

Longtime food activist, writer and speaker, Mark Winne's new book inspired the theme and title of this year's Closing the Food Gap conference. He kicks off the conference as the keynote speaker at the Recognition Dinner on Thursday October 16 at 6pm and will sign his new book, *Closing the Food Gap*. Mark will also conduct Advancing a Food Policy Council workshop on Friday Oct. 17. Visit www.sustainlex.org or call 859.312.7024 for info. (His book is also available at Good Foods on Southland Drive.)

From 1979 to 2003, Mark Winne was the Executive Director of the Hartford Food System, a private non-profit agency that works on food and hunger issues in the Hartford, Connecticut area. During his tenure with HFS, Mark organized community self-help food projects that assisted the city's lower income and elderly residents. Mark's work with the Food System included the development of commercial food businesses, Connecticut's Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, farmers' markets, a 25-acre community supported agriculture farm, a food bank, food and nutrition education programs, and a neighborhood supermarket.

Winne is a co-founder of a number of food and agriculture policy groups including the City of Hartford Food Policy Commission, the Connecticut Food Policy Council, End Hunger Connecticut!, and the national Community Food Security Coalition. He was an organizer and chairman of the Working Lands Alliance, a statewide coalition working to preserve Connecticut's farmland, and is a founder of the Connecticut Farmland Trust. Mark was a member of the United States Delegation to the 2000 World Conference on Food Security in Rome.

His first book *Closing the Food Gap—Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty* published by Beacon Press, was released in January 2008.

Resetting America's Table

(excerpted from Closing the Food Gap, Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty by Mark Winne, reprinted with permission from Mark Winne)

IT'S TIME TO MOVE BEYOND HUNGER

Our society's stated mantra to end hunger has grown tired and hollow. We know its cause—poverty; we know its solution—end poverty. Yet we choose instead to treat hunger only as a symptom of poverty. To get us heading down the right road, I think the time is long past due to create a single national food assistance program that works in tandem with an intentional and effective campaign to end poverty. The antipoverty campaign must support health insurance, quality



education, childcare, and a living wage for all citizens. The national food assistance program—which I will dub the “Food for All Program”—must be adequately funded to ensure that not only does everyone have enough to eat but also that everyone can afford the same healthy food that many Americans are becoming accustomed to.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE AFFLUENT IS GOOD FOR ALL

While some of the science justifying our concerns is still being debated, there is no doubt that our system of industrial food production and marketing has messed with the environment in the same way that it has messed with our health. There can be no empirical equivocation over the disaster that obesity and diabetes have wrought a disaster that has cut a deeper and wider furrow through the lives of the poor than it has through those of the rich. As diet-related diseases have eclipsed hunger as our nation's biggest food problem and are making inroads as our biggest public health problem, the headlong pursuit of organic and local food has opened up the food gap to a record width.

Unless we are prepared to tolerate two very different food systems, one that serves an elite class very well and one that serves all others poorly, I recommend that we invest our public and private charitable dollars in healthy food at every opportunity. The cost of healthy food, which should include local and organic whenever practicable, should not be a limitation for any class of citizens. Our National School Lunch Program serves more than 29 million children a meal every day. Half of those children are receiving a free

meal courtesy of the federal government. Just because it is “free” food doesn't mean it should be cheap food. It should be the best that the richest nation on earth can provide. Cutting-edge “lunch ladies” such as Ann Cooper, the pioneering food service director of the Berkeley, California, schools, and outside-the-box thinkers such as Alice Waters have demonstrated that local, sustainable, and delicious food can be a part of every school cafeteria.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR FARMERS MUST ALSO BE GOOD FOR CONSUMERS

We must have food and farm policies in this country that are just as good for consumers as they are for farmers. If farmers are indeed stewards of the earth, hold a trust that we as a nation have granted them, and are entitled to earn a living wage for their toil, we must pay food prices that serve those needs in return for a commitment from them to produce healthy food for all. Nor can the need for cheap food override the rights of producers to make a living, or pressure producers to violate the carrying capacity of nature. Policies that balance these needs must be found. Serving one interest at the expense of another is, like the way we've treated the environment, a recipe for disaster.

