

LOCAL FOOD - GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

Conference report

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flair
food & local agriculture information resource

**A conference in the FLAIR project
organised by the Foundation for Local Food Initiatives**

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1 Executive summary

Introduction

The 'Local Food – Global Experience' conference was held at Warwick University on 23 September 2002. It was the third conference held as part of the Food & Local Agriculture Information Resource (FLAIR) project.

Local food has become a focal issue for central and regional government during the last year. The 'Curry report' from the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, published in February 2002, strongly supported the concepts behind local food, recognising the benefits that it can bring to local economic development, rural and urban regeneration, health and local communities.

The aim of the conference was to explore some of the exciting new ideas in the development of local food economies in the UK and abroad. The focus was on identifying practical ways forward at strategic and local levels, from some of the leading-edge initiatives in Europe and the USA, and exploring parallels in the UK.

This conference was aimed at all those involved with local food projects or policy development in the local food sector in the UK. A wide range of practitioners and professionals attended from:

- Local and central government
- Regeneration agencies
- The private sector
- The health sector
- National funding bodies
- Non-governmental organisations
- The voluntary sector
- Academic institutions

Keynote presentation: *Local Food Economies: The Problems, Costs and Lessons*

Professor Jules Pretty presented an introductory address about the hidden costs of food. He put agriculture into historical context and questioned the 'progress' that has been made over the previous century. He illustrated how the part of the real cost of our weekly food basket is masked by hidden costs of infrastructure and impacts on the environment and public health. He suggested that we need to re-think "agri-culture" as something which is more than simply about the industrial production of food, and indicated how local and sustainable food systems can embody a wider view.

Summary of the workshops

Six workshops were held, each consisting of two or more presentations, followed by a participative exercise inviting delegates to comment and offer their views on the key learning points or potential actions from the presentations. The workshops included the following:

Infrastructure for local food

Tim Crabtree, of West Dorset Food and Land Trust, introduced the Bridport Centre for Local Food in Dorset - a centre enabling collaborative processing, marketing and distribution of local products.

Bart Soldaat, from the Netherlands, introduced the Green Heart Landshops, which offer a retail outlet for local products and an IT-based co-operative marketing scheme.

Consumer Co-ops tackling food poverty

Sharron Rourke, working nationally for the Countryside Alliance, introduced the Cumbrian Food Co-ops and Food Development Project in North Cumbria, which is working in partnership with North Cumbria Health Action Zone.

Lieve Vercauten, from Belgium, introduced 'Vredeseilanden', an organisation which promotes direct links between farmers and consumers through labelling and community supported agriculture initiatives.

Producer Co-ops and marketing

Richard Boden, the Co-ordinator of WyeCycle, introduced how this community business is working on a range of initiatives including recycling, composting, farmers' markets, and a farmers' market shop in the village of Wye, Kent.

Carine Graff and Francois Aubert, from AVEC in France (Farmers in Direct Collective Sales), talked about their twenty farmers' co-operative shops, which are managed and staffed by the producers.

Local food sourcing by the public sector

Maddelena Bolognesi, from Italy, talked about the work of Aprobio, a group of voluntary associations that run school canteens, sourcing the food from local organic producers, and working with teachers, local authorities and cooks to create a sustainable food culture.

Addressing food access

Moyra Burns and Lucy Gillie, from the Scottish Community Diet Project, talked about their experience of Scottish community food projects and the lessons from an exchange visit to Finland.

Victoria Williams and Anna Watson from the Food Poverty Network of Sustain, summarised the findings of the report "Food with Latitude", which explores food projects across the North/South divide".

Community supported agriculture

Bernard Jarman, of the Biodynamic Agricultural Association, talked about the development of a new community supported agriculture Project near Stroud.

Jesus Concepcion, from Cuba, talked about the move towards self-sufficiency in food in Cuba and how this is being met in part through urban agriculture projects involving all sectors of the community.

2 Chair's summary

The conference was chaired by Dr Elizabeth Dowler of Warwick University, who researches the social and policy aspects of food and nutrition.

