

Social Concerns Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 8, 2010

12:30 ~ 2:00 p.m.

Morrill Hall, 238A

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

Present: Timothy Sheldon (chair), David Golden, Lisa Pogoff, Rebecca Von Dissen, Kaari Nelson, Michael O'Day, Katherine Fennelly, Ahmed Heikal, Catherine Jordan, Kim Robien, Michael Sommers, Shannon Beigger, Ashley Gaschk, Christine Dolph, Elizabeth Shay

Regrets: Joseph Marchesani, Sandra Krebsbach, Benton Schnabel, Marynel Ryan Van Zee, Ajay Skaria, Carolyn Wardell

Absent: Amelious Whyte, Austin Loeb, Jeffrey Thaler

Guests: Dr. Jean Kinsey, program director, Applied Economics; Mindy Kurzer, director, Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute; Kristine Igo, assistant program director, Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute

Chair Sheldon welcomed members and guests and introductions were made. He informed members that Dr. Kinsey, Ms. Kurzer and Ms. Igo were in attendance to provide an overview of local food efforts in affiliation with the University. He then turned the meeting over to Dr. Kinsey.

Local Foods Initiative ~ Dr. Jean Kinsey

Dr. Kinsey began by informing members of a 2006 study on local food conducted by Dr. Robert King, Department of Applied Economics, concentrating on consumer food selection and food resources. She stated that she has studied a great deal about what consumers are looking for in their food. In recent times food authenticity and the integrity of the food has been a concern for consumers. Kinsey said that consumers began to distrust food companies about the claims of their products, labeling and advertising in response to increased reports of food recalls, often due to salmonella concerns. She said consumers began turning to social networking sites and blogs to find the facts about local food producers and said the problem with social networks is that the information available is often not fact but is mistaken as such.

Dr. Kinsey said that the focal point of the study was the whole foods system and sustainability. She stated that the number one concern for consumers is the freshness of food. The criteria of importance for consumers include natural products, hormone free, local, organic, and gluten free. Kinsey informed members that Dr. King's study was conducted in local (MN/WI) supermarkets, farmers markets and co-ops. The top reasons consumers turned to an interest in local, sustainable food were better quality and freshness, lower environmental impact, to support small,

local businesses, and food safety/traceability. Kinsey noted that there are local food providers that are actually very large businesses, such as Kemps and Golden Plump. She stated that defining what it means to be local varied among consumers, with the majority (27%) agreeing that all of Minnesota and Wisconsin could be considered local. However, the official federal definition of local is:

Any agricultural food product that is raised, produced and distributed in:

1. The locality or region, which the final product is marketed so that the total distance the product is transported is less than 400 miles from the origin of the product or
2. The State in which the product is produced

Other benefits to buying local include building a stronger sense of community, an increase in nutrition, and better tasting and looking food that may promote more long-term, positive eating habits. Kinsey pointed out that just because food is local does not necessarily mean that it is fresh. Food needs to either be eaten quickly or properly stored, which is not always the case. She said if the consumer is buying food that is not in season for the region they live in, then it is not going to be local and will probably not be very fresh.

Dr. Kinsey said that local does not necessarily mean a reduction in carbon footprint or cost. One pilot project, Farms to School Program, offered students' lunches made from local food producers and gave kids an opportunity to try new, healthy foods they may not have tried before. The result was that the processing of the lunches increased the cost of \$.13 to \$.80 per lunch more than regular hot school lunches. In addition to the cost increase was the fact that healthier food can be provided for students but they may not eat it.

Dr. Kinsey stated that the numbers of farms that sell directly to vendors are very minimal and those that do are not making a living from direct sales. She said that farm cooperatives have been suggested to serve as intermediaries between farms and buyers but that would impact cost and increase the carbon footprint. She said that Sysco is one such food distributor that is interested in brokering as much local food as possible to meet buyer demands.

Healthy Food Healthy Life ~ Mindy Kurzer & Kristine Igo

Ms. Kurzer began by talking about a recent meeting she attended with the University Dining Services (UDS) administration regarding negotiating a contract with a local distributor. She said they discussed providing more healthy choice foods on campus and noted that the St. Paul campus has the worst food choices on campus and little has changed in the past 20 years. She cites the irony in that the St. Paul campus houses the College of Food, Agriculture & Natural Resource Sciences. She thinks healthy food on campus is a serious issue and would like to see the University Senate and students work together toward a positive change. Kurzer asked members if they were aware of any initiatives in this area going on around campus. Ms. Shay stated that there is a student survey currently being done about food choices. She said they are looking at the quality of food and how they see their options on campus.

Ms Igo walked members through a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted the University's sustainable agriculture and local food initiatives. She gave a definition of local food as defined by G. Feenstra, author, *Creating Space for Sustainable Food Systems* as a "collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies - one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution, and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place." She said there have been many definitions for local food such as the examples by Dr. Kinsey and another freshness marker is that the product is within a days driving of the distributor. The sustainability part is producing food in a manner that supports needs now and maintains the resources for future generations. She continued that the economic and environmental impact of having our food shipped does not make sense and is not sustainable.

