are non-partisan but parti pris – part of the City and ready-to-serve. Meetings are conceived as a social production – the meeting is the message, Toronto media guru Marshall McLuhan might have said – staged to model and optimize relationship-building. In this way, meetings mirror the breaking of bread and companionship (from the Latin roots for 'with' and 'bread') of meals, over and above the utilitarian nutrients of ingredients. Meetings start with nibblies, usually provided by an entrepreneur chosen as 'Local Food Hero' in honor of their 'going the extra mile to bring local, sustainable and healthy food nearer to us.' By opening each meeting

with this ceremony, we not only break the ice with sociability around food; our relationship helps win recognition and profile for struggling entrepreneurs, often from disadvantaged communities, while positioning ourselves to break the ice with the business community, which usually fears that food sustainability hampers business effectiveness.

It takes time and skill to make the call to order heard over the buzz and chatter, and to stop the hugging among 50 guests and 25 members excited to see each other. That, together with the time for the ceremony honoring the Local Food Hero, means that the formal agenda starts about 30 minutes late. But the upbeat, positive, cheerful, can-do mood can't be sacrificed to the formal agenda because we are trying to brand sustainable food security policy emotively as well as logically. In contrast to most meetings of change advocates, where the tedium is the message, the pace is brisk and bristling with humor and progress reports that report progress; if you don't have such progress reports, the meeting says sub voce, you're not doing your job because opportunities to make good are abundant. TFPC borrows from Toronto City Council and its committee meeting gimmick known as a 'consent agenda.' Detailed reports on all the deathly boring minutes, correspondence and executive routine are sent out by e-mail in advance of the meeting and grouped together under one consent agenda item and voted on in less than a minute. That leaves 10 minutes for council member introductions and updates, 80 minutes for two educational presentations and discussions, a 20-minute networking break and sampling of baked goods bought at a nearby farmers market, and 40 minutes to review upcoming opportunities. Any sensitive, difficult or complex issues are referred to the alternate month's TFPC meeting, which is identified as a meeting to sort out troublesome details and usually only attracts TFPC members and close followers. Since meetings compete for time of people who have very little time to spare, every effort is made to ensure that public meetings downplay administrivia and play up unique networking opportunities and presentations that have to be experienced in the flesh. This goads TFPC staff and steering committee members to develop relationships that keep meetings fresh and ahead of the curve. In this way, the necessities of successful meetings drive a relationship-based organization.

Over and above the two educational presentations, the meetings are part of a learning organization, at least by the standards of learning theorist Senge.[3] A learning organization is one 'where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire,' he writes, and 'where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.' (Senge 1990: 3) The mood and style of the meetings also allows us to perform a distinct function; it's where we shine as what Sue Zeilinsky, internationally respected traffic planner, used to call 'a linktank.' Linktanking is a remarkably effective way to make

3 I want to thank Rebecca Schiff for bringing this to my attention by lending me an advance copy of her book manuscript on food policy councils.

things happen and illustrates the European Green Party concept of 'subsidiarity'. Organizations, they say, should be 'as low (close to the grassroots) as possible, as high (i.e. centralized) as necessary'. Meetings such as this are as high as linktanking needs to be and as low as it must be to work well. Both the linktanking and the learning also illustrate the non-technical fix proposition I am arguing here, since the wealth of knowledge that is created comes from a 'new' way of bringing a collectivity together – a meeting.

The proof of the TFPC relationship-based meeting style is in the pudding. Some of the outstanding successes of TFPC meetings come from what Vancouver Food Policy Council founding coordinator, Herb Barbolet, calls the 'serendipitous synchronicity' of food gatherings. Just as golf players get luckier with their shots the more they practice, so savvy food organizers get luckier with the people they meet the more they come to TFPC meetings. The genesis of Local Food Plus (described in detail in Chapter Ten) came from a chance meeting between Lori Stahlbrand and Mike Schreiner which led them to jointly found what became Local Food Plus (LFP), which shortly launched its first contract with University of Toronto, still the largest contract for local and sustainable food in North America. The Plus in Local Food Plus refers to sustainability, and LFP offers the world's most comprehensive certification and inspection system for sustainable food production methods. LFP and TFPC both work independently to promote 'local and sustainable' as words that belong together, just like health and safety, peanut butter and jam, and research and development.

Another benefit from the social side of food policy meetings came from recognizing that most guests, unlike TFPC members, were under 25, primarily members of a new generation of university students eager to sow some wild oats on behalf of authentic food. My frequent contact with these youth coincided with other opportunities I was taking advantage of to work with universities in Toronto to educate the next generation of food professionals to work in more holistic ways by combining nutrition, community organizing and sustainable agriculture. At the time, the TFPC had a chance to hire a youthful Yusuf Alam on a short-term contract, and I asked him to organize what became in 2009 the world's first Youth Food Policy Council. Sustainability doesn't get much better than having a youth group learning to play leading roles as new food professionals for their entire career.

Aside from providing a good time and producing some good results, TFPC meetings create an atmosphere that models processes of dialogue and consensus, establishing a crucial set of social skills as well as an important social-psychological undertone for sustain-ability messages. Consensus, dialogue and buy-in are critical to good energy – a positive and empowering counterpoint to the otherwise foreboding prospects that necessarily inform sustainability efforts in a grim and threatening era. Though I wouldn't use the term social engineering, the positive can-do mood that envelops and frames TFPC meetings is deliberate, not spontaneous. The failure of climate protection advocates to do the same – to get out of the scientific doom and gloom club and contest oil industry lobbies by

reframing a different opportunity discourse on going fossil-free – starkly proves by force of negative example what doesn't happen when positive dialogue, consensus and cross-societal buy-in don't happen deliberately.[4] As with most things that don't happen, they don't happen in an entropic universe where energy degrades unless someone intervenes to raise the level by concentrating otherwise-diffuse good energy. One big job of food council organizers is to concentrate that good energy by going the extra mile to overcome conflict or find a welcoming place of consensus or collaboration. On a broader level of human psychology, the TFPC's approach to dialogue, consensus and buy-in means modeling and setting an expectation for win-win and we-we solutions that we can continuously improve, rather than win-lose and us-them proposals that end up causing analysis-paralysis.

