

NYCEN – Sustainable Food Systems & Public Health
04.08.2016
Teachers College, Columbia University

9:00 Welcome by Brett Klein

Introduction of what NYCEN, description of membership and thank you to meeting organizers, Jack and Allison. This was the last meeting of the academic year.

9:11 Jack explained why he organized this meeting and did a call and response mantra before introducing the first speaker. Here is the mantra:

What food is grown

Where food is grown

And how it is grown

Has a lot to do with what we are eating

And what are health problems are

Introduces Dr. Jasia Steinmetz: Professor and Director of Didactic Program in Dietetics at the University of Wisconsin. She and her husband grow food and support local farms. She is also an author of several books and contributed to the creation of the sustainable food systems undergraduate program in Madison, Wisconsin.

Title of her talk “Opportunities for Food and Nutrition Practice in Anthropocene”

9:15: Dr. Jasia Steinmetz

Storytelling presentation. Not a lot of data. She introduces herself using all of these different cultural references. Every time we breath out carbon dioxide, it is being circulated by the plants who are taking it in. We are related to all of the plants in a very visceral way. We also have a deep heritage of all of the other people and plants that lived before us. We are connected in a molecular way. When we talk about the ecosystem, we always talk about ourselves as the observers instead of us being a part of it. Why?

It's all about relationships

Questions of the day:

Why is sustainability important?

Why is it essential that nutritionists incorporate sustainable practices into their work?

What concerns do we have about promoting sustainability in our practice and in our communities? Is it accessible?

Why is sustainability important?

What values/attitudes/knowledge/skills about food and food system do we pass to the next generation (25 years)?

Audience responded: Health - supporting local farms - how to cook food - cycle - equity - tradition - taste - nurturing - food comes from farmers -

What is the legacy that we are leaving our children? Get away from the nutrition/health paradigm and think about food in a wider sense.

Where are kids seeing this and learning this? How are these things being reinforced? Many people think that it happens in the schools. Are they really talking about a food culture?

We need to think about what we are passing down to children because that is sustainability.

Picture of Shanghai

Lots of smog

“You never want to take a deep breath”

Can you imagine comprising our air that way?

Anthropocene

Earth's most recent geologic time period as being human influenced, or anthropogenic.

*The US has caused more global warming than any other country - How did we get away with this? It has to do with *we are American*.

Reactions to climate change emergency

Need to think about water policy. How are we going to balance the food supply?

People are predicting that we need more meat in the world Is this actually true?

Majority of food being produced is produced by small, older farmers: we want to encourage that.

The agriculture and food system at present is no longer effective. It needs to change.

Paradigm shift for food system and our practice

Everything that we do with food somehow involves water and energy. How am I balancing the nexus between energy, food and water? The more familiar we get with that, the more we will demand certain types of methods of producing and consuming food

Concerns and Opportunities

Just start somewhere: important to recognize the emergency before others and recognize that leadership is risky. The greatest consumption of fruits and vegetables happens in the first 3 years of a child's life. After that, it drastically declines. We are consuming ultra processed foods. In Brazil, they differentiate between unprocessed food and processed food and actually tell people to avoid it.

Picture of wild rice:

Contrasts with the previous images of lots of processed foods because it values culture and place. Following the juxtaposition between the processed foods and the rice, she showed many pictures of contradicting realities that exist: corn fields vs agroforestry, big farms vs CSAs, food waste vs recycling, old farmers vs young farmers etc. She was highlighting that while there is lots of bad there is also much good.

9:45: Andra Benson - Organic Valley Farmer- Owner

Organic valley is the only cooperative that sells organic milk. Over 50% of organic valley profit comes from New York State. New York City has embraced organic more than any other place in the United States.

Why did they go from being conventional dairy farmers to organic dairy farmers?

Family bought the farm in 1946. They started a dairy/poultry egg farm. In the later 50's and early 60's, all of a sudden farmers were told, "Why do you have your cows out in pasture? You should bring them inside. They do not need to eat grass. You are wasting your pasture. You can grow corn on it! All you need are all these chemicals." Almost everyone changed the way they were doing things.

Andra did not start farming until the early 80's. She fed the calves and did the bookkeeping. She fed the calves feed formula, which had low grade antibiotics in it. Sometimes it had soy in it too. She decided to experiment and feed some calves with whole milk. Everyone told her that her calves would die, but they did not. It was hard because you think you are supposed to keep selling milk, but she would give it to the calves so it was perceived as "wasted milk."

