

April is Earth Month in Lex

Shovel Ready: Lexington Leaders need to re-think our food system

By Jim Embry

On Earth Day we remind ourselves of the sacred relationships between human beings and the entire Earth community that are woven into a web of interconnectedness and interdependence.

The sustainability movement allows us, human beings, the opportunity to restore our sacred connections with Mother Earth and all of her children while enhancing the manifestation of our own deeper humanity. The restoration and practice of our sacred connections to the Earth is the Great Work of our time ala Thomas and Wendell Berry.

Building a local sustainable Food System

In reading the stimulus package proposals that Mayor Jim Newberry and his local team formulated and which was designed to provide a listing of “shovel ready” projects, I found interesting the absence of any projects having to do with local food production. There were no new projects listed to support local farmers and producers short of a farmer’s market pavilion.

There was no mention of money to build much needed food processing plants. Where was the mention of support-

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ing the shovel ready community gardening movement with green houses, fulltime staff, or hiring youth green corps members, aquaculture projects like Will Allen’s work in Growing Power in Milwaukee and Chicago? This exclusion left me wondering what planet do they live on? Don’t they understand that the food system is the foundation of all other human systems. Can’t they see that not only is the financial system—or better called capitalistic Greed System—in disarray and melting down, but our food system has been melting down for years now? The food system meltdown has been caused by the same people—greedy globalized gangsters or food system “bankers” and “investors.” They have “invested” in such schemes as: creating toxic chemicals that poison the Earth thus producing a very unhealthy ecosystem; hijacking local community food systems and “gifting” us with a globalized food system that moves people off the land, destroys forests, creates deserts, and produces poor quality “food,” unhealthy human beings, unhealthy soil that was once fertile lands and polluted air and water that all wind up in our bodies.

In Kentucky we don’t have to wait until the food system melts down before we restore our sanity and health.

When I read about California experiencing a water emergency because of severe drought conditions I wonder which planet the mayor and his select committee live on because 90 percent of our food comes from California — and like Detroit — the ride of our destructive, unhealthy food system is over. While in Kansas City in January attending Breaking the Silence-Building Sustainable Earth Community conference, I learned that the Ogallala aquifer which stretches from South Dakota to Texas (remember the US Breadbasket?) is ALSO drying up and creating all sorts of tensions between farmers and cities. These drought conditions in the US are just a small example of similar drought conditions around the world. These acute conditions should be seen as a national security issue and a local security issue. At last fall’s Governor’s Conference on the Environmental there was not one workshop or speaker that discussed our agricultural system. Is not growing food connected to the environment? It’s about time that Mayor Newberry and the Governor start thinking out of

the box and into the garden to get our state food system house in order ... and for goodness sake get a team of advisors who understand the critical need for a quantum approach to food systems.

I encourage them to call for a statewide effort around victory gardens, develop a food security master plan, establish food policy councils, finance food processing plants and distribution centers, get local foods in schools, restaurants, hospitals, get gardens in every school in KY, gardens in all parks, all community centers all government office buildings



AND support the hell ... *well the health* ... out of our breadbasket ... our Kentucky farmers and producers!

Key Aspects of community food system

Four aspects that distinguish community food systems from the globalized food system that typifies the source of most food Americans eat:

- **Food security** is a key goal of community food systems. While food security traditionally focuses on individual and household food needs, community food security addresses food access within a community context, especially for low-income households. It has a simultaneous goal of developing local food systems.

- **Proximity** refers to the distance between various components of the food system. In community food systems such distances are generally shorter than those in the dominant or global food system. This proximity increases the likelihood



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Terra Madre/Slow food (terramadre2008.org)

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My first trip to Europe could not have been for a more glorious reason than to attend the fabulous Terra Madre gathering in Torino, Italy October 23-27 2008. What a grand, inspirational and educational experience it was.

I encourage everyone reading this to learn some Italian, save those pennies and consider attending the next gathering in 2010 ... because our beloved state of Kentucky needs the help... and you will have a wonderful time. In the meantime learn even more at the website www.Terramadre2008.org

About 20 of us kindred spirits from Kentucky and 800 from the USA were among the 6,300 delegates who attended the third edition of the international Terra Madre gathering that included more than 4,000 small-scale farmers, breeders, fishers and artisan producers, 800 cooks, 300 academics, 1000 young people and 200 musicians representing 1652 food communities and 150 countries as well as hundreds of volunteers and observers. Terra Madre brought together people from different climates and cultures to share innovative solutions and time-honored traditions for keeping small-scale agriculture and sustainable food production alive and well. Terra Madre—meaning Mother Earth— the largest international gathering of small scale farmers and food producers is a forum for those who produce, purchase, cook, and educate in an effort to promote a more sustainable local and global food system. The gathering is based on the concept of food communities which encompass the long and diverse chains of people involved in bringing our food from field to the table. “Terra Madre is a forum for all who believe that good, clean and fair food should be available at every table,” said Erika Lesser, Director of Slow Food USA.

