

NOURISHING COMMUNITIES - FOOD SEMINAR REPORT

Justin Kenrick
justin.kenrick@st.andrews.ac.uk

36 people from Fife Council, communities, and from Fife food networks, initiatives and support organisations attended our 'Nourishing Communities' Food Seminar in Letham Community Hall on 27th of April 2010. The day included presentations from an academic perspective, from Fife Council, and from community and support organisations perspectives, as well as offering a chance for informal discussion and networking. The day provided the space to bring together people from very different perspectives to collectively begin (or continue) to develop a sustainable and transformative food system for Fife.

1. Presentations

Hamid van Koten, from Dundee University, spoke on 'Food in Transition'. He painted the broader global picture before focusing down on the particular ways in which his local initiative – North Howe transition Toun – is working to localise food production. He pointed out that food crosses all sectors from energy, transport, production, business, households; that half the UK's food related emissions are from meat and dairy [T Garnett (2008) Food Climate Research network]; and that globalisation means vulnerability as well as living beyond our means, since the UK currently imports 50% of its food. Hamid pointed out that organic growing cuts emissions by 25 to 30%, but if we contrast emissions as related to different diets: a mad meat eating diet produces 6700 pa, a lacto-vegetarian 1220, and a vegan 190. Hamid suggested that large companies should and will eventually be required to label foods and other products according to lifecycle assessment, assessing the emissions associated with each stage of its existence. Finally, referring to the 'Growing Communities UK' 2008 report: the UK could grow 80% of its food, bring in 15% from the rest of Europe, and 5% from elsewhere.

Mike Small, from the Fife Diet, in a talk titled 'What the Volcano told us' gave similar figures except it was 80% from Scotland, and 20% from the rest of the UK and beyond. Mike pointed out that the volcanic ash stopping planes flying not only saved 206,465,000 tonnes of CO2 from 5 days of EU flights being reduced by 60%, but also allowed us to leap forward and imagine a plane free future. Food contributes to 31% of households CO2 emissions (WWF 2010). Politicians are obsessed by a failed economic growth model meanwhile there is a fast emerging global movement for localising food. The Fife Diet began in October 2007, and now has over 1,000 members, and the CCF is supporting community food growing projects. Fife Diet runs community assisted lunches, maps regional production, conducts carbon monitoring of a sample of its members, reskilling and publishing. How can communities and the council work together on this? (i) Local development connecting economic development and the environment as a strategic approach; (ii) institutionalise re-localising through Fife Council leadership (e.g. making vacant land available for community projects, and offering council tax rebates to those households who reduce their waste output); (iii) public procurement (including Fife Council itself, schools and hospitals); (iv) creating closed loop systems (e.g. collecting garden waste and compost to take to community gardens, and using chip fat to run council vehicles).

Ellie Kinross, from the Fife Diet, spoke of having had fantastic Council support for the creation of a community garden in Burntisland on one and a half acres of

underused and overgrown land. She spoke of her work for Fife Diet being to help communities get community growing spaces off the ground, and so contribute to building a local food network and community food resilience in Fife.

Teresa Martinez and Pete Ritchie (One Planet Food) spoke about how Fife Council could help shape **a sustainable food system for Fife.**

Teresa Martinez spoke of the food system in the UK being responsible for 20-30% of emissions, of the poorer dying 10 years younger than the wealthier, of 80% of food sales in Fife being through supermarkets, and 0.52% through farmers markets etc; of farmers being very overworked, often earning under the minimum wage, not having time to process and sell locally, having nostalgia about traditional mixed farms, and dairy farmers disappearing by the day. In Kelty local food shops have shut in the last 10 to 15 years, take-aways have grown rapidly, but there is a real interest in local food. Fife produces enough food to feed itself. We need food security (we each have a right to enough food) but also food sovereignty (the right to define and control our own food system). Instead of saying "we will need to feed 9 billion people by 2050", we need to ask how we can best feed everyone now, something we can do by combining local control of food and not throwing away a third of the food we produce.