Strong Bedfellows

Meetings are the tip of the iceberg in terms of what food policy council members and staff do with their time. Most of the work promoting relationship-based sustainable food policy happens between meetings. Relationship-based outreach can be quite far-reaching, thanks to three methods that have come to define the TFPC's approach to partnering work.

The first of these methods comes from the commitment to elegant design of government programs, design that strives for multiple benefits spread among a wide grouping of beneficiaries. Commitment to elegance gives the TFPC a hand up in establishing win-win/we-we relationships with a seemingly magical ability to do more with less and increase benefits from stabilized expenditures. Innovative food system relationships are all about transforming a problem in one phase of the food cycle (soil degradation, for example) into an opportunity by connecting it to a problem in another phase – for instance, the so-called garbage problem of dealing with food scraps that could be composted to regenerate soil. In this case, city governments and farmers help each other by saving money on both chemical fertilizers and garbage landfill costs. Environmental sustainability wins too because there's no more rotting food buried in landfill, where it generates methane, a gas that creates 22 times more trouble with global warming than carbon dioxide.

Take another example of elegant methodology to get a sense of how it fosters non-threatening relationships that speak well for sustainability. Elegant design can address the problems of low farm incomes, and the resulting problem that many farm-owners cannot get their children to buy or carry on the family farm, by linking farm challenges to the problems of new immigrants who would like a local source for their favorite homeland foods that can grow here, and who might also want a chance to take up their old homeland occupation as farmers.

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4 An interesting example emerging are transitional towns that merge positive messaging with opportunities to construct post-peak oil cities (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQF09NG00V8).

Put these problems side by side on the same page, and soon even government officials start imagining a way that immigrants can work on farms growing ethno-cultural foods that fetch a premium price in the stores, and they can do this while creating local jobs, reducing a negative balance of trade in agricultural products and limiting pollution caused by long-distant transportation of foods that can well be grown locally. On the basis of this kind of winning design approach, the TFPC has partnered with a number of groups to champion and promote opportunities for immigrants to farm professionally and for local farmers to hire and grow for new immigrants.

Using elegant design as a method suited for social outreach beyond the already-converted, food councils can develop relationships with unlikely partners by piecing together workable, consensus-building and sustainable solutions that people hadn't previously thought of because they were thinking inside the box of their isolated experience or specialized departmental silo. The members of food councils have eyes peeled for elegant solutions that solve several problems at one time – providing through social innovation the efficient problem-solving method appropriate to sustainability.

Aside from the magic of elegance that makes TFPC outreach viable, the TFPC had the advantage of a practical approach to stages of food system reform brought by my predecessor, Rod MacRae, who in turn learned the approach from his brilliant mentor and Ph D supervisor at McGill University, Stuart Hill. Though Hill favored a radically organic overhaul of industrial food systems, he developed a schema that allowed him to present three practical and continuously-improving steps, an alternative to telling people they had to go for all or nothing. The famous Russian revolutionary, Leon Trotsky, who designed a 'transitional program' in 1938 that was designed to take workers step-by-step from fights for modest reforms to fights for socialist revolution, would have been amazed that a Montreal agriculture professor upstaged him in such a gentle way.

Step one for Hill is reform that increases efficiency. Rather than denounce food banks as violations of basic notions of the right to dignified access to nutritious food, a Hill-based efficiency scheme would suggest that donors give money instead of cans and boxes that have to be carted to a central place and sorted; the money would allow food banks to buy healthy food in bulk at great discounts –literally quadrupling the value of donations. Or, if the topic had to do with toxic pesticides sprayed on crops, Hill might suggest something akin to Integrated Pest Management, spraying only when and where needed, in the most efficient way possible, commonly reducing pesticide applications by half, thereby saving the farmer money and saving the environment at the same time. No fuss, no muss in terms of fights, just the beginning of movement and dialogue.

Step two for Hill is reform that offers substitutes. Instead of relying on food banks, help people organize community gardens so they can grow low-cost and healthy foods as a substitute for going to the food bank. Instead of relying on toxic pesticides, farmers can substitute biological sprays that do the job.

Step three for Hill is redesign. Instead of relying on charitable food banks to provide food, governments should provide people on low income with vouchers for healthy food, and cover the costs for the vouchers through savings in the medical care system. Why quibble over the costs of a healthy school meal when the cost of one child-onset case of diabetes can top a million dollars?[5] Instead of spraying crops with pesticides, farmers can redesign their farms to replace vast fields of one low-value commodity crop that acts as a magnet for lazy pests with new crops that return a higher premium because they're pesticide free. The new crops can feature diverse plantings, some of which, like carrots and onions, fend off the pests that bother the other.

Rod MacRae – who likes to say things like 'I'd rather see one hundred farmers cut their pesticides in 50 per cent than one farmer cut by 100 per cent' – instilled this methodology in the TFPC during the 1990s. This approach kept the TFPC from isolating itself on the policy margins where members would issue abstract criticisms of conventional wisdom but with no prospect of ever establishing relationships that could allow both the TFPC and its partners to work together.

A few years after I joined TFPC staff, Janice Etter became the TFPC's unpaid citizen co-chair. I credit her with coining the term 'issue management'. We applied this concept successfully and unknowingly when we promoted green roofs as sites for urban agriculture. Just like private sector innovators need research and development units, often organized into freewheeling 'skunkworks,' government innovators need issue managers – people who can take a seemingly crazy idea and put it through its paces until it becomes official policy. The trick is to be able to deconstruct the tests and stages that have to be passed before getting to a sustainable yes.

