

# farm to plate

## NETWORK

### DEEP-DIVE SESSIONS

#### 4. Promoting Food System Literacy

Throughout the F2P stakeholder input process, consumer education was among the top three most frequently mentioned needs for strengthening Vermont's food system. But how do Vermonters learn about the benefits of fresh, healthy, local food? What are some innovative approaches to teaching people about where the food they buy comes from and who produces it? How are we currently educating consumers about why local and regional food systems are important? What messages seem to resonate with consumers?

**Facilitator:** Megan Camp, [Shelburne Farms](#)

**Panelists:**

Jane Kolodinsky, [University of Vermont, CDAE](#)

Richard Berkfield, [Food Connects](#)

Carrie Abels, [Local Banquet](#)

Suzanne Kelley, [Vermont Department of Health](#)

Beth Kennett, [Liberty Hill Farm](#) and [Vermont Farms!](#)

**This session should be of interest to members of the [Consumer Education & Marketing Working Group](#), the [Education & Workforce Development Working Group](#), and the [Research Cross-Cutting Team](#).**

**Notes:**

#### Q: How do we educate consumers about why eating local is important?

**Carrie Abels** emphasized the need to get rid of jargon when describing what we do as advocates for local food consumption. She explained that some words are repellent, and she hates the word "learn" as in "come learn how the food system works" because it presumes that a person will develop an interest in something and change their habits if they just "learn" about it. To further demonstrate her point, she held up a sign that read "Learn to make fresh local applesauce," and one that read "Learn to play ice hockey." She concluded by asking whether we need to use different words for different audiences, and pointed out the Intervale Center's tagline's use of unnecessary jargon, suggesting a new tag line: "The Intervale, helping you impress your family at Thanksgiving dinner since..." Carrie suggested resurrecting the Localvore Challenge because it was a starting point for many people in the food movement.

- 🍷 choose words carefully
- 🍷 eliminate jargon
- 🍷 attract or repel people through language
- 🍷 different words for different audiences
- 🍷 Localvore Challenge returns!

**Suzanne Kelley** from the Vermont Department of Health works in obesity prevention. She explained that the Department of Health doesn't do individual counseling, but looks closely at systems. They award grants to community coalitions to create projects that target Vermonters' greatest needs, and help those people understand that this project is for them. Regarding the question about how to market local food to Vermonters, she spoke about how the Healthy Retailer Initiative is trying to get local foods into towns and support retailers with merchandising and point of purchase signage. She also mentioned that parents are often guided by what their children will eat, and don't explore much beyond that. How do we drive demand, so that it is eventually the rule, and not the exception? We are attempting to change the culture and must find out what resonates with the community.

- 👉 Changing behavior through changing systems
- 👉 How can retailers promote healthy local food?
- 👉 Farm to School reinforcing cultural shift. Becoming the norm

Food Connects founder, **Richard Berkfield** is trying to connect low income consumers with local food. Richard went back to the topic of word usage in marketing and promotion, asking what is the opposite of food literacy. Food illiteracy is offensive, so Food Connects doesn't use "food literacy" anymore. Richard said that their market is separated by socio-economic class, and they have had to test and learn about how their message resonated with different groups. He offered an example of a daughter who comes home from school after learning about eating local/healthy/organic, and asks her mother to prepare more of it. The mother doesn't like it, doesn't know how to make it and can't afford it. This led Richard to explore the stages of behavior change: Pre-contemplation, unaware of the problem; contemplation, aware but unable to make change; preparation, understands and ready to take action. Different lenses can be applied to the stages depending on socio-economic status to develop messaging. Finally, Richard said that building community around food has been a beneficial concept for Food Connects. Sharing and coming together is a key to success.

- 👉 Food literacy implies the trait of food illiteracy
- 👉 Same message to different audiences, one can be successful, another invokes shame
- 👉 Stages of behavior change vs education. Need to move through the stages]
- 👉 Building community around food

**Beth Kennett** from Liberty Hill Farm told a story about needing to give what she was doing (hosting tours of her farm) a name. Agritourism is not about entertainment or "agritainment!" She feels fortunate to be here in Vermont where Shelburne Farms and Billings Farm understand education, and teach farmers how to educate farm visitors. Hosting visitors to farms is technically not considered part of agriculture in Vermont, as it is in New Hampshire; however, Beth believes that educating people about agriculture is vital, and benefits the whole food system. She told a story about a family from Long Island who was stranded on her farm after Hurricane Irene. One of the family members got agitated after a few days and asked Beth's sons what would happen when they ran out of food, and couldn't believe they would have enough food - "this is a farm!" This is where food comes from.