Pete Ritchie gave the example of needing to feed pigs either soya from Brazil/ China or fishmeal from Peterhead (if we are to avoid GM non-organic feeds), but the best thing to feed them (both from a pigs point of view, and as a way of minimising our waste) would be human food waste, but foot and mouth fears have made that impossible. We need to eat less and better meat since most of Scotland agricultural land is best used by cattle. Fairtrade has grown to be worth hundreds of millions of pounds as people demand the right to be citizens and not just consumers.

Pete Ritchie then considered what Fife Council can do. His suggestions included the points that you can get a lot done when there is a financial squeeze on; that Fife Council needs to offer policy and leadership; we need a champion in the council who can be clear that there's a problem that connects health, climate change and the economy; Fife Council could propose symbolic action such as meat free Mondays or fish full Fridays, or giving a day a year off for its 20,000 employees to work their gardens; recognising a community right to grow, and supporting food mutuals.

Pete gave the example of Lochgelly where people are aware of needing each other more than in a high income area. Here the community could work with Credit Unions and each put £1 or £2 a month into a food co-operative, agreeing to buy a local farmers produce and so providing a community guarantee (possibly through sustainable food bonds facilitated by Triodos) to the producer to produce cheap organic local food. Pete also suggested (i) extending a Fifestyle scheme to include buying local food; (ii) telling employers about multipliers, about every pound put into local farm shops is worth £2 to the local economy, whereas every pound going into supermarkets is only worth £1.13 to the local economy; and (iii) creating a green apprentice scheme since we are clearly going to need growers and artisan food producers.

Fife Council's Vivienne Brown outlined the emerging 'Food policy for Fife'. The likelihood of dying before 65 is very different in different parts of Fife, a fifth of 5 year olds in Fife have weight problems. With its national strategy on food and drink the Scottish Government is trying to link food to health and well-being. **Feedback from** an initial networking meeting to discuss the possibility of a food policy for Fife was outlined. There are issues of affordability and accessibility (the need to reduce inequality), of skills and knowledge, of education and sustainability. There are

complex interlinkings between these different issues, and setting specific targets focusing on specific issues needs to take into account broader effects. There will be drastically reduced public sector resources in the coming years, so councils are going to be having very different conversations with communities to explore different ways of doing things if services are no longer available from the council. We need to make sure that food and sustainability are high up the agenda. The council will face conflicting priorities: should we provide social work or cut carbon? There is a real need to involve communities in finding solutions. By involving communities, could a food policy for Fife develop community based sustainable food systems?

Derek Hamilton explained the role of Fife Council procurement in helping the council, communities and households food choices contribute to a low carbon future. Of the £78 million Fife Council spends on goods and services, £63m is spent in Scotland, £18m of which is spent in Fife. £6.5m is spent on food procurement, e.g. providing 22,000 meals a day to school children, providing a 2 course lunch for 70p worth of ingredients (£1.65 total spent per meal per child). The EU define local as in country, and we still need to feed kids so how [later workshop solution proposed kids growing local organic food for school meals and being involved in learning to cook it]. 35% of lamb and pork, and 40% of red meat, eaten in Fife schools is sourced from Fife farms, 100% of Scottish meat is from Fife farms, all winter veg is from East Scotland, all berries are from Fife and seasonal, all milk has been from Fife but Fife have now joined the national milk contract so this will change.

Sustainability is now core to procurement policy, the need is to not be stitched into all national contracts, and to split contracts into parts so smaller suppliers can apply. Fife Council can opt out of all national contracts, but if we do and if the prices are higher then procurement will be asked to explain. Fife is the only Council in the country with a dedicated sustainability team, but it will be difficult to tackle local economy issues with the impending budget cuts. There is a need to increase specifications (e.g. from Scotland, and sustainability as part of supplier performance). Peter Ritchie pointed out that Fife says it excludes GM, but there is GM in feeds for pigs, etc. Derek responded that if we had a food policy it might be able to ensure Fife bought organic and excluded GM from animal feeds, etc. Food miles cannot be taken into account under EU regulations, but if parents were to write to schools head teachers about supplementing meals with food from school gardens then that is far more likely to happen than if Fife Council suggests it.

Response from Crispin Hayes: In terms of the food procurement policy of Fife Council, clearly 'local' procurement is seen as the key issue - particularly with meat. While this is useful, an independent study is needed to inform and help shape Fife's forthcoming Food Policy to create a downward trajectory for the climate impact of food procured, while maintaining or improving health outcomes.

