

Connections Between Sustainable Agriculture, Community Food Security, and Health Benefits of Foods

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Presenters

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Summary and Highlights

Three health care professionals – one doctor and two registered dietitians – who were working with different aspects of community food systems discussed issues where production and consumption merged.

Community Food Assessment: Guiding Health Related Nutrition Interventions

Olivia Thomas explained the role of community food assessments in public health research, listed the components of an assessment, compared and contrasted methods for conducting an assessment, and prepared people to customize their own assessment. Dr. Thomas cited some of the resources she used, including the Nutrition Environment Assessment Tool (NEAT) from the Michigan Department of Community Health, and the Nutrition Environment Measures Survey, (NEMS) produced by Karen Glanz. The NEMS was thought to have greater detail with regard to availability and price within restaurants.

Dr. Thomas highlighted a pilot program done by the University of Georgia Department of Nutrition in Barrow County. The project was a collaboration with health clinics and community resources and led to several changes through training on preventative education, focus group surveys, and interviews. The outcome was the posting of “five a day” signs in grocery stores, and healthier menus in restaurants and was part of the first wellness program in the state of Georgia.

Bridging the Gap

Jill Foster hit on three areas where there is an opportunity to bridge gaps. The first area is sustainable agriculture – food production and markets. The second is health and nutrition, which includes disease, treatment and education, and the third is the community approach of connecting eaters to producers.

Dr. Foster highlighted the changing image of food in the media. In the 1930s the media had cartoon celebrities like Popeye promoting spinach to children. Today television contains 10 food messages an hour in both overt and covert promotion that targets children and alters their perception of normal eating.

Some of the tools and resources available for this work are the 2005 dietary guidelines, my pyramid, and DASH, which advocates 9-12 servings of fruits and vegetables a day as opposed to five a day. Another interesting model food pyramid is the Oldways Diet Pyramid, which is a culturally based index that includes Asian, Mediterranean, Latin American, as well as Vegetarian options. Dr. Foster also encouraged the American Institute for Cancer as a useful resource.

Federal Food and Nutrition Policy – Local Impact

Angie Tagtow began by shedding light on the disconnect between dietary guidelines and agriculture policy in the US, explaining that our most subsidized crops feed livestock, and flood the market with low-cost processed foods, while fruits and vegetables are not subsidized. She went on to ask, “Has this disconnect created challenges in public health?”

The material covered was related to the upcoming farm bill that Ms. Tagtow referred to as the “farm, food and fuel bill, saying “What does it say about society when we have food competing with fuel?” She closed with this quote from Francis Moore Lappe; “The act of putting into your mouth what the earth has grown is perhaps your most direct interaction with the earth.”