It was a privilege to be asked to chair the 2002 Flair conference, which had an ambitious programme with an array of speakers from across Europe. It was made possible through f3 and the help of East Anglia Food Link, supported for a third year by DEFRA under their Environmental Action Fund (an important source of support for the FLAIR project). The conference was a chance to reflect on the progress made in recent years, as well as to learn the lessons from overseas. Food, and particularly local food, was much in the news in the last year, with the Curry Commission acknowledging local food as no longer a niche market, the Working Group on Local Food chaired by the Food Standards Agency, and the Sustainable Development Commission on sustainable food procurement in the health service.

Jules Pretty started us off with a challenging and comprehensive overview of 'the true cost of food shopping' and set out several of the themes which recurred in the workshops throughout the day. These included a general enthusiasm for 'sustainability' but a reluctance to put it into practice where it matters – at the heart of the food system and traditional agriculture. The challenges are:

- to 'green the middle' of farming, rather than greening the edges
- to explore what a land and food ethic would look like, one which respected land, community, farming and food as a connected network of parts
- to recognise that all our choices make a difference to nature and community – each time we buy food.

The workshops were hard work but informative and often inspiring. The common themes which emerged in the presentations of key lessons were:

- we need to engender more creative collaborations between small producers, consumers and public sectors in how we live and work together, to shift the food culture;
- we need more work on the externalities in the food systems – the 'other stuff' which can establish the value of alternative systems, so as to make it easy for people to get different foods in different ways;
- we have to recognise the heterogeneity of 'shoppers' (including those with different forms of disability or encumbrances, the time poor, different cultural demands);
- we are making some progress in 'greening the middle' – there are sustainable development initiatives, with grass roots/bottom up approaches being approved; there are also some creative efforts to overcome policy blocks at local levels (e.g. on WTO rules and State Aid rules) which can build on others' experiences in a global learning;
- we are building networks and flows of information to recognise the differences our choices can make. As an academic I was urging people to communicate in as many ways as possible, including documenting experiences and writing papers of various kinds, in different places – professional and academic journals, newsletters, websites, TV, radio and newspapers.

The day was stimulating and challenging, but provided ideas and inspiration, built alliances and enabled people to meet one another whose paths do not usually cross: the West Midlands or French farmers, the ngo activists, the public health professionals, the local government officers charged with public procurement of food.

3 Keynote presentation by Jules Pretty

'Local Food Economies: The Problems, Costs and Lessons'

Professor Jules Pretty explained the hidden costs of food. He put agriculture into historical context and questioned the 'progress' that has been made over the previous century. The presentation was underpinned by data illustrating the real cost of our weekly food basket and rounds up with examples of successful agricultural transformation. The following is a reproduction of his presentation:

Agriculture

Humans have been dependant on industrialised agriculture for only two generations out of six hundred since agriculture became the way of life instead of hunter gathering. Agriculture developed with close connections between people and land.

The world produces 354Kg of cereal per person, theoretically enough for all. However, in 2002, 790 million went hungry, mainly in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. There is significant food poverty in the USA despite this country being the largest food producer in the world. Perversely, there are 500 + million people who are clinically obese.

We have seen increases in the scale of production and concentration in the food chain but also increases in the level of harm to the environment. Farms have had to get bigger to remain competitive e.g. in 50 years, 200,000 farms have been lost in the UK and 4 million in the USA. Progress has been defined by productivity increases, a fall in commodity prices and cheap food. This is a narrow measure of success and ignores the costly side-effects.

The Real Cost of Food

Everyone likes cheap food and the proportion of average household spend on food has declined e.g. from 20% to 9% in UK. Agriculture's share of GDP is falling, as is the farmers share of food £. However, cheap food is a myth. We pay three times for our food – in retail outlets, via taxes used as subsidies and to cover the costs of damage to the environment and health.

In economic terms, agriculture provides commodities but also is a multi-functional activity providing many side effects and externalities. This raises important questions:

- How much are the positive side-effects worth to farmers?
- How much do the negative ones cost?