The first step in issue management is brainstorming and idea-popping to get the outlines of a bright idea. That happened back in the early 1990s when early supporters of urban agriculture, flummoxed by the lack of growing space in a busy and dense city like Toronto, identified rooftops as an abundant space for growing food atop approximately one-sixth of the landmass in an otherwise crowded city.

The second step is to create a little buzz around the idea, get people talking about it in avant garde circles. We did this through local alternative media while visionary engineers and architects such as Greg Allen and Monica Kuhn did the same in their professions. Margie Zeidler, the city's champion of social and green entrepreneurs, also used her restored garment factory office building as a showpiece of a low-tech, food- and garden-oriented green roof right in the epicentre of Toronto's hip art scene, where black clothing was de rigueur. Green roofs became the building fashion equivalent of the new black.

The third step, especially in government circles where evidence-based decisions are prized, is to show that the idea has some scientific legs. TFPC and

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5 In the US, estimated direct and indirect costs of diabetes was over $174billion in 2007 (NDIC 2009). The federal health department in Canada estimates diabetes costs over $9 billion annually (Health Canada 2009).

its friends helped link up with two Canadian federal government agencies, Central Mortgage and Housing and the National Research Council (Peck et al. 1999). These agencies sponsored a report, that determined the benefits of the green roofs to store and clean storm water and keep it out of the full-to-overflowing sewage system, thereby saving millions in public dollars. That scientific report not only made green roofs seem believable it put green roof advocates on the positive side of the financial angles.

The fourth step is to ensure an independent host organization that can work to command sufficient respect and support to put the issue on a very crowded policy agenda. This was taken up by Steve Peck, a visionary green entrepreneur who founded Green Roofs for Healthy Cities a non-profit largely funded by farsighted roofing companies. Holding annual building science-based conferences in major cities of North America, Peck turned the Toronto-based non-profit into a world-class authority on the multiple efficiencies and paybacks of green roofs.

The fifth step, commandeered by Peck, is to establish a demonstration project in a prominent place where the project can speak for itself. Demonstration projects often win more support than demonstration protests. This was the case with a set of gardens on the third floor of Toronto's City Hall, right outside City Council chambers, especially when National Research Council tests vouched for the water and air cleaning. In the course of promoting the showpiece, Peck also found his political champions, two politicians from very different points on the political spectrum.

The sixth step is to normalize the issue, which the TFPC did by having green roofs profiled positively in a number of important City reports, including the Toronto Environmental Plan of 2000, the Food and Hunger Action Plan of 2001 and the Official Plan of 2002.

The seventh step is to ensure an agency within the city take the lead in bringing the issue home. That job was taken up by Toronto's Planning Department when they prepared a study recommending a pilot incentive program for green roofs. The water department agreed to pay the incentive for a pilot test as a way of encouraging construction companies and landlords to move early to adopt a building innovation that would save the city money on expanded sewage construction.

The eighth step is to have a political champion with clout talk up the benefits of the program and propose to make the innovation permanent. That happened when deputy mayor Joe Pantalone organized a 2009 City Council vote mandating green roofs for new Toronto high rises.

The ninth step, still to come, will clean up over-engineered and ham-fisted language in the specs for green roofs. They currently fail to include public benefits of container and other low-tech gardening and food production techniques that can be productively and beautifully done on more conventional roofs. While we wait for more ecumenical language, we can take solace in the fact that green roofs are green or biological or solar machines that provide food for many species other than humans, from endangered butterflies and pollinating bees to the soil and plants themselves, which digest sun rays and rainwater and put them to work, cleaning, conditioning and cooling the summer air.

It took 15 years before TFPC members who first grabbed hold of the issue could shout from a green rooftop about this pioneering technology of urban sustainability. One of the things that make social capital so productive, what Thorstein Veblen called 'the Advantage of backwardness' is that other cities will be able to duplicate and outdo Toronto's accomplishments in a fraction of the time because someone has already taken the leap of imagination to look for unused capacity way up in the sky (Veblen 1904).

So far in this section on strong bedfellows, we've discussed three methods, techniques or thinking styles the TFPC has followed, deliberatively or intuitively, to promote relationship-based policy in the area of food system sustainability. The fourth technique, which I've followed intuitively, is part and parcel of the whole TFPC effort to present policies that start conversations, not terminate them. In my 2008 book called *The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food,* I argue that 'fusion' prototyped by chefs who mix a little Szechuan with a little Peruvian and French may become the model for emerging sustainable food policies. The old-style religion pitting devils against angels has not gotten us very far in our efforts to build movements for sustainability. Partly that is because life does not divide into two camps of right and wrong. Idealism increases in direct proportion to distance from the problem, my aphorism-rich colleague Brian Cook likes to say. Since sustainability depends on getting very up close and personal with thousands of god-is-in-the-detail techniques and approaches, sustainability advocates need idealism that is less brittle than polarizing versions. In my No-Nonsense guide book I present a future that goes beyond the all-local versus all-global debate and proposes as many local foods as possible, as many fair trade imports as possible, and as much common sense as possible, to give one example of the fusion method (Roberts 2008).

That approach to local is also the perspective of Toronto's FoodShare, the largest citywide food security organization in North America and one of the earliest and strongest champions of the TFPC. Dedicated first and foremost to the nutritional and social needs of people on low income, who in Toronto are disproportionately immigrants, FoodShare sponsors Good Food Markets in underserved neighbourhoods. The Good Food Markets get their food from FoodShare's warehouse, which in turn gets about half its food from local (often organic) farmers and about half from the Ontario Food Terminal and other importers who provide staple foods such as rice and mango that are the comfort foods of immigrants. Not a local-farmers-only farmers market by any stretch, but certainly socially sustainable and part of the mix we need to encourage as we deepen our understanding of what it means to say that sustainability is a journey, not a destination (Chapter 12 presents a case study of a similar project in Waterloo Ontario).

