

APPENDIX VIII

Food Congress Recommendations for 2010, 2008, and 2003

2010 Food Congress Recommendations:

Held at Cleveland State University, the 2010 Food Congress participants reviewed 60+ recommendations from the Northeast Ohio Local Food Assessment and Plan and recommended priorities for programs, policies, and investments. The recommendations from the original assessment were organized around core clusters, such as education and training, public health, or consumer mobilization. The following summarizes the top recommendations based on voting among the congress participants:

OVERALL RESULTS:

The top three clusters, based on voting, included:

- 1) Urban policies;
- 2) Education and training; and
- 3) Local food infrastructure.

The top 5 recommendations based on voting included:

- 1) Formation of a local food authority;
- 2) Shift economic development priorities to emphasize local foods;
- 3) Develop “slow muni” bonds;
- 4) For profit kitchen incubators; and
- 5) K-12 school gardens and curricula.

PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS:

Programming covers initiatives that can be implemented by non-profit organizations or educational institutions. Based on voting, the following overall program clusters were identified, from highest to lowest priority:

- 1) Education and training;
- 2) Urban agriculture;
- 3) Urban-rural interface; and
- 4) Public health.

The top specific recommendations for programming included:

- 1) K-12 school gardens and curricula;
- 2) Vocational training and workforce development programs;
- 3) Development of tools for regional collaboration;
- 4) Development of learning farms and gardens for research and training;
- 5) Healthy food in schools; and
- 6) Supporting stronger market development for medium-scale farms.

POLICIES:

Policies cover government-based initiatives to support local food systems

development. The following priorities were determined for policy clusters:

- 1) Urban policies;
- 2) Policies at all levels; and
- 3) State policies for Ohio.

The top specific recommendations for policies included:

- 1) Shift economic development funds from non-local retention to local food business development;
- 2) Develop support for “slow muni” bonds from a variety of funding sources (public at large, foundations, investors);
- 3) Local procurement policies to create purchasing preferences for local businesses;
- 4) Creation of urban food districts to provide urban farm incubators and infrastructure for consolidation or processing;
- 5) Create food policy coalition to focus on developing processing infrastructure; and
- 6) Promoting farmland preservation and agricultural viability.

INVESTMENTS:

Investments cover efforts to attract public, foundation, or private capital to support the development of a local food economy. The following priorities were identified for key investment clusters:

- 1) Strengthening local food infrastructure;
- 2) Developing alternative financing mechanisms;
- 3) Supporting businesses for local foods systems;
- 4) Mobilizing consumer demand; and
- 5) Improving competitive advantage of local food.

The top specific recommendations for investments include:

- 1) Formation of a local food authority;
- 2) Development of for-profit kitchen incubators;
- 3) Utilization of existing and/or under-utilized processing facilities in the region;
- 4) Facilitation of waste recovery businesses;
- 5) Organization of food distribution hubs in low-income communities; and
- 6) Development of local business malls or collaborative sites.

CRITICAL THEMES AT THE 2008 NORTHEAST OHIO FOOD CONGRESS

The following themes emerged from the open source process. These themes are also posted with short video compilations of Food Congress interviews at www.gotthenac.org. In addition to viewing short videos, users can make comments and updates on the website to respond to issues raised in the Congress, talk about innovative projects, or share resources or links.

THEME ONE: ACCESS

This theme emerged as one of the most critical issues in local food access: how to connect local food to under-served or low-wealth communities. This issue particularly affects urban neighborhoods, many of which are poor and have lost grocery stores. While cities like Cleveland struggle with high rates of obesity and poor food access, this clip also shows the positive impacts of connecting farmers with urban neighborhoods and improving healthy food access through urban agriculture.

THEME TWO: HEALTH

Another significant theme emerged around the connection between food and health. Many chronic diseases are directly connected to diet and local food can contribute to a healthy lifestyle. As discussed in the Access section, the key issue with health is the ability to access healthy foods, particularly in urban neighborhoods where residents are given few healthy food options.

THEME THREE: ENVIRONMENT

Environmental sustainability was a central thread connecting many other social and economic concerns at the Congress. Food represents the most direct interaction people have with the natural environment. How we grow, distribute, and dispose of our food can enable us to gain leverage over many larger environmental concerns, from climate change and dwindling fuel and water resources to biological diversity and soil quality.