As an example, we can look at the UK.

Negative externalities total £1.54 billion per year (1990s). This is made up of the following:

£120 m/year	Pesticide removal from water
£69 m/year	Soil – nitrate and phosphate removal
£23 m/year	Cryptosporidium removal
£124 m/year	Losses of biodiversity, hedgerows and stonewalls
£96 m/year	Off-site costs of soil erosion and carbon losses

£169 m/year	Bacterial outbreaks in food
£300 m/year	Effects of greenhouse gasses on climate
£607 m/year	BSE
Not costed	Antibiotic resistance, acute and chronic pesticide effects on human health

Positive externalities – value of these may exceed income from food in some systems:

Landscape services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 550 million day visits/year to UK countryside • £14 billion income into rural communities
Wetland values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inland wetlands valuable for flood protection, waste treatment and nutrient amelioration, and habitats • But have lost most of our wetlands during intensification
Soil health and carbon sequestration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural systems can accumulate 0.3 – 0.6 tonnes carbon/ha/year rising to 1.3 tonnes carbon/ha/year • New income options for farmers

Thus, the real cost of the weekly food basket (including eating out) based on 11.68Kg /person, is £24.79 /person /week (average for 1999-2001). Calculated external costs arise from farms, transport to retail outputs and to home, disposal of organic waste to landfill and subsidies (for background data on these, please see appendices). These costs lead to a total food basket of £27.71 or an extra 11.8%.

Avoiding these costs

Organic farming, localised food systems, more sustainable transport and composting are all ways of reducing external costs of agriculture. For example, if all farms were organic, £1,129 m/year would be saved; if all food were produced within 20km, £2,136 m/year would be saved; if the bus replaced the car as the mode of transport, £1,150 m/year would be saved; £7 m/year would be saved if all food waste was composted.

The extra 11.8% added to the cost of our food basket could therefore be mitigated to 1.3% additional cost if one were to purchase organic food, produced locally and transported from the retail outlet by bus.

All this has implications for agricultural policy. To avoid costs of agriculture, the direction of policy must be to:

- Encourage sustainable farming
- Localise food systems
- Encourage sustainable forms of transport
- Reduce unnecessary food swap
- Compost organic wastes
- Switch subsidies

Transformation

From a University of Essex study of 208 sustainable agriculture projects and initiatives:

- 8.98 million farmers have adopted sustainable agriculture practices and technologies
- this amounts to 28.92 million hectares (3.01% of arable and permanent crops in Asia, Africa and Latin America)

Common themes of this study included functional biodiversity for pest management, growing the soil (organic matter and carbon sequestration), water (more efficient use and collective action), social organisation and additional value and a market for rural economies.

There is much evidence of transformed thinking, in that everyone is in favour of 'sustainability' some of whom are willing to change words or practices. However, most policy structures still encourage 'old' modernist agriculture. With only two countries currently having explicit national policies for sustainable agriculture (Switzerland and Cuba), the core challenge for the next decade is to increase the number of supportive policies.

Finally, we can go a step further - a land and food ethic implies thinking of land and community, farming and food, as a connected network of parts with limits, obligations and responsibilities.

"we abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect...."

That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics"

Aldo Leopold – 'Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There

Jules Pretty is Director of the Centre for Environment and Society and member of the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Essex. He has published widely, and his books include Agriculture: Reconnecting People, Land and Nature (2002), 'The Living Land (1998), 'Regenerating Agriculture(1995), 'Fertile Ground: The Impacts of Participatory Watershed Management (1999, co-authored), 'The Trainers Guide for Participatory Learning and Action' (1995, co-authored); 'The Hidden Harvest Wild Foods and Agricultural Systems' (1992, co-authored); 'Unwelcome Harvest: Agriculture and Pollution' (1991, co-authored), and.