- 👉 Agritourism not agritainment (focus on education)
- 👉 Agritourism benefits everyone not just the farmer
- 👉 Agritourism should be included in the definition of Vermont Agriculture (NH includes it)

**Jane Kolodinsky** from UVM collected products from the gathering, including a Garuka bar, bottle of cider, bag of popcorn and VT Smoke and Cure meat stick. She said that value added producers need to make the local choice the easy choice, and individuals need information to make those choices. Nowhere on the product labels can you find "Made in VT." In marketing, we start with emotional words, but when you label, you need to educate consumers. One obstacle to this is the Vermont policy stating that in order to label something "Made in VT," every part of the process must take place in Vermont, so if the packing source for Garuka bars leaves Vermont, they can't say that it is made in VT. Chittenden cider mill is other example. Cross-cutting teams need to talk to each other to advocate for labeling of our products and make policy changes to allow these producers to get credit for their Vermont products.

- 👉 People vote with their \$

- 👉 Food system has changed. How do we make food more accessible?

Megan summarized the panelists' comments about the importance of messaging, the role of policy, changing the environment or entire system, stages of behavioral change. This isn't just about farmers - how do we do good for the entire system? Then she opened up the discussion to the rest of the room to share strategies to address food literacy:

**Alan Curler**—Know your audience. To get local food into households, we need to figure out a way to show them how to prepare it quickly, here's what you can do.

**Michelle Wallace, VT Food Bank**—explained how the food bank was formerly an emergency food system, focused on getting maximum calories out. How do we move toward healthy food, and make it accessible? What is the food bank's role in educating consumers? She is thinking about education in the food shelf setting, with gleaned produce and surplus. She wants to give people a chance to try something new. What about a "healthy food shelves" initiative similar to "healthy retailers"?

**Richard Berkfield** from Food Connects suggested use Harvest of the Month strategy - ready-to-go materials for parents, educators and cafeteria workers, all info is online.

**Tara Kelly** from RAFFL described the Everyday Chef program, which focuses on cooking techniques to use within budget and time constraints. They conduct demos and taste tests around the community and at worksites, such as a vegetable-grilling demo in a low-income area. Tara says it is important to partner with organizations that serve needy populations, esp families with children. Cooking workshops only draw those who already cook.

**Jonathan Kaplan**—Last home ec teacher in the US retired.

**Kathleen Kravetski** of the Vermont Farmers Food Center was surprised to find that nurses don't go to the farmers market. Now that RAFFL has done CSAs in the hospital, the nurses, who are key influencers with patients and the community, learn how to use these ingredients. Professional women are another target for local food education.

**Suzanne Kelley** reminded the group that people are always going to be busy. Our expectation can't be to get people to learn to cook, but find healthier prepared foods.

**Megan** said that it was recently reported that 51% of food in the U.S. is now purchased outside the home.

**Suzanne Kelley**—Let's be careful about what we're measuring. Cooking from home is also making mac n cheese out of a box.

Extension Services needed - let's go "back to the future"

**Yael Dolev**—we need to educate workers in the retail stores to identify products, but workers in price chopper

don't know more than the community. Create curiosity and opportunities to taste. Find the joy of eating. The Mediterranean diet is really the "common sense diet"

**Beth Kennett** reminds us about the old Land Grant University Extension System (4H), and said she would like to see us get back to that. People want to do it themselves.

**Jane K**—If you approach it from both sides, you can make progress - purchased vs. cooked at home. Bring it back into the schools, just like with recycling. Send a crock pot home with every CSA share.

**Anne Bijur** suggested something similar to the Department of Health's program on smoke cessation - couldn't Vermont mandate that all kids need to know how to cook a meal?

**Ryan Torres** from the Greater Burlington YMCA - Eat Well Play More Vermont—schools are the gateway, farm to school is better, nutrition education is still missing.

**Melissa Spear, Common Ground CT**, said that her school offers an intensive Food and Environment course for high school students stressing the implications of food choices. There is an element of shame in households that perceive health/local food as unaffordable and not for them. There is an interesting dynamic between parents and children there, deeper implications.

**Faye Conte**—How do you make people think local food is for them? We have had a policy shift to get people to use EBT at farmers markets, but they do not show up. How do you market that these things are for everyone?

**Carrie Abels** mentioned an article in the New Yorker about peer to peer influences (hand washing at a hospital in India). Social influencers could accelerate change.

**Jane K** said that's opinion leadership.

**Suzanne Kelley** agreed, saying that evidence based strategy is peer support. Building things and promoting them makes a difference and changes behavior. Need more resources for marketing

**Vera Simon-Nobes** added that the Cooking Matters program in San Francisco uses promotions to drive adoption of healthy local choice - usually women. Model from Central America - community health workers

**Joyce Cellars** thanked Carrie for assessing the Intervale Center tagline, saying that theirs is a typical non-profit tagline. She expressed a need to start deploying marketing tactics, but said that non-profits need training and funding to do marketing. The for-profit community provides strong examples of how to do it right, and events such as Summervale wouldn't be successful without the for-profit vendors.