My point is that relationship-based outreach is the way that the TFPC and its co-thinkers have promoted what the UK calls joined-up thinking on community food security and food sustainability (Rideout et al. 2007). Out of respect for the

crucial role of social relationships and partnerships in bringing this into effect, I coined the term 'joined-in thinking,' a unique contribution of the TFPC.

Instant and Latent Messages

To my great surprise, despite being the most-computer-challenged person in the world, one of the first outreach initiatives I undertook at the TFPC was to launch an e-mail service for people interested in keeping track of progressive food trends. We call the service – one and sometimes two e-mails sent out on most workdays – Eaters' Digest.

The e-mail service is designed to accomplish six goals. First, it identifies the TFPC as a government-funded organization that does what governments should do – solve what political scientists call 'the collective action problem.' That is the problem, seemingly inherent in the human condition, which arises from the fact that few people will do all the work on a project that benefits everybody equally but yields no 'exclusive goods' for them. That is why we have governments – not just to overcome market failures, but human failings as well. Since both sustainability and community food security are ultimate cases of a collective action problem – there can be no gated community that features food security and environmental sustainability for residents only – I thought the TFPC could develop a real niche here. We are the ones who do information sharing for all groups and individuals and we can do it because the government pays for our salaries and computers.

Second, as an under-funded organization trying to service an under-funded movement, I was interested in building what Jim Collins (2001), author of *From Good to Great*, calls a flywheel – an unstoppable semi-automatic mechanism which grinds it out (the opposite of an organization that goes from one one-off event to another). For example, as the only group in the city (and one of the few on the continent) to have a general purpose e-mail service for a general purpose audience, our flywheel allows us to shoehorn ourselves in as partners in a wide variety of meetings or conferences because we bring to the table an email list of likely supporters and attendees. We can't afford to kick in $2000 to co-sponsor a conference, but we can offer our e-mail service. We also put a $2000 value on the use of the service when we're asked to show that a group applying for funds is leveraging those funds for in-kind contributions. Having a flywheel turns a food security and sustainability organization into a partnership machine, which is how it should be.

Third, I wanted to use the service as a daily framing device to tell people where we were coming from so they would know where to place us in terms of attitude. The featured story in e-mails, other than postings on alternative food jobs or local events, was always what the TV producers call a 'bright' – an upbeat story that says there's still hope, despite all the gloom and doom. We take the best success story of local citizen initiatives that could be duplicated anywhere. This message, that sustainability is do-able by ordinary people, is perhaps the most

urgent sustain-ability message of all, and it has helped people see the TFPC as a positive, can-do organization, not to be confused with the doom and gloom, nuts and berries stereotypes many people have. That branding of TFPC encourages what Michael Sacco, the young leader of ChocoSol, a Toronto fair trade organization, calls 'actionism' – a food movement twist on activism, which takes full advantage of the fact that food offers an abundance of opportunities for individuals and small groups to start putting into practice what they believe. Indeed, it's not written in stone that policy only deals with what governments can do; part of promoting an empowerment version of food security and sustainability is to demonstrate that the power glass is half-full, not half-empty, and that there is a huge realm of activity that does not require permission forms from the state. Indeed, I believe that a major opportunity for emerging food policy leaders, in an era when governments are becoming increasingly hidebound and decreasingly responsive to innovative citizen proposals, is to develop a *Do It Yourself* food policy kit for civil society.

The e-mail service had a fourth goal: to help me capitalize on all the time (about an hour a day) I spent reviewing emails from scores of colleagues and list-servs. Our service allowed me to make this scanning time serve another purpose beyond my information needs by sharing the best story of the day on our service. This also underlined the fact that the TFPC was an unusual kind of government organization that saw itself as sharing information and providing a service. In this world, organizations need to follow the advice given to journalists – show, don't tell: show what happened so people can come to their own conclusion without telling them what to think. The e-mail service tries to show that we are a service and helping organization because too many people would laugh out loud if I told them 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help you.'

Fifth, I wanted to capitalize on the time I spent doing public speaking. Many overly-busy public health staff refuse to do one-off public speaking because it takes about three hours (travel and decompression time included) to give a talk and it's hard to quantify any benefit. By using these speaking engagements to build an e-mail list, I was able to bring something back to the office that we could build a relationship on in the fullness of time.

Sixth and finally, I hoped the flywheel might serve as the key communication tool in any major campaign adopted by all in the food movement. I estimate that people regularly acting on food movement values (buying at farmers markets or buying organic, for example) add up to five % of the population; that is big enough to influence government policy, if those numbers and energies are effectively targeted rather than dispersed over some 25 equally important causes. As the food movement matures, I believe, more supporters will recognize that one issue at some point in time holds out the promise of a breakthrough that can lift the entire movement, and a full-bore unified campaign will follow. When that happens, the e-mail service to be put at the disposal of the campaign will already exist. Thinking and planning ahead like that, I believe, is part of the planning function that government organizations should fulfill.

I have had modest success tracking how the time we (myself and the TFPC administrative genius, Leslie Toy) spend on this email service helped us advance relationship-based outreach. We presently have some 2000 subscribers, about 1500 of them in Toronto. The TFPC also receives about 100 requests a year from students across North America who want to do an essay about us, and about 50 calls a year from students who would like to intern for the TFPC. When we launched a facebook page for 'friends of the TFPC' in 2009, it quickly went to 1000 fans. Our neglected website, which I have not been able to update since 2002 receives the second-highest number of hits of any unit in Toronto Public Health. As well, we have become the go-to place for journalists to call when they're first looking into a story. Because, they explain they've kept one of our e-mails passed on to them as a possible story idea. As a result, I am probably one of the ten most quoted Toronto civil servants in the local and national media. Anyone who cares to make a contribution to all-important but untargeted sustainability or community food security goals needs to figure out a way to 'punch above their weight' and this electronic relationship builder is our way.