He is Deputy-Chair of the government's Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE). He is a regular speaker, contributor to media, and presenter of the 1999 BBC Radio 4 series Ploughing Eden and contributor and writer for the 2001 BBC TV Correspondent programme The Magic Bean. He received a 1997 award from the Indian Ecological Society for "International Contributions to Sustainable and Ecological Agriculture". He was appointed A D White Professor-at-Large by Cornell University for six years from 2001. He is a founding member of the Agricultural Reform Group and the Neighbourhood Think Tank, editorial advisor to academic journals, vice-president of Suffolk-ACRE, member of the Institute of Biology and British Agricultural History Society, adviser to government on social and environmental development, and adviser to the corporate sector. He was appointed to the International Jury for the Slow Food Award in 2002.

4 The Workshops

Infrastructure for Local Food

Tim Crabtree and Bart Soldaat

The Bridport Centre for Local Food Experience

This presentation described the achievements of the West Dorset Food and Land Trust in partnership with organisations such as Bournemouth University, Local authorities and Business Link. The achievements include piloting farmers markets, production of a local food directory, organisation of Food Week and work with schools. This organisation is also part of the Dorset Food Initiatives Partnership.

Proposed initiatives in Dorset are based on a model consisting of supply and demand elements that feed into the food system, including production, processing, distribution and consumption. Four key themes are taken from the Curry report and DEFRA:

- Joining-up the food chain
- Improving the performance of farmers and land based workers
- Improving public health through healthy eating
- Protecting and enhancing the environment

A 'Centre for Local Food' is currently being developed by West Dorset Food and Land Trust in partnership with Dorset Food Links and other organisations. This will provide managed workspace and offices, business support and a commercial development service.

Farm-led co-operative marketing in the Netherlands: Projects, Problems, Prospects

Bart Soldaat argues that through (the new types of small-scale) initiatives for farm-led co-operative marketing, farmers obtain a stronger marketing position, better prices and in this way, a better chance for economic survival. He acknowledges the short and long-term problems that have to be solved by farmers themselves and through government policy.

In the Netherlands, there are new markets emerging and new possibilities of organising chains and markets, making room for a whole range of new types of products, new small-scale initiatives and new types of farmer-led co-operative marketing. The example focussed on here is the Green Heart Landshops Initiative, formed by a small group of farmers. The formula developed in setting up these landshops has now been used for 13 shops – the aim is to have at least 25 in the Green Heart by the year 2005.

The project has led to interregional collaboration with other regions using the formula and the support of the farmers union in lobbying, strategy building, networking and project management. Despite the problems, the government, consumer organisations and farmers together can do much to make this type of project viable.

Summary of actions/observations

The following critical factors for success were concluded from the presentation and ensuing feedback from delegates:

- Participation – inclusivity in decision-making, raising awareness and provision of jobs and skills
- Networks – between stakeholder groups to identify gaps in the system; provide logistical, organisational and marketing success stories; shared facilities
- Support – in terms of funding, political will, public sector support and provision of business facilities
- Co-operation – between producers/processors and consumers at a local level to avoid fragmentation and improve efficiency
- Infrastructure – joint facilities such as processing facilities
- Marketing – a clear marketing plan with good branding and support from well-known organisations such as NFU
- Information – flow between agencies/community and farms/producers to improved and underpinned by evaluation
- Strategy – work strategically with groups to develop balanced schemes that work to along-term perspective.

Consumer co-ops tackling food poverty **Sharron Rourke and Lieve Vercauten**

Vredeseilanden

Vredeseilanden is a Belgian NGO (non-governmental organisation) specialised in food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture and is working in 14 countries within the continents of Africa, Latin America, Asia and Belgium itself.

About ten years ago, Vredeseilanden changed its strategies, in such a way that direct intervention projects evolved towards co-operation with local and regional institutions. Whereas Vredeseilanden once specialised in technical intervention, it now has a clear focus on methodological support and monitoring.

We are also working towards structural improvements of the economic situation of farmers' households by means of advocacy - including mobilisation – both at a national and international level.

Ten years ago the Belgian programme on Sustainable Agriculture was set up. In Belgium we can distinguish between three main domains of activities:

1. Initiation and monitoring of new or existing initiatives on direct links between farmers and individual consumers or consumer groups.

