

Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force Consumer Access Committee

3-20-08

NOTES of COMMITTEE CONFERENCE CALL

1. Members of the Committee on call: **Jim Slama** (Sustain, Oak Park), **Chuck Paprocki** (Dayempur Farm, Carbondale), **Penny Roth** (Dept of Human Services, Springfield), **Gerry Kettler** (Niemann Foods, Quincy), **Kim Wasserman-Nieto** (Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, Chicago)
2. Kim Wasserman-Nieto was new to the team and gave a brief overview of her work. The Little Village is a neighborhood of Chicago on the southwest side bordering Cicero Ave. Her organization looks at health issues in schools where many children have diabetes and obesity. They promote people growing their own vegetables. There are no large grocery stores in the neighborhood, only small grocery stores. Kim's organization works with them to buy quality produce. They rate the produce in stores and get recipes to people that makes traditional dishes more nutritious.
3. Chuck reported on agriculture and food growing in southern Illinois. The information he provided raised the request that the team members in southern Illinois create a Case Study that could frame the major issues related to starting a food system that could be used by the Taskforce. Chuck agreed and Jim Slama offered to help edit the study.
4. There are food deserts in urban and rural areas of Illinois, places without access to fresh food. We want to address this issue as part of our committee work. Jim Slama reported that Mari Gallagher's Research and Consulting Group that produced "Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago" has gathered information on food deserts in all counties of Illinois but has not processed it yet. Mari is willing to provide the Taskforce with information but it is a big job and she could use some funding for staff time. Penny will look into potential funding. Information on food deserts across the state would demonstrate the need for resources statewide.
5. Aside from food deserts, we also have the question of how to get local and organic food to the poor through food banks, food stamps, WIC, emergency relief etc. Kim reported that the desire for local and organic food is not trickling down to the poor – they can't get to outlets like Trader Joes and they don't have the money to spend on high quality food. At the same time, quality in neighborhood stores are is poor. Kim's organization is working with stores to help them purchase better food. They are trying to create markets for Illinois farmers. They would like a list of farmers who will sell to local groceries.

Penny reported that the only issue of getting food banks to purchase local and organic food is the cost of the food. She said that there is a WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program and a Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program that provide small checks to participants during the growing seasons. WIC recipients get \$15 and Seniors get \$21 for the season. She said that people might not use these checks because they don't know how to shop at farmers markets. She said that we should recommend that the WIC and Senior programs be expanded through state funding.

Foodbanks across the state also link with farmers markets to get free food at end of market days.

Jim suggested that Penny, Kim, Erika and others think through this section of our committee report.

6. On the question of how to increase supplies to supermarkets, restaurants, distributors and institutional buyers like schools, hospitals, prisons, etc, Jim agreed to take the lead. He is completing a book on how growers can access wholesale markets. He will also try to get Sheri Doyel, the Forager for the City of Chicago Farmer's Market Program and Green City Market on the task force. Also Irv Cernauskas who runs Irv and Shelly's Fresh Picks, an on-line market selling local and organic food

Therese MacMahon will put Jim in contact with the Restaurant Association.

Gerry reported that Niemann Foods, a grocery chain has 3 wholesale suppliers. There prerequisite for selling to retail stores is that they gross at least \$50,000 per week. This requires a store of approximately 25,000 square feet. A smaller store may contract with the wholesalers but they must show at least \$30,000 in gross sales per week. Niemann's recently set up a store in Pittsfield, IL which is a town of about 3,000 people. The store is 25,000 square feet. Springfield stores are typically 50,000 square feet.

Jim would like to strengthen the institutional buyer research. He will try to get someone from Greg Christian's Organic Food Project and someone from the Healthy Schools campaign to work with Leslie Durham on the schools aspect. Penny will try to get someone from the State Board of Education to help on this as well.

Penny will also try to find someone to work with on procurement of food for prisons and other state institutions. Jim will send her an email specifying the kind of information we need.

7. We need another section on selling direct to the public. How do we increase farmers markets, upicks, CSAs? Lynn Peemoeller from FamilyFarmed.org is one target to get on the committee. Martha Boyd from the CSA Learning Center and

Harry Rhodes from Growing Home would also be good. Anybody else that members can recommend who can address this?

8. We will hold our next meeting on the 2nd of April in Springfield