The TFPC participated in launching a second email service in 2002 after I had the good fortune of being selected to represent Canadian non-government organizations at the parallel people's conference held outside the official 2002 World Food Summit in Rome. Until that time in my life, I had been content to be parochial in my activities and travels, thinking that activists needed to know their own country first. But in Rome, I met peasant activists, especially women who had been jailed and brutalized as a result of their organizing activities and their stories shattered me intellectually and emotionally. I returned home thinking, as I think to this day, that activists in the Global North need to start their organizing day with thanks to the democracy and relatively high standard of living we start from, and that the way we express our gratitude is to do something special in solidarity with people in the Global South. This, I believe, is a touchstone of both sustainability and food security; we cannot build a mature food movement in the Global North unless people have reckoned with the needs of everyone in the world.

Upon my return, I convinced a number of people in and around the TFPC that we should do something, and before I knew it, a professor at University of Toronto offered to assign a grad student, Amber McNair, to work with me to co-edit a bi-weekly e-mail service dealing with global food security issues from a policy perspective. Today, that service continues as the e-mail service and website called foodforethought.net/, which is co-edited by TFPC member James Kuhns and me. It provides information to foster dialogue on the need for inter-sectoral cooperation and civic action on global food challenges and strives to spread insights coming from the Global South.

A second globally-minded initiative which the TFPC started after the 2002 Rome conference was to hold an annual Toronto event celebrating World Food Day in mid-October. For several years this event was held at City Hall but is now being held at University of Toronto co-sponsored by a New College Equity Studies Program which hopes to launch more courses on sustainable food systems.

Aside from linking us to the many people in Toronto active in global solidarity networks, the e-mail service and World Food Day event help us relate to half Toronto's population, people born outside Canada; global is part of being local in Toronto.

Inch by Inch, Row by Row

The role that a food policy council performs on behalf of food security and sustainability is sometimes identified as 'catalytic', as in the chemistry lab when a catalyst is dropped into a solution to make other chemicals fizz and do something together they could not do before. The metaphor is not quite accurate – the TFPC exerts a little more energy than that, and is also as transformed as are others, both of which chemical catalysts miss out on. But as metaphors go, it is close. What is useful about the catalytic analogy is it identifies the transformative ability of someone with an innovative system perspective who brings new energy and new options that allow people to open their minds to new possibilities – or as is more often the case, open their mouths about an idea they have long had but never felt permission to voice. Indeed, when I speak about food councils to some circles, I liken our role to Mary Poppins who came into a totally dysfunctional household and worked her magic by helping people see new relationship opportunities that let them become who they really were. Poppins knew it wasn't the players, but the system, that was wrong. Even when the TFPC seems to play a catalytic role based on policy understanding, there is more about empowerment and relationships to it than meets the eye.

I would like to explore this innovative role as it plays out with two related areas of TFPC external work – promoting local and sustainable food and fostering new relationships between local farmers and local food actionists.

When I started working at the TFPC in 2000, I, the TFPC and official City documents[6] were already primed – quite a bit ahead of the curve for the time – to champion a more self-reliant and local food system than the one we had, which was about 95% dependent on imports from outside the region. What sealed the matter for me was going to a meeting of farm leaders from the area just north of Toronto, where I was slated to make a brief presentation about a City food initiative. One look at the crowd and I felt like checking to see if someone had brought a noose and scaffold to hang me; there were a lot of harrumphs as I introduced myself. A number of early speakers made some nasty references to the city people who were always going on about organic as if conventional farmers didn't grow their food on real soil, and so on. I had a pretty clear feeling I was one of the city people they had in mind, since the TFPC had been interpreted as strongly supportive of organic, then a very tiny niche in the market. I started off my remarks by saying that

6 I had a major hand in the taskforce that drafted the City's Environmental Plan, which was unanimously adopted by City Council the week I started work.

the TFPC was keen to work with them, because for us, supporting local farmers trumped everything including organic. I can't remember what else I said, because everyone relaxed so much the presentation just broke down and we settled into a conversation.

I remember leaving with the thought that the TFPC had to become the champion of both local food and local farmers, to become the allies of local farmers in the course of promoting local food. Vic Daniels, one of the farm members of the TFPC (we were authorized by the Board of Health to have two farmers from outside the city) explained to me the next day that the word organic stuck in the craw of farmers and that he found he got a better reception when he said he favored bio-dynamic – 'whatever that means' he added. What it meant, of course, was that the word organic had become a trigger that shut down dialogue and that a working relationship was being upset by a word that had come to mean to farmers that no-one understood how farmers were hurting and how much they needed to be honoured for their hard work putting low-cost food on the tables of city people. One of the books that's most influenced me, *Getting to Yes,* explains that problem-solvers should not get hung up or defensive about one *position*, but instead talk about their *needs*, which can't be argued and might be addressed with a variety of positions (Fisher and Ury 1991). Local and sustainable became a means of literally repositioning the discussion between local food counterculture people and local farmers so both sides could talk about needs.