Vredeseilanden's role is to co-ordinate the process, bring together all relevant actors, initiate the interaction between them, and beware of the sustainability of the initiative.

2. Advocacy actions to support more sustainable agricultural systems

3. Participatory and Action Research Projects:

Cumbrian Food Co-ops

Nearly three years ago, a partnership was formed between the North Cumbria Health Action Zone, the Countryside Alliance, Mitchells Auction Co. and Allerdale Borough Council to develop a programme of initiatives to address the appalling statistics in coronary heart disease, cancer and other health-related problems that are linked to poor diet. The partnership also recognised that the local agricultural communities were in need of help.

The project has made a very successful link between the two by delivering affordable, top-quality, fresh local produce into the communities on a weekly basis and by helping local producers to rebuild their lives and businesses. The food co-op base in Cumbria is growing on a weekly basis with numbers reaching 37 and 5 new ones waiting to start.

This project has now gone beyond the boundaries of Cumbria and has successfully helped communities in Merseyside, North Wales, Northumberland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and London.

Summary of actions/observations

The following critical factors for success were concluded from the presentation and ensuing feedback from delegates:

- Information – carry out needs assessment of deprived communities and disseminate information about success stories that could be transferred
- Networks – share information between countries, urban co-ops and rural farmers
- Co-operation – manage expectations of consumers and producers, help farmers into secondary processes e.g. milk to cheese and with direct selling initiatives
- Participation – reconnect the co-op with the needs of the local community – ethnic minorities, shopkeepers etc..
- Marketing – promote benefits of food co-ops by recognising potential in addressing health and social inequalities
- Ideas – pledges to set up food co-ops in East Lincolnshire, Gloucestershire and Selby. Many other areas to begin researching.

Sharron Rourke is a Rural Regeneration Manager working nationally for the Countryside Alliance and manager of the Food Development Project in North Cumbria, working in partnership with North Cumbria Health Action Zone.

Producer co-ops and marketing

Richard Boden, Carinne Craff and Francois Aubert

The development of farmers markets and the growth of retailing

The big four supermarkets are responsible for 60% of UK food retailing. The 400+ farmers' markets together account for 0.3%. This workshop discussed ways in which local food can become mainstream, by marrying all that is good about existing initiatives with the convenience and choice offered by the supermarkets.

AVEC (farmers in direct collective sales)

The AVPC (farmers co-op) was created in 1990 in the Rhone Alpes region and became AVEC Rhone Alpes in 1994. The organisation is involved with the research and studies concerning farming production in the Rhone Alpes region and participates in a programme of European initiatives. The group consists of various types of co-operative shops operating under a charter which guarantees 'the presence of the farmer at the place of sale' and 'the product's transparency of origin' (traceability).

Producers in the co-ops take part in a number of different commissions:

- Future – dealing with the reception of young people into the co-op
- Know-how – organising training and skills-share sessions
- Communication – offering support and help to sales points
- Inspection – monitoring the inspection of shops
- Publicity – in charge of promotion, information and publicity

AVEC Rhone Alpes, a member of the National Federation of the Association of Farmers, is in a position to organise and set up training courses, promotional initiatives, annual exchange visits, consumer-producer meetings and first-hand reports of project group's experience.

Summary of actions/observations

The following critical factors for success were concluded from the presentation and ensuing feedback from delegates:

- Legislation and support – the UK is not good at adapting regulations for small producers. Need to encourage local authority and regional freedom and support, and regulations that present consumers with credible ethics
- Co-operation – important to foster sense of community identity and responsibility through communication and commitment in the UK
- Information and communication – share success stories e.g. through FLAIR website. Co-ordinating body to oversee correct advice and guidance on regulations and cost
- Markets – focus on quality, promotion, location and accessibility to provide localised shopping without losing standards. Have a sustainable business plan for the future
- Take ideas presented to develop low-cost organic box schemes, particularly for low-income rural communities.
- Look at ways to develop a sense of community and 'ownership' between farmers/producers and consumers e.g. by getting them interested in how their food is produced, involving volunteers.