**Carrie Abels** had an idea - Consumer Ed and Marketing could work with marketing experts to test certain words or phrases. Share findings with other working groups to see which words resonate the most.

**Erica Campbell** said that the Farm2Plate used a consultant to develop network-wide messaging in the early stages of the strategic plan.

**Daria Halcomb** from Fletcher Allen said they struggled with marketing, but 3 years ago came up with Food Matters. This has resonated. Cooking at home vs. purchasing premade was a focus for them. With such a huge captive audience, they realized they needed to walk the walk. Sales have sky-rocketed, despite initial complaints, and the tipping point was education - people realized this is the new reality, and eventually embraced it. The hospital nurses serve as advocates.

**Yael Dolev**—we must be steadfast. Food literacy is not only an issue with poor people.

What about a food passport for young adults?

**Kathleen Kravetski** said food is medicine, and our health system should be telling people to eat vegetables. We need heavy hitters like doctors to deliver this message, especially now that our health system is changing.

**Suzanne Kelley** said that the reason Fletcher Allen was successful is that the leadership believed in it, which makes it much easier. Changes must be sustained. There needs to be policy change.

**Ryan** from YMCA mentioned that Wholesome Wave is doing great things in NYC, providing prescriptions for healthy food to families. In Vermont it may not work that way. UICC is providing CSA shares. We must go to people, not ask them to come to us.

**Annie Gaillard** from Buffalo Mountain Food Co-op said we need to agree on a definition of local. Find what resonates with people. A vet gets more nutrition education than a family doctor.

**Tara Kelly**—Values are important to change behavior. It goes beyond health and lecturing.

**Emily Jacke** from VT Community foundation said that it is important to feel like you are a part of something bigger than yourself.

**Michelle** from the food shelf said that as a mom, she wants to tap into the power of food for a kid and the love of eating. How do we celebrate the taste of local fresh ingredients?

**Jonathan Kaplan** explained how we struggle with developing a common language for the F2P Network and suggested that cross-cutting teams can help.

**Anne Bijur** asked whether we can piggyback on the obesity prevention media campaign - Maybe farm to plate can build on this.

**Megan** asked whether there are any project ideas that arose from our discussion. Where may there be some gaps? What is at the higher level?

**Rebecca Brown** from NH - Land conservation is her day job, but they are partnering with NEK. She agreed that testing words is really important and asked "where are our consumers?" She said this should be a focus for the entire New England region, not just Vermont, and it may be a good Food Solutions NE project.

**Megan** said it is difficult to drive consensus.

**Barbie Ives** from Maine Food Strategy said that they are in the process of conducting a survey about local shopping (600 people, 15 min survey). Results will be out the first part of 2014. School of Public Service.

### **Project ideas for F2P:**

Kathleen Kravetski—Messaging for the farmer to use with the consumer, message for differing audiences

Tara Kelly, RAFFL—How do we express the work we are doing with food systems and change behaviors? Where is the prioritization?

**Beth Cullen, Root Consulting**—In what life stage/SES standing do people make food decisions? Where would we have the biggest impact? Key moments - life stage marketing

**Jane K**—identifying clusters - cluster analysis

**Megan**—What are ways to look at this from a regional perspective?

**Joanna Herron, VAAF**—We need to develop feedback loops to funders - keep in mind we need to re-evaluate ideas. How do we reach the unengaged? We need a cohesive mission - low hanging fruit vs. deal-changer.

**Michelle** from food shelf suggested healthy food shelf initiative with displays and promotions, including the education.

Importance of cohesive mission/campaign - clear, measurable goals. Use marketing tools of "big food companies"

**Megan**—reframing - What are you excited about us to work on?

Healthy Retailer Initiative

**Chris Jacobson** at Upper Valley Food Coop said there are many different areas where people get information. They are all avenues for information. How do we maintain the message and disseminate through these existing channels?

**Megan**—We are probably not going to create new ways for people to get their info - We might not be able to create new streams, build on existing channels that people trust.

**Daria** said it is better to utilize the expertise of the network, and come up with common definitions.

Need to develop shared language.

### ***Takeaway Messages:***

- 👉 Need to identify target audiences
- 👉 Need to develop key messages for specific audiences
- 👉 Need to develop a common language to be used throughout the Network.
- 👉 Many organizations throughout the Farm to Plate Network need the same kind of marketing/communications help. What can be done to coordinate these efforts?
- 👉 Investigate possibility of Localvore Challenge/10% Challenge.