For a food policy council, local food is a system and sustainability issue. It isn't just about how far food travels from farm to table, which is only one result of a long distance food system. I suspect that we think first and foremost about the distance from farm to plate because we are a narcissistic species so we think the food system revolves around us. From a sustainability perspective, local food takes on importance inasmuch as it reduces energy inputs and toxic outputs that are a long way (i.e. distant) from sustainability. Local in any comprehensive sense needs to indicate how far the fertilizers, pesticides, tractors, tractor fuel, irrigation water, irrigation pumps travel to the farm, how far the package travels to the processor, and the processed food in a package travels from the processor to the retailer, how far the food scraps travel from the home to the landfill and the food package from the home to the recycling plant in China – and that's just a shortlist of distance measures. So local food is about a lot more than making a local decision at the grocery store; it requires a total system rethink and overhaul. Just because an area has local farmers, for instance, doesn't mean the farmers produce anything remotely related to food that can be sold locally, unless the locals like eating a lot of soy and corn grown for cattle. Just because an area has a local take-out chain or a local cafeteria doesn't mean it cooks food, let alone local food; more likely, it heats food made from a score of inputs (inputs, not ingredients) assembled wherever the assembling labor is cheap and can be trucked in by an aggregator. These are the system issues that a food council is charged with bringing into the equation.

Just to show how far away people from the Toronto area were from understanding local food when we were getting started: our first brief on the local food issue was a

submission to the Ontario government urging it to save the fertile farmbelt around Toronto from suburban and boxstore expansion. Most farmers opposed farmland protection because it upset their hope to cash out of farming by selling their farms to real estate developers. Surprisingly, one group as far from understanding local food were environmentalists, who saw a protected greenbelt as a way to save at-risk flora and fauna, not endangered farms. It is important to know that local food came up from the outside of all the political lanes of the time; indeed, the TFPC won a major award in 2008 for its work introducing environmentalists to the food issue. Such changes in thinking don't happen 'naturally' without interventions and social relationships, any more than food happens naturally.

Where to start? Relationships, of course. Our first annual local food conference, which we co-hosted with Caledon Countryside Alliance just to give ourselves some rural credibility, tried to play matchmaker between chefs who were interested in more local sourcing and farmers who were interested in batch sales of local/quality food with a bit of a story to tell. We got them talking – no small feat in itself when farmers speak only English and many restaurant staff who came only spoke Chinese, in case anyone thinks distance is just physical. One farmer brought a pickup truck full of carrots and sold the load but I think the only other outcome among about 100 attendees were good feelings. The next conference brought together farmers and farmers' markets organizers. 'It is time to take a stand', we told farmers, 'at your local farmers' market', but not too many were interested in standing behind a stall for a day to take home $500 net, assuming it didn't rain. As local picked up steam – and equally important, as non-local sales options for local farmers dried up when the US exchange rate dropped and beef and pork couldn't be sold out of country – we had our successful 2009 conference to develop a common wish list for infrastructure for a local food economy. Just as big a success: by 2009, the TFPC was only one of several major organizations, including Sodexo, culinary tourism organizations, Sustain Ontario, Local Food Plus, Caledon Countryside Alliance, and a farm organization called Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTAAAC). We had arrived as serious players, thanks to relationships as much as policy. As with Mary Poppins, success comes when you're no longer essential to what happens.

Having the GTAAAC as a formal and official farm sponsor for this conference represented a major breakthrough in relations between the local farm community and the local food community – two very different species. The TFPC was a minor player in the establishment of the GTAAAC. Planners in the Greater Toronto Area who wanted to do something to rejuvenate the local farm economy invited us as well as farmer representatives to set up an organization, which the Province agreed to fund. Two of our members got very active in the organization and another one of our members was the founding staffer, so relationships soon gave us some influence – a reminder that one of the reasons why food policy councils work is that they have staff to handle the tedious work of an organization, leaving members free to work on the outside, with the result that the ones who win are those who come to the most meetings. We began to treat the GTAAAC as a prime arena of

work, and to prize it as perhaps the leading place on the continent for urban-rural dialogue. We saw it as a chance to bridge perhaps the biggest and most distancing cultural divide in North America, one which plays mainly to the advantage of farm input companies and far-right politicians both sworn enemies of sustainable development. Most of the farmers GTAAAC represents are commodity farmers, producing one crop, such as soybeans for wholesalers, but farm and rural leaders seemed willing to check things out. From a relationship perspective, this kind of infrastructure for local food is the crucible, with the outcome undetermined at the time of this writing.

According to the position paper of the British Sustainable Development Commission, food security and sustainability are 'the perfect fit' (SDC 2009). That is certainly true in logic, and if logic were the problem instead of relationships or interests, that would be easy enough to fix. But the Commission argues on the first page of its paper that the 'message that there is an ideal 'fit' between sustainable development and food security is in danger of being submerged in appeals to single-issue solutions.' There is the rub, which the TFPC is in a position to discuss from direct experience. Two quick examples illustrate the complications.

For farmers anywhere near Toronto, Toronto is 'the market', the fourth biggest metropolitan area in North America. I try to warn farmers that 'market' is not a good way to describe Torontonians – we are people, some of us single moms, some of us refugees from Africa, some of us needing kosher or halal meat, and so on – and if they want to define us as an impersonal market, they should not be surprised if Torontonians treat them as part of an impersonal supply chain where the lowest price is the only consideration. The speech always falls on deaf ears. The fact is that culture has been taken out of agriculture – and is why governments, business and farmers refer to the 'agri-food sector,' which is about as unappetizing, uncultured, unbrandable, unsustainable and as far from customers eager to buy local as a local farmer can get (Chapter Eight). Some people complain that 'the kids of today' do not know food comes from a farm; what they do not recognize is that food does not come from a farm but from a culture, agriculture.