- If farmers markets have reached their limit – need new initiatives such as consumer co-ops and working with supermarkets.

Richard Boden is Co-ordinator of WyeCycle, a community business working on a range of initiatives (recycling, composting, farmers' markets) in the village of Wye, Kent.

Local food sourcing by the public sector

Maddelena Bolognesi

Aprobio - Friulia-Venezia-Giulia

Maddelena is from the region of Friulia-Venezia-Giulia in NE Italy and works for Aprobio, an organic producers organisation that works to support school meals services within their particular region. The presentation started with an analysis of the political situation in Friulia-Venezia-Giulia, which has been very favourable to the development of meals based on 'AOC' local and organic ingredients.

Two laws passed in 1990 and 1995 created this favourable legal environment for the development of these services. One other positive aspect has been the co-operation between the organic and bio-dynamic farmer organisations and the regional committees for the development of agriculture. Together they have held a series of courses and seminars both on organic production and on organic school meals services. These seminars have also focused on involving teachers, parents, cooks, school children and all stakeholders who are relevant to the development of services. Again, as in other areas of Italy, they have shown that where there is preparatory groundwork and synergy between the different partners involved in setting up the school meals service, the result is a far greater success rate.

Where the local authority administers the system they have a fairly high percentage of organic ingredients of up to 80%, however it is where the parents committees organise the school meals services that they have reached the highest percentage of local and organic ingredients, in fact approaching 100%. However in many other areas they are only able to reach 30%, due largely to the fact that there is very little local production which results in much higher prices. Where they are able to source locally, prices are kept reasonable, and therefore they are able to implement successful school meals systems based on up to 100% of local organic ingredients.

One of the first organic school meal systems in Italy, that of Meruzzo, started in 1987. The project focused on the supply of organic fruit and vegetables. In fact the parents' committee became both the manager of the system and also the supplier of the organic fruit and vegetables to the canteens.

Friulia-Venezia-Giulia was the first region in Italy to officially implement a state law regarding the introduction of organic ingredients and local ingredients with a guarantee of origin. The new law allows for two types of subsidies for the systems. The first one regards subsidising the costs of providing the service, that is the canteens, the cooks and the ingredients. The second regards the development of teaching and educational materials and their subsequent use.

Addressing food access

Moyra Burns, Lucy Gillie, Victoria Williams and Anna Watson

An insight into the Scottish Community Diet Project's Study Tour to the National Public Health Institute of Finland and North Karelia.

Finland has an outstanding record on coronary heart disease, from which mortality in men aged 35-65 has dropped by about 65 per cent over the past thirty years. The decline in death rates has been greater than the corresponding decline in risk factors would predict. The aim of the study tour was to understand how the Finnish experience and could be of benefit to Scotland's low income communities.

Instead of inviting health professionals or government officials to take part, participants had to both live and work (paid or unpaid) in one of Scotland's low-income communities, tackling the barriers to a healthy, varied and balanced diet. Applicants also had to demonstrate a commitment to sharing the experience both at local and national levels on their return. Two community workers from the Scottish Community Diet Project went to see for themselves the initiatives that reduce heart disease in Finland.

"Food with Latitude"

This recently published report explores whether there is any potential in setting up a linking programme between community initiatives in the UK and those in Southern countries working towards improving local access to good, quality, nutritious food. Where links already exist, the report examines the pros and cons, and where there are none it explores potential benefits.

Some of the key points made were the need to connect communities; the importance of sharing good practice ideas and examples; the need for a change in thinking about ways to reach and involve communities in addressing their own needs, and that no one model fits all.

Summary of action/observations

The following critical factors for success were concluded from the presentation and ensuing feedback from delegates:

- Infrastructure issues - Need to provide more farmers markets and regeneration of local shopping. More support for local food projects, producers and retailers. Feed community voices into policy change.
- Co-ordination - Encourage local shops and don't underestimate capacity for involvement.
- Social/Cultural - Make shopping/cooking fun. Transfer of cooking skills between generations. Get rid of stigma. Food is culture and environment too.
- Assurance - Advertising that is correct and genuine. Get rid of false assurance schemes.