Ms. Igo informed members about the University's Student Organic Farm, Cornercopia. Cornercopia provides fresh produce to UDS, the Campus Club and the University's farmers markets but said UDS continually looks for bargain distributors, which is an issue of finance for Cornercopia. She said that students will begin this semester learning how to plant, harvest and market produce. She also mentioned WUSA, What's Up in Sustainable Agriculture Student Group, which offers mostly informal University community brown bag seminars weekly on campus for those interested in keeping abreast of the latest news in sustainable agriculture. She said the brown bag discussions are open to anyone interested and for information on seminar locations, email wusa@umn.edu.

Igo stated that the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum is one of the largest Minnesota entities using local food sources. They track consumption of local products as a way of monitoring the financial and environmental impact. She said another large advocate for local food is the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, RSDP. Some of the efforts put forth by RSDP are:

- The creation of a U of M Expert Database of faculty, students, and staff working with local foods at the U of M - can be found at localfoods.umn.edu
- Launched the U of M Local Foods Task Force in April 2008 with the support of U of M Extension and the College of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resource Sciences, (CFANS)
- Have been supporting efforts in Farm to School/Farm to Institution research and outreach since 2003
- Research Presentations

RSDP will be presenting at the food shed conference in March and they offer several resources and links to the sustainable food effort at their website, <http://www.regionalpartnerships.umn.edu>.

Other initiatives on campus include a networking conference on local food and consumer demand with co-presenters Carlson School of Management and MISA. Topics of discussion were economic, health, and marketing aspects of local food.

Ms. Igo reported that Associate Dean Jay Bell of CFANS is coordinating a Food Systems Minor for incoming undergraduates. The curriculum includes a core course titled “Sustainable People, Sustainable Planet,” interdepartmental electives, and a project-based capstone course in which students address a community’s environmental, social and economic sustainability from a systems perspective. Igo told members another strategic planning initiative by CFANS is Task Force IV: Campus Culture Transformation. Each fall semester they organize and serve a welcome reception for new freshmen and transfer students and their families. Foods representing those produced or supported by CFANS such as Native American foods, products from the dairy and meats labs, Cornercopia, fruit farm, etc. could be served. Igo touched briefly on other initiatives on campus centered around sustainable and local food resources and impact. For more information on the Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute and their work, go to <http://www.hfhl.umn.edu/>. Ms. Igo included work being done on the Duluth campus; the Superior Grown Foods Summit was hosted by Duluth’s Randy Hanson on November 14, 2009 wherein local government and community members discuss and collaborate on issues surrounding local foods. Sandy Olson Loy is a large proponent of the local foods movement on the Morris campus.

Ms. Igo stated that the Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute (HFHL) is not limited to local food production and distribution but she said their work intersects with the local efforts. Their mission is to increase and sustain the University’s impact in the interdisciplinary arena of food, agriculture and health by building the University’s capacity in research, learning and community engagement. Their mission encompasses the desire for local and worldwide sustainability. She said that next week the Institute was hosting a conference on the models and methodology of re-localizing our food shed.

Ms. Kurzer relayed a recent experience providing food for a symposium they hosted last fall and had the event catered by the Birchwood Café. She noted that the Birchwood Café is a local restaurant specializing in local, natural and organic food that is tasty and healthy. She said the price was cheap compared to many other vendors and the response was phenomenal. Professor Fennelly said her understanding was that University financed food had to be ordered through University specified caterers but Kurzer and Mr. Golden said that was untrue. Kurzer said HFHL is expecting more funding toward the research of implementing healthier food into our society. Dr. Kinsey added that even if healthier options at the University are offered, it does not mean students will eat it. She said she has had discussions with UDS and has been told that they have to really push the healthy, organic food and that students do not go through it quickly and it gets wasted. Chair Sheldon pointed out that healthy food choices on campus are not always in plain sight.

Mr. Golden asked about nutritional value posted on vending machines. Ms. Shay said there are a few but not many and she thinks it depends on who is running the dining hall. She said there is a large difference between dining halls. Kinsey mentioned that New York City is required by law

to list nutritional information on prepared foods and that fat and sugar intake has reduced because of that initiative.

Sheldon thinks some measures can be taken right away such as adding nutritional or calorie labeling of food on campus as a great first step. He suggested a possible grant from HFHL to pilot a program to produce and provide that information for University consumers. Kurzer said that might be possible and thought it would be a good way to be proactive. Ms. Gaschk said all Morris campus dining has food calories and fat listed on their foods. Many members agreed that it would be a great idea as a first step in the movement toward healthier eating.

Old/New Business

The minutes of the February Social Concerns meeting were approved unanimously.

Having heard no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Lisa Towry
University Senate Office