That culture question leads to the complicating or enriching realities of multiculturalism, a major theme in Toronto, which is proud to be the most ethnically and culturally diverse city in the world. The TFPC is charged with, among other things, seeing to it that immigrants get as many culturally-appropriate foods as possible from a local food system and benefit from as many local jobs, business and farming opportunities as possible. We've also taken it upon ourselves to come up with a word for food that comes from another place in the world. 'Ethnic food' is politically incorrect, since it 'others' people who have just immigrated a generation or two later than the people who are labeling them ethnic; we're leaning to a phrase such as 'world foods' or 'inter-cultural foods' a term used by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

Whatever the stereotypes about farmers, TFPC members get a fair hearing on that issue at GTAAAC, despite the fact that most farmers come from northern European families who migrated here before 1960, while half of Torontonians

came from non-northern European areas after 1970. To honor rights to culturally appropriate food and to contribute to sustainability, it is crucial that local food advocates work the creative tension between being short on distance and long on inclusion. Indeed, many of the favorite comfort foods of many immigrant groups, even people from semi-tropical climes, can be grown in the Toronto area; so it's possible for local farmers to gain access to a new market niche and to reduce global warming emissions at the same time responding to cultural inclusion.

Another single issue, however, proved too much for the TFPC – public sector purchasing by City of Toronto of local food. The TFPC has always favored sustainable food, namely food grown with a minimum of toxic pesticides, Genetically-Engineered seeds, mistreatment of animals, abuse of natural ecosystems, and so on; indeed, the TFPC favored sustainable food in 1992, before it favored local – logical enough, given that most members then came from the same background as organic promoters, who were also slow to get the local angle. From the standpoint of global warming, arguably the planet's most burning issue of environmental sustainability, sustainable farms with few synthetic inputs do more to reduce global warming than local farms using many synthetic inputs. From the standpoint of creating good jobs, sustainable enhances local since it puts an emphasis on using labour rather than fuels and chemicals (Chapter 5). As well, from the standpoint of people who go out of their way and beyond their budgets to buy local, sustainability issues such as animal treatment, labour treatment and pesticides rank right up there with distance as a purchasing motivator. Therefore, the TFPC supported a motion to have Toronto purchase local and sustainable food, as had been done by nearby Markham township (Town of Markham 2009). That proposal was unanimously defeated by a City Council committee which subsequently adopted a loosely-worded motion favoring more local purchasing. Anyone who followed the ins and outs of that fiasco would have little trouble agreeing with the judgment by the British Sustainable Development Commission. But the TFPC has to take its lumps too; it lacked the resources and ability to lead the way based on the primacy of relationship-based initiatives, and so when the matter stood or fell on policy, it fell.

Kicking It Up a Notch

Our defeat on the local sustainable food issue was a flashing red light indicating that the TFPC was playing in a bigger league – where well-funded foundations, links to the mayor's office, and direct lines to the media counted – without the necessary heft, credibility or social relationships. Just like major foundations in the US were discovering, it was getting to be time to scale up from projects – albeit projects woven together from some pattern fitting in with a food system perspective – to whole system interventions. As luck would have it, we didn't have to nurse our wounds too long. The Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David McKeown, shared an office with my predecessor, Rod MacRae, during the 1990s and was a strong

advocate of social determinants of health and preventive health measures that a reformed food system would deliver on. His policy advisor, Barbara Emanuel, had a perfect split personality – half bold visionary, half shrewd political tactician. Carol Timmings, was a socially-skilled and I'm-up-for-it director of Policy and Planning. My office neighbor and friend, Brian Cook, one of the best and fastest researchers, had his finger on the statistics showing Toronto, Canada, North America and the world were losing ground on all the key health indicators around food. They and a few colleagues had an idea for developing a food strategy for the entire City, and they asked me and the TFPC, normally the black sheep among the public health flock, to help out.

Here is the second curious truth about food policy. The first, which we have illustrated up to here, is that relationship building is what makes policy palatable and creates policy in motion. The second, which is what we are about to illustrate, is that when situations truly ripen for food policy, it is expressed as strategy, not policy, for the simple reason that a policy without a strategy is a wish list without a plan.

By then, I had two-years of experience as co-organizer of a city-wide food strategy project that started about a week after I joined TFPC staff. According to provincial dictate, Toronto had just become an amalgamated city of the old downtown merged with its suburbs – like amalgamating Vienna and Phoenix, critics said. The brand-new city had no unified policies of its own, and in the mood of the Millennium year, was keen to start off with some broad statements of vision. A committee of leading counselors, staff and citizen activists were already a team when I joined, and called their team the Food and Hunger Action Plan (FAHAC). The name was a blessing because it was broad enough to address hunger, which was felt as a stain on the honor of 'Toronto the Good' by everyone in the city, and to put it in the perspective of food, not just low income. Since I was the food policy person, I worked to give FAHAC a food system as well as income inequality spin. The poor of the world could eat like kings on the 50% of all food that is wasted, and governments could cover the costs of making sure such high-quality food got to people on low incomes just by savings on medical care for chronic diseases, I argued, so we should not blame inequality for things that were just due to stupidity. People liked the sound of that, so we set out to produce a three-volume report over a year that would see all departments of the city working to be advocates, coordinators, supporters and innovators in the field of food.

This innovative project in food security and sustainability policy was based on two golden opportunities – the chance to think big without fear of contradicting an existing policy (the newly-amalgamated city was too young to have any existing policies) and the space to look beyond the normal constraints of the 'tyranny of the urgent' that absorbs most leaders on most days. We hit the jackpot when someone suggested we work on a 'backcasting' basis, asking where we wanted the city to be in 20 years, not what we wanted to do the next day on today's budget. This kind of freedom and space for open-ended idea sharing allows consensus to develop fairly easily – who wants to say that the city they're working to create over 20 years

is one where children will go to school hungry, where hospitals are filled with obese people, and that we look forward to a bitter harvest from unsustainability, for example? We encoded this vision in a brief Toronto Food Charter,[7] one of the first such municipal charters in the world (we borrowed the idea from Kamloops, B.C.), and it was adopted unanimously by City Council in 2001. Though the charter has no legal significance it provides the terms of reference for the TFPC. A charter offers some basis for a claim that it was reasonable to think the city supported sustainability. The charter also stakes a claim for food policy as an area of municipal jurisdiction.