- Participation and involvement and research, develop, influence policy, balancing top down with local need, adequate funding/resourcing, lack of reference to needs of minority groups.
- Skills and knowledge – infrastructure transferability.
- Infrastructure – policies to bring about improvements in health – longer-term thinking.
- Funding – ongoing support needed.
- Partnership – joined up thinking between agencies – agriculture, health, education etc.

Moyra Burns has been a State Registered Dietician for more than twenty years - ten of those working within the community rather than in a clinical or hospital setting. A large part of this work was working with people to facilitate change whilst recognising the barriers to that change. For the past four years she has worked in food and health with the Health Promotion Unit of Lothian Health Board. Much of her present work is with groups of people - many of whom face problems of poor housing, issues of unemployment or low pay and have little in the way of local food shopping facilities. Providing good food for themselves and/or a family is often an issue which concerns them. Getting good quality food, at an affordable price, within a community can be very difficult, and her experience is that people often have to take the initiative themselves and set up food co-ops or cooking skills classes. Having the option to make small changes to what you eat day in day out can make a big difference to your well being. She is also a member of the SCDP's steering group.

Lucy Gillie has worked to support and encourage networks of community food initiatives at Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming and at the Soil Association. Currently she is Development Officer for the Scottish Community Diet Project and she co-ordinated the study tour to Finland.

Victoria Williams works at Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, and has been the Food Poverty Project Officer for over three years. The project aims to address inequalities in food access and health. She has a background in community development and urban regeneration.

Community supported agriculture

Bernard Jarman and Jesus Concepcion

CSA Project

Inspiration for the Stroud CSA Project comes from two sources:

- The Gaia Theory originally developed by James Lovelock where each species and every part of the earth is recognised as existing for the benefit and greater well being of the whole. Community supported Agriculture (CSA) effectively translates this understanding into the context of economics and replaces the free market with community support.
- A second source arises from biodynamic agriculture, the oldest consciously organic approach to farming and gardening, and inspired by the spiritual research of Rudolph Steiner. It has at its heart the idea of a farm as a self-contained and evolving organism which relies on home produced compost and manure for its fertility and home grown feed for its livestock.

Creating this form of CSA involves bringing together a circle of consumers around a farm who are willing to commit themselves financially to carry the farm's annually agreed budget. In return, they share all the farm's produce between them. the project is also underpinned by some co-operative and social principles:

- The farmers and growers shall be paid a fair and adequate salary to enable them freely to volunteer their time for the farm.
- Supporters shall be encouraged to identify with and volunteer time on their farm on the premise that the more that is given, the greater and better will be the results.
- Everyone wishing to shall be able to join the scheme and not be excluded on grounds of cost alone.
- The whole enterprise shall operate in an open and transparent way and full participation by all stakeholders will be encouraged.

After several months of preparation the Stroud CSA Project was launched on July 20th 2002. At its launch, about twenty people signed up, a number that has since risen to forty

Urban Agriculture in Cuba

Cuba was one of the main consumers of chemical products in Latin America. With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and in consequence the loss of trading connections and the supply of agricultural chemicals, a big transformation in Cuba's agriculture was required. A special period in peacetime was declared in the country, as the supply of fresh food decreased drastically in urban areas. People started to sow vegetables in their gardens and, later on, in neighbourhood areas. It was the birth of urban agriculture. Doctors too has become worried about the use of chemical inputs in agricultural areas, and the contamination of water resources, so the Ministry of Health did not allow the use of any chemicals. The Ministry of Agriculture then created a new department for the support of urban agriculture.