They completely re-did their land. They put up fences, they took away all of the corn and turned it into pasture and noticed big changes in the cows' health. First thing that they noticed was that the condition of

their legs and feet improved (concrete does not make sense for cows). Reproduction improvements. Biggest obstacle to going organic is pasture. Next big step is realizing that you can have healthy cows without antibiotics or hormones.

*Cornell is anti-organic

She then told us her family story. She gave the farm to her son and his wife. Her younger son also lives near the farm. He is a big animal veterinarian.

She spoke about the Cooperative and what the USDA organic seal ensures.

She went through lots of slides about why Organic is better and why Organic Valley is best.

10:15: Toni Liquori

Showed us a film to situate us inside of her work and give us an idea of what school districts she works with. She thanked NYCEN for continuing to exist. It has been 19 years. Sustainability is the work itself and the workers who do it.

First she took us back to the late 1980s, the first time that you see the UN speaking about the deep connection between environment and economic development. In a robust food system, you will see a diverse range of foods and diverse people eating them, more rational mix of supply.

School food FOCUS is a national collaborative that leverages the knowledge and procurement of power of large school districts to make school meals nationwide more healthful, regionally sourced and sustainably produced. It focuses on the large school districts and works with the early adopters. They help schools use their knowledge to speak with producers/manufacturers about the kinds of foods that they want. It's all about relationships. She recommends Brene Brown and her [vulnerability Ted Talk](#). Nothing just happens. There is too much connective tissue.

Now they have 43 districts, and they serve about 5,000,000 students. 68% of students receive free/reduced rate. They have over \$600 million of purchasing power. Their signature programming is called Learning Labs. There are three phases to their program: planning, implementation, and self reliance. In California, they are in three communities pulling together the hospitals and the schools, which gives them more procurement power, a broader audience and greater moral authority. A big product category in school is chicken. Schools want healthier chicken, and they want kids to be able to recognize the chicken. They are now partnering with the center for good food purchasing to track where the chicken comes from, what labor conditions are like etc.

It's not just the plate and it's not just the environment. It has to bring both of those things together.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

How can we tell people to eat organic when they are unable to afford it?

ANSWER

Dr. Jasia Steinmetz: Farmers market is cheaper than Walmart. If you make it convenient, you do not need to buy large amounts of food that need storage. When we say food insecurity, we are really saying income insecurity

Did any of you have a role in the inclusion of sustainability in the USDA's food guidelines? What do you think was the biggest obstacle getting in the way of it being a part of them (big meat)? What are the compromises that need to be made....

ANSWER

Dr. Jasia Steinmetz : There is no reason why we have to wait for the guidelines. She recommends a book called, "Blessed unrest." We do not need to wait for people to approve of sustainability. we just need to do it. It's about community relationships and figuring out what each community needs to do. She is passed the point of being patient. Let's just do it

Andra Benson: Long conversation about milk and flavoring it. Kids won't drink regular milk, but they will drink flavored milk.

Dr. Jasia Steinmetz : When we go into schools, we go in thinking we need to teach instead of to learn what they want to learn. These communities have more resilience. They are more attuned and are quick learners. We come in with an attitude of disrespect, specifically out of a nutrition background which encourages, "we are going to give you this." It is very top - down. If you don't comply, than something is wrong. Where do we live in community? We are not independent. We have gotten ourselves into this social un-sustainability. We are all actually connected to each other. It's not about equity, it's about recognizing that everyone has something. We need to build a bridge between the people who are serving and the people who are being "served." The problem is that schools are just a reflection of what kids are eating at home. If they are drinking chocolate milk at home, they will want to drink it at school

Who monitors the quality of food after it is on the menu?

ANSWER

Toni Liquori : It is a challenge in large systems especially when there is no leadership. Difficult to get quality food and keep checking it along the way.

What can nutrition educators do with limited resources?

ANSWER(S)

Andra Benson: Invite a real farmer

Dr. Jasia Steinmetz: How are we talking about food with the kids? Not just about health and science but let's include social studies and math. It is about a food culture. Ask immigrants to come in and talk about food culture. How does this relate to geography? or celebrations? How we talk about food in place and in community: tastings, tongue mapping etc. Let's rediscover food in all of its beauty, beyond the label. We need to stop using the word nutrition. We need to reframe the conversation about what we are talking about and that it represents bigger things.

Toni Liquori: Center for Good Food Purchasing moved out of the LA food policy council into their own space. They have a set of guidelines/principles, and they are working at an advocacy level: economic impact/environmental impact/ labor/welfare. There is also an organizing group in New York City: Food Chain Workers Alliance

Conclusion:

- fill out survey
- Annual meeting and expo of Eat Right New York is in May in Tarrytown (May 19-21)