Our national food and farm policies must be reoriented toward securing a healthy and affordable diet for all. This is not a matter of semantics but a matter of who comes first, the farmer or the consumer. In light of what we know about the relationship between health and food, and between health and the environment, both of which

we know more about now than we did thirty years ago, our system of food production should put the consumer first. This in no way implies a cheap food supply. To the contrary; it explicitly means that we, the consumers, must accept the cost that healthy food and a healthy environment imply.

At the same time that our farm and food policies reorient the relationship between farmer and consumer, we must invest in a new generation of farmers. Who will grow our food in the future is not an idle question. It is a real problem for which there is currently no good answer. Young farmers, new entry farmers, immigrant farmers, minority farmers, and women farmers are all potential food producers who have special needs for assistance but who may very well be the ones who feed us for the balance of this century. If we are going to subsidize their entry into farming, we should not be doing it only to feed the elite customers of Whole Foods Market.

CREATING FOOD-COMPETENT CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES

Food competency not only takes root in the school and the home but is nurtured in the community as well. While I have made it reasonably clear throughout this book that I do not believe that community and urban agriculture make enormous contributions to food security, I do believe that they offer admirable building blocks for community development and vital training grounds for competent food citizens. These uses should be carefully cultivated and enhanced at every opportunity. Food competency percolates up from the grass roots to city hall, the

statehouse, and Capitol Hill. People who are smart about their food choices are also smart and engaged food citizens.

We have often asked much from our public schools in the past, and now we must ask them to take the lead in fully educating children about food, health, and even agriculture if we are to push back the genuine threat of obesity to our public health. It is imperative that all public school curricula provide adequate time and opportunity for students to fully develop their skills as food buyers, eaters, and preparers and as voters. And to give food-competent citizens a place where their knowledge can be most effective, we must make local and state food policy and regional food planning as common as any other feature of civic life. Food policy councils should be a regular part of local and state government. Food systems should be a routine part of the planning profession.

RACE, CLASS, AND PRIVILEGE: MAKE WAY FOR THE NEXT WAVE

The fact that our food system is racist, classist, and sexist should come as no surprise to anyone. When the marketplace fails our communities, and when government fails to intervene effectively and compassionately, people of color, low-income households, and women are the first to suffer. The people who do the dirtiest and toughest jobs in our food system come from the same categories as the people who have the fewest choices, live the shortest lives, and struggle the most to put food on the table. Perhaps the only place in our food system where these folks are not well represented is in the leadership of the groups that are helping them. Rarely will you find a low-income person in a leadership or upper-level management position at an

organization committed to promoting food security. And only recently will you find people of color in leadership and professional positions within these same organizations.

To ensure that people of color, women, and lower-income people lead the movement to close the food gap, I urge public agencies and especially my own comrades in the food movement to use all means necessary to diversify their leadership and management positions and create a program of leadership development for these people. At the same time, policy-related efforts to change the food system and close the food gap must be more inclusive of those whose lives we are attempting to improve. And while it may go without saying, the growing number of people who are benefiting from a food system that is reaching new heights of health, sustainability, and local connections must unequivocally commit themselves to a food system that is not just profitable and sustainable but also socially just.

IT STARTS AT HOME, WHEREVER THAT MIGHT BE

But it's important to remember that because the food system is so diverse and complex, it has many interconnected parts, none of which can be ignored for too long before the system falls out of balance. Focus too intently on hunger, and you'll lose sight of its cause. Devote yourself too narrowly to agriculture, and you'll forget about the consumer. Care too much about your own food, and you'll forsake food justice. There are larger purposes in life when all our interests come together. Closing the food gap is one. ■

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Food Policy Council

One of the primary goals of Closing the Food Gap Conference is to begin the process of organizing a food policy council. Mark Winne will lead the workshop on Advancing a Food Policy Council on Friday Oct 17. Come and be a part of this process.

What is a Food Policy Council? Food Policy Councils (FPC) are comprised of stakeholders from various segments of a local food system. Councils are typically sanctioned through government action such as an Executive Order, Public Act, or Joint Resolution however, some Councils have formed through grassroots effort and operate without an official convening document. FPC's are innovative collaborations between citizens and government officials which give voice to the concerns and interests of many who have long been under-served or un-represented by agricultural institutions. The primary goal of most Food Policy Councils is to examine the operation of a local food system and provide ideas and recommendations for improvement through public policy change. Why create a Food Policy Council? There are many reasons why state or local governments may want to create a Council. The most significant may be to broaden the discussion of issues beyond agricultural production by creating a public/private forum to conduct a comprehensive examination of a food system. Councils can be an effective and efficient process to provide education and share information where people involved in all different parts of the food system and government can meet to learn more about what each does and consider how their actions impact

other parts of the food system.