THEME FOUR: ECONOMY

With the present downturn of the global economic system in combination with recent spikes in oil prices, it is clear that many future growth opportunities will take place at the local and regional scale. Given its base of soils and access to fresh water, Northeast Ohio is particularly well-suited to expand local prosperity through local food system development. With an almost uniform distribution of urban areas throughout Ohio, surrounding farms can find new markets and opportunities. Further, the emptying out of cities like Lorain, Cleveland, and Youngstown presents re-development opportunities in intensive urban food production.

THEME FIVE: EDUCATION

The future sustainability of our food system will depend upon how much we involve our youth. Young people are at the peak of their strength and freshness

for new ideas, but often lack access to resources or adult mentors who can provide support for their success. Education will be paramount to the development and evolution of food systems. Education comes in many forms, including formal primary or collegiate education as well as informal mentoring between adults and youth within a given community. How can we teach youth to take the steps that we have already taken and then challenge them to do it better?

THEME SIX: COMMUNITY

Food security provides one measure for a healthy community. A food-secure community will have access to healthy, locally grown food for all residents who desire it. Achieving food security as a region opens up new opportunities for growing community. A healthy local food system will need to be a collective effort, bringing all people closer to the cycles of planting, nurturing, harvesting, and sharing food together. A local food system means that everyone knows their farmers and the land on which the food was grown. Community gardens, community-supported farms, farmers markets, or businesses sourcing locally grown food help to create stronger community ties. When communities feel a sense of ownership in their own food system, they will want to support it with future regional gatherings and the possibility of a regional food council on the near horizon.

FOOD CONGRESS 2003- SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

After a careful review of priorities identified at the Food Congress and follow-up discussions with several of the organizations that participated, these key action steps provide a road map of activities over the next several years to build an economically and ecologically sustainable food system for Northeast Ohio:

CREATING A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION:

Creating opportunities for partnership and a unifying message. Actions include:

- 1) Formation of a food council for Northeast Ohio to foster collaboration between organizations and businesses;
- 2) Participation in state-wide network promoting sustainable food system development and legislative support on the state-level;
- 3) Collaboration with network of businesses and organizations promoting sustainability in the Cleveland area to promote connections between food and other emerging markets (green building materials, transportation, renewable energy, etc.)

FACILITATING FARM AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:

Increasing the regional supply of food for local markets. Actions include:

- 1) Organization of farmer network and identification of farmer clusters to supply local markets;
- 2) Assessment and development of new farm and market garden starts within Cleveland through adaptive re-use of vacant land, community gardens growing for market, and partnership with Cuyahoga Valley Initiative;
- 3) Organization of business training workshops for farmers and food system entrepreneurs;
- 4) Development of George Jones Farm in Oberlin as model farm for the region that can provide a site for training, demonstration, and applied research; and
- 5) Formation of a network of farms throughout region that can provide models, demonstrations, and mentoring for new or existing farmers.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT:

Building regional market demand for local food. Actions include:

- 1) Organization of buyer network and formation of market clusters in metropolitan area that can build and consolidate demand for local food products;
- 2) Organization of local food trade show to provide a forum to foster transactions between suppliers and buyers;
- 3) Educational events and celebrations to raise awareness and support for local agriculture;
- 4) Development of "local food pledges" for consumers, restaurants, grocery stores, or institutions;
- 5) Development of website for education, outreach, telling stories about

- farmers and entrepreneurs, and facilitating transactions between buyers and sellers;
- 6) Develop “farm to school” program to combine buying power of local schools with curriculum development programs to raise awareness and support for local agriculture among youth; and
 - 7) Identification of locations for development of market outlets (farmers’ markets, corner grocery stores, etc.) to increase access for low-income communities.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT:

Building infrastructure to increase transaction potential. Actions include:

- 1) Development of alternative marketing and distribution systems, such as farmer and/or consumer-based cooperatives;
- 2) Determine economic benefits and development options for kitchen incubator on Cleveland’s West side;
- 3) Determination of “consolidation sites” near clusters of farmers or major markets that can provide produce storage, packaging, and limited processing to increase distribution efficiency.