As it turned out, our small band of under-resourced staff, overworked citizen supporters and ultra-busy councilors wasn't able to do much beyond networking in a city where the normalcy of jurisdiction-minded departments on tight budgets quickly asserted itself. We managed to get one item through for $600,000 a year to go into grants for community-building good projects. This pot of money allowed us to fund an exciting group of Animators, who worked in over-stressed and under-served neighborhoods, where people barely knew one another, to use food to literally animate or breathe life into community development. The Animators were such a success that Toronto Community Housing recently retained them to develop community gardens and other community food projects in social housing projects across the city. Despite the success of the charter and the Animators, the project couldn't carry on without dedicated staff resources or buy-in from the departments that needed to cooperate on a strategy, so FAHAC gradually dissolved. It had become a case study of what the outstanding food analyst Tim Lang called a talk shop without a core focus suffering from the 'tyranny of structurelessness' (Freeman 1970).

As I look back on the charter from today's vantage point, I notice two big things we got wrong which showed my failure to understand the level of strategic thinking and promotional savvy to make both food security and sustainability governance principles of food.

First, the 2001 charter says that food policy is considered the concern of all departments and staff in the city. As Food Strategy Manager Peter Dorfman, Brian Cook and I thrashed this over countless times during 2009, we landed in a different place, and I now see what was deficient in that formulation from a strategic conceptual, relationship and marketing standpoint.

Start with marketing, which is an alternative to selling. Selling is for people who have a product and have to convince someone to buy it. Marketers find out what the person needs and make it. Food security and sustainability deserve to be marketed. The public works, transit, recreation and economic development staff in any city already deal with food. They do not need to be convinced to support healthy food policy. They do need to learn how to identify and leverage what they already do with food so it adds value to them and others (aka food security and

7 The Toronto Food Charter was written by me and Sean Meagher, executive assistant to the lead councilor Pam McConnell, in about an hour in front of a meeting of citizens.

sustainability); that is what marketing does. That is also how mutually beneficial relations get established, when a proposal is made to help each other, not me. And it is how food gets raised conceptually to the strategic level.

Here, in a nutshell, is how the logic goes. About a third of garbage relates to food. Torontonians dump a million paper coffee cups a day into the garbage, mostly picked up by the city. Most recycled containers are for food. The farther a package has come from, the more difficult and expensive it is to collect and recycle. That's because long-distance hauls need ultra-light, airtight and strong multi-material packages. The packages are bulky to haul away and almost impossible to separate and recycle. In other words, if you stop and think about it, city recycling departments subsidize long distance imports. Passing this cost back to the producer would be a way to save city taxpayers money and level the playing field for local producers and job creation. Food scraps are a different story. But the key is they're not part of a waste management strategy but a resource management strategy. Two huge costs that are now deadweight could be revenue sources that pro-actively shape the city's future.

What about transit: does a food connection there seem far-fetched? Efficient, cost-effective public transit, which is to say street rail, relies on busy main streets with lots of pedestrian traffic. What creates busy main streets with lots of foot traffic better than mom and pop grocery stores, neighborhood restaurants, street food vendors, and coffee shops? What about transit planning that situates transfer points near grocery stores where people can shop on the way home? What about transit stops beside coffee shops where people can wait inside when it is cold or raining? What about street vendors at key intersections so transit-takers have their version of drive-throughs? What about looking at food as a way to enhance the functioning of public transit?

Then think of all the government money that is in the wrong pot – money in the tens of thousands for every hospital stay for diabetes treatment, but almost nothing for diabetes prevention because the money for treatment is at a 'senior' level of government and the prevention takes place locally. What about prevention applied to youth in youth detention centres, given the established success record of groups working with at-risk youth in gardening projects? Could we make an example for wayward youth by providing money at the local level to keep them out of institutions paid for at the provincial level?

Just as hunger is caused by lack of planning, not lack of food, so many other non-food problems are caused by lack of strategic planning and alliances. The food strategy will (hopefully) be proposing a 'food facilitator' operating out of a high level at the city, with a job description to advise heads of departments of where a food connection might be and how to use it to enhance workings of their department.

The new food strategy will also pinpoint another resource overlooked by FAHAC – neighborhood centres which, with a little spiffing up, could become all-purpose food centres, which provide a range of services from supporting breastfeeding moms, to teaching gardening to children, to community kitchens for

people who are lonely or isolated, to free meal programs for people down on their luck, to farmers' markets for shoppers. Many neighborhoods in many areas of the world have a community health centre, a library, a school, a recreation centre as a fixture of their community. Why not add a community food centre as innovative infrastructure for the 21st century?

Jim Harris, one of Canada's leading green business strategists and consultants, wrote *Blind Sided* as a cautionary tale about companies that crashed because they didn't know what hit them and felt like they got whacked out of the blue. The problem, he says, is not lack of problem-solving skills, but lack of problem-recognition skills. In some ways, political and economic leaders of modern societies have been like deer stuck in the headlights of oncoming cars in the way they've been blindsided by sustainability for some 20 years. They have the skills to solve the problem. But they lack the strategic skills to recognize it as an organizational – not technological – problem that requires organizational innovation.

Food and food policy councils may well be able to be the first movers in this area by showing how to co-manage food security and sustainability. Situated in local and regional governments, they are relatively free of the mega-corporations that run the show in national capitals whenever there is an issue related to trade, transportation, subsidies, advertising, labeling, pollution, packaging, garbage, energy, social assistance levels. In one of the delectable ironies of life, an example of Trotsky's law of uneven and combined development, these corporations leave real estate and road construction to local businesses that have considerable sway in local governments, but little to say about all the issues that affect food – all of which relate to trade, transportation, subsidies, advertising, labeling, pollution, packaging, garbage, energy and social assistance levels. Carpe diem; with the help of food policy councils, this is where the work of sustainability can come into its own.

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