What can a Food Policy Council do that is not already being done in government? Food Policy Councils can address a variety of issues not normally examined or implemented from within government.

Food Policy Councils convene individuals and government agencies which do not typically work directly with each other nor are they asked to be involved when farm and agricultural policy is discussed.

Food Policy Councils can examine issues which often go unexamined; such as the effectiveness of food assistance programs and the causes of hunger in a society.

Food Policy Councils can enter into a more comprehensive approach to analyzing food system issues which recognizes the inner-workings between different parts of the food system and the need for coordination and integration of actions if policy goals are to be achieved.

Food Policy Councils capitalize on the ability of individuals to control their own destiny by using institutions they control, empowering them to take charge of their future.

Who comprises Food Policy Council membership? Typical representatives might include farmers, consumers, anti-hunger advocates, food bank managers, labor representatives, members of the faith community, food processors, food wholesalers and distributors, food retailers and grocers, chefs and restaurant owners, officials from farm organizations, community gardeners, and academics involved in food policy and the law. ■

For more information visit www.sustainlex.org

Understanding Challenges of Food Access in Lexington

By Keiko Tanaka

According to the Economic Census published by U.S. Census Bureau, in Lexington-Fayette County, there were 74 "grocery stores" in 2002. Despite a four percent (or 10,277) population increase, this was 14 fewer than the 88 stores counted in 1997. Aside from the issue of fewer stores serving more people, there is the question: "Are grocery stores geographically distributed in a way that serves every Lexington resident?" This was the issue raised by the Lexington Community Food Assessment study which started in SOC350: Special Topics in Sociology—Food Security, taught by Professor Patrick Mooney in the UK Sociology Department in the Fall of 2004. Since then, the project went through various phases. Students from various levels in my Sociology and Honors courses at UK have participated in the effort to collect additional data.

In these four years, Dr. Mooney and I have also developed stronger collaborative relationships with various community

organizations as project partners, including the Community Farm Alliance and the Sustainable Communities Network.

Our work confirmed that food access is limited in low-income neighborhoods, in terms of the availability of nutritionally and culturally adequate food at affordable prices with easy access. For example, in the Fall of 2006, graduate students in SOC517: Rural Sociology found that many stores in two case study neighborhoods did not carry any fresh produce and that, for many items, the price disparities between stores were relatively high. The research report of our Lexington Community Food Assessment 2004-2007 is available at: www.uky.edu/Ag/CLD/doc/CommunityFoodAssessmentReport04-07.pdf.

This year, both undergraduate and graduate students in SOC517 are collecting data to answer four questions, including: (a) Who is concerned about what food-related issues? (b) What do Lexington residents believe makes a "good" food system? (c) What do they see as challenges in addressing their concerns about food? (d) What do they suggest as possible solutions for creating what they consider as a good food system in Lexington? The students will be conducting the survey at Lexington Farmers' Markets (downtown and Southland Dr.), Good Foods Market &

Café, and two Wal-Mart Supercenters. They will also interview various community leaders, including Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council members. We hope the outcome of this study will play an important role in shaping future activities of the community organizations working on issues of food security, sustainable agriculture, and local food economies as well as contribute to those community organizations in the process of organizing a food policy council in Lexington and/or the Bluegrass Region.

We are also in the process of developing a directory of organizations and groups in the Bluegrass Region that are working in these areas so as to facilitate stronger collaboration among them. This directory will be made available widely as an electronic file so as to facilitate the effort to build Kentucky citizens' capacity to address their own community food security issues.

For more information about the study, please contact: Dr. Keiko Tanaka, UK Community & Leadership Development Department (ktanaka@uky.edu). For more information about the Bluegrass Directory of Sustainable Agriculture and Local Food Economies, please contact: Rebecca Som Castellano (Rebecca.Castellano@uky.edu). ■