2. Food working groups

(i) Financial mechanisms to support CSAs (community supported agriculture) and CSRs (community supported renewables)?

Pete Ritchie: Energy/ food/ housing are not discretionary, so how do we establish long-term community energy and food systems? CSAs tend to stick at about 200 households, to get to 5,000/ 10,000/ 20,000 you need a financial intermediary (a credit union or bank) that can work with a number of local farms. Food co-ops in the UK have focused on low income households but we need a combination of middle class purchasing power and low income solidarity.

In the context of 8-20% cuts, Fife Council could work with Credit Unions to propose to a bank such as Triodos to join them in creating investment schemes to create 'Fife Bonds'. These could include 'Wind Bonds' (to support community renewables) and 'Land Bonds' (for community agriculture) to build community material/ social resilience. Fife could also develop a regional currency (Richard Douthwaite in Kilkenny) to reinvigorate the Fife economy in the same way that a local currency, or prioritising spending in locally owned shops with local produce, reinvigorates local economies. The key is to base such approaches on building peoples awareness of abundance (there is enough food in Fife, and enough renewable energy in Fife, to ensure sufficiency and well-being).

We need to consider the purpose of buying. In the dominant modes of buying people hunt for a bargain or buy in the pursuit of status or through following habit. We need to build up a new purpose of buying in which CSAs develop in a similar way to the way Fairtrade has been taken up. This could be based on: a pride in Fife; on long-term investment (e.g. in agricultural land and renewable energy such as wind and water); on Fife Council investing in and helping design the system; on a distribution system that works; on each part not getting too big, since people need to identify with it (the linked but identifiably distinct Dragon co-ops in northern Spain).

Just as commercial advertising has powerfully contribute to creating the current situation, we need to counter this by developing CSAs with different foods in different places at different times of the year – responding to mundane uniformity with powerful identity: building alliances between issues and institutions in different regions (emphasising identity).

How does Fife Council start on this?

- (i) Work with the whole system (e.g. through working with Triodos/ new economic foundation, etc)
- (ii) Develop practical examples that work (e.g. Lochgelly community farm)
- (iii) Create a team to head this up (including people with farming backgrounds)

(ii) Encouraging alternatives to supermarkets

There is a dominant culture of 'big shop' (cheap, convenience) vs ethical, local, fairtrade. There is also the illusion of choice in supermarkets. The alternative involves: town centre shops, CSAs, deliveries, vibrant weekly street markets (low cost or free to have a stall), farm shops, local not for profit shops. We need to develop different sorts of loyalty schemes (e.g. local currency, Kirby Lonsdale).

Fife council can take a lead through planning decisions (refusing out of town supermarkets, and zoning close to town centres) but they need support and pressure to resist the power of supermarkets to influence, to use threats of court cases, etc.

(iii) Healthy food - Changing habits?

There is a real need to help people to have a healthy diet, to eat half decent food, so we shouldn't just focus on local &/or organic food, or food in relation to carbon emissions. But could a focus on local organic food be a way ensuring a healthy diet? For example: local schools growing food, learning to cook it, developing skills/ habits.

(iv) Food Growing and Fife Council

- (a) Encourage Community Development, and look to replicate things that work well e.g. Newburgh Organised planting sessions

- (b) Facilitate garden/land share
 - look to Edinburgh model – now 50 gardens in total
 - review regulations relating to community allotment scheme
- (c) Is there scope in residential Care Homes and Schools to grow their own food as per the Cuban model?
- (d) Local schools – potential to make greater use of its community resources\
 - Potentially parents could help with projects etc (e.g. developing relevant low carbon projects for/with teachers).
 - Need to be creative in overcoming previous barriers e.g. Newburgh Community Orchards previous offer to school for local apples to be provided for primary school children – health and safety issues?
- (e) Can we focus on small scale economic development as well as major investments: e.g. building on farming co-ops in Fife (joint sale of produce, sharing machinery)
- (f) Can the local authority lead on major Fife land reform with land transferred from major landowners and re-distributing to the people: e.g. an initial quick win could be where Fife Council & NHS have unused land which local people could use rent free if they use it productively to grow food.