We can summarise the main activities that were taken in order to face the crisis as follows:

- A big effort at national level to convert the nation's agricultural sector from a high input agriculture to low input self-sufficient farming practices.
- Comprehensive waste recycling. All kind of waste products are converted into animal food, energy or fertiliser.
- Re-dimension of all kind of farms, according to the labour availability and working capacity of producers.
- Replacement of synthetic fertilisers by bio-fertilisers, earthworms compost, other organic fertilisers, natural rock phosphate, animal and green manure.
- Replacement of chemical inputs with locally produced bio-pesticides (microbial products) and natural enemies to combat insect pests.
- Use of resistant plant varieties, crop rotations and microbial antagonists to combat plant pathogens, and the planning of better rotations and cover cropping to suppress weeds.
- Use of animal traction in soil preparation and waste collection in the cities.
- Research and agricultural extension is developed in situ. From farmer to farmer, farmer field school and an incipient use of participatory research techniques. Those have become the main way of information dissemination to farmers and urban producers.
- Application of local initiatives without intervention at central level.
- New courses and Master courses about sustainable agriculture for all production sectors, including small farmers.

Organisations that provided mechanisms for implementing these are:

- CPA – co-operative of farming production
- UBPC – co-operative of production brigade units
- The Community Food Preservation Project (the Vilda's project)

Summary of actions/observations

The following critical factors for success were concluded from the presentations and ensuing feedback from delegates:

- Engage wider public through poverty reduction programmes and funding to support self-reliance
- Adopt a 'ground-up' development as in Cuba
- A diversity of approaches to agriculture and agricultural products is a key component of sustainability
- Unique projects are needed to match community need to sustainable solutions
- Community aspiration begins with the community, not the farm

Bernard Jarman is the executive director of the Biodynamic Agricultural Association and a founding member of the Stroud CSA Project. He has been involved with biodynamic farming and gardening for many years.

Jesús Concepción is a Cuban consultant with many years of experience in organic, tropical and sustainable agriculture. He received a degree in Agriculture (1988) and an MSc in Animal Production (1998) in Cuba, along with an MSc in Sustainable Agriculture at the Imperial College of London (2000). He also studied at the IAC (Holland, 1997).

5 Launch of Food Links UK

After the afternoon workshop session, Paul Sander-Jackson of Somerset Food Links and Clive Peckham of East Anglia Food Link gave a presentation on the launch of Food Links UK (FLUK).

Food Links UK Mission

Food Links UK will provide a national voice for groups which aim to achieve a fairer, healthy and sustainable local food system.

Food Link UK Aims

- To act as lead advocate and influence for the local food sector and its members at a national and European level.
- To develop innovative policy and action to enable the growth of the local food sector
- To be a practical and active link between members by information exchange and development of regional co-ordination.
- To act as a focal point for fundraising for local food projects.

What is a sustainable local food system?

- Local
- Low output
- Profitable
- Healthy
- Fairly traded
- Fair to employees
- Environmentally beneficial
- Accessible
- High standards of animal welfare
- Socially exclusive
- Celebrates food cultures

Food Links Structure

Members have to:

- Sign up to the mission
- Work in an integrated way
- Be committed to sharing experience
- Be inclusive
- Contribute to developing FLUK

Food Links UK Steering Group

The Steering group's regional representatives currently comprises:

Sharron Rourke (north)
Nick Corker (Midlands)

Clive Peckham (East Anglia)
Sarah Davies (South East)
Paul Sander-Jackson (South West)
Suzanne Davies (Wales)
Angela Heaney (Scotland)

FLUK aims to increase representation from North Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Plans for the future

- Meet regularly with DEFRA and FSA
- Contribute to Sustainable Development Commission
- Work with Local Food Works, FLAIR and SUSTAIN for better information exchange between projects
- Develop monitoring and exchange between projects

Paul Sander-Jackson, of Somerset Food Links - since it began in 1999 Paul has been the project manager of this well-respected, award-winning project, and has been a prime mover in helping to develop a thriving trade in locally produced food in and around Somerset.

Clive Peckham, of East Anglia Food Link - Clive has been the co-ordinator of EAFL since its foundation as the UK's first food link organisation in 1997. One of EAFL's principal roles has been the development of partnerships from local to global level, to help the spread of good practice and to meet common objectives.

Appendices available separately from the Foundation for Local Food Initiatives:

Slides of Jules Pretty's presentation
Workshop notes, verbatim
Delegate list