First organized in 2004 and repeated in 2006, this year Terra Madre grew even stronger thanks to 1,000 youth delegates from around the world who came as college and high school students,

culinary students, young farmers, cooks and activists. My impression was that this organization very clearly understood that to strive towards sustainable development means we MUST involve our youth! As an expression of this understanding, the Opening Ceremony that included colorful and inspiring cultural performances,



speeches by Carlo Petrini, Vandana Shiva, Prince Charles and Alice Waters also included a speech by Sam Levin, a 15-year-old student at Monument Mountain High School in Massachusetts. Sam rocked the house with such words as these: “What all of you have started is an unbelievable beginning to a powerful revolution. But I know that all of you are wondering if my generation will be able to continue that revolution, and carry it to the extent of its mission... I’m here today because I want you to know that we get it. We will be the generation that reunites mankind with the earth.”

Sam and his classmates will be here in Kentucky November 6-7 to speak in Louisville at the Local Food Healthy Farms conference organized by the Sierra Club. He is the real deal! Other prominent U.S. delegates to Terra Madre included Will Allen, a 2008 MacArthur Genius Award winner and founder of Growing Power. Will speaks in Lexington on April 13 6pm at the Downtown Public Library; Wanona LaDuke; Chef Tory Miller of L’Etoile of Madison, WS; the Coalition of Immokalee Workers; and faculty from the New

that enduring relationships will form between different stakeholders in the food system — farmers, processors, retailers, restaurateurs, consumers, etc.

- **Self-reliance** refers to the degree to which a community meets its own food needs. While the aim of community food systems is not total self-sufficiency (where all food is produced, processed, marketed and consumed within a defined boundary), increasing the degree of self-reliance for food, to be determined by a community partnership, is an important aspect of a community food system.

- **Sustainability** refers to following agricultural and food system practices that do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their food needs. Sustainability includes environmental protection, profitability, ethical treatment of food system workers, and community development. Sustainability of the food and agriculture system is increased when a diversified agriculture exists near strong and thriving markets, when non-renewable inputs required for every step in the food system are reduced, when farming systems rely less on agri-chemical fertilization and pest control, and when citizen participation in food system decision-making is enhanced. ■

Hampshire’s ground breaking new “Eco-Gastronomy” program.

Terra Madre this year ran concurrently with Salone del Gusto, one of the most important international fairs dedicated to high quality, sustainably produced artisan food from around the world, also organized by Slow Food International. The unification of these two events opened discussion to Salone’s 180,000 visitors on topics important to sustainable food production. For example in the Salone, Vandana Shiva presented the Manifesto on Climate Change and the Future of Food Security by the International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture to a packed auditorium. This document co-authored by Wendell Berry outlined why it is vital to consider agriculture in analyses of climate change and discussions of possible solutions. Slow Food believes that both events will continue to build bridges from the farm to table and inspire solidarity among sustainable producers, supporters and advocates.

Education was a key theme of the gathering’s forty Earth Workshops, 28 regional and national meetings, walks through the Journey to the Origins of Taste exhibits, hundreds of daily cultural performances, the captivating international Marketplace, the long bus rides to and dinners back at your hotel and the many hugs shared between kindred spirits. The message being spread by Terra Madre is gaining momentum on every level — from food producer to global policymaker. In a clear sign of the political strength it has gained, at the Closing Ceremony the Italian government invited a Terra Madre delegation to serve as an interlocutor to the G8 meeting next year in Sardinia, Italy. This unprecedented invitation will give significant voice to a representation of the 450 million smallholder farmers of the world who do not typically have the opportunity to influence global policy decision-making.

Terra Madre was without a doubt one of the liveliest and most practical international gatherings that I have ever attended. It is difficult in these few words to describe and for you readers to even imagine such a magical and profoundly important event. In those few short incredible days, international friendships were developed, exchanges established, our world’s cultures were tasted, lis-

