



CITY FOOD SYMPOSIUM BRIEFING

EXPLORING LOCAL FOOD POLICY

On 12 December 2012, the Centre for Food Policy at City University London convened its third annual symposium, gathering academics, practitioners, campaigners and policymakers. This year's theme was the 'local': what does it mean in terms of food policy? Who does it, what is it for, and how is it faring in these economically and politically challenging times? Speakers came from Britain, Brazil and Canada, and part of the session was devoted to working groups, where delegates shared ideas and experiences. This briefing presents a summary of the proceedings, and recordings are available at www.city.ac.uk/food.

VIEW FROM THE FRONT

Professor Tim Lang, of the Centre for Food Policy, on the context and lessons of the day

It is a view widely held that national food policy is drifting. The Centre for Food Policy is not alone in that diagnosis. Nor are we alone in regretting the loss of impetus that we flagged up at last year's symposium. Patchy and at times reluctant though it was, a framework had begun to emerge of how and why the UK food system needed to change. Priorities were discussed. Then progress stalled.

Today, over half way through the Coalition Government's agreed duration, the structural challenges facing the food system show no sign of dissipating. The horsemeat scandal that erupted in January 2013 grabbed headlines and reminded the British that trust in food requires good governance. Behind the headlines lay a new

food reality of squeezed incomes, inexorable food price inflation, alarming data on climate change and diet-related non-communicable diseases, and more.

These structural issues are the daily concerns of this Centre, and provided the backdrop for our review of national food policy in the 2011 Symposium (see website for Briefing). For 2012 we decided to focus on the local dimension of food policy. This was partly because in recent years there has been an upsurge of local food policy experimentation and engagement. Partly because Centre staff, researchers and students are active in local food policy development and auditing. But above all because we are intrigued by whether there is any consistency or

coherence across local food policy work. The area is vibrant, of course, but quite what is the 'local'? Are there any cross-cutting themes? Where is this headed? Perhaps most important, can it halt the national policy drift? Is its moment here?

The 2012 Symposium was thus set up, like its predecessors, to 'take the policy temperature', a task to which the speakers rose magnificently, for which we

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thank them heartily. Put more formally, we set out to explore the state of the sub-national, through different levels of governance, action and experience.

So how do people define the local? The answer we received was that some see it at micro level, very local, a position championed by small towns like Todmorden, as reported here. Some set the boundaries at large conurbations or regions, such as London or Ontario, where complicated meta-governance has to emerge, liaising across authorities, interests, identities. We heard from Scotland of its long and sophisticated engagement with diet-related ill health, and how dogged persistence is needed to tackle low income's legacy in food culture. For a quarter of a century, a generation of Scottish researchers, politicians and activists has struggled to achieve change. Various points of entry have emerged: national autonomy, land ownership, class divisions, 'inside track' champions.

The local, it seems, is a rich and flexible concept, and one whose import is still unfolding, as was eloquently outlined by the Centre's Professor Martin Caraher at the Symposium's start. New food poverty scars the local yet is shaped by decisions at national level -- or internationally if you work for a transnational (low tax-paying) corporation. New UK benefit levels are now pegged below inflation. So is it any wonder food budgets are squeezed for the poor? Local provision might make this marginally better or

worse, but can local food policy tackle the fundamentals?

One theme in discussions about local food policy that might affect this is the choice of institutional structure. Some localities have or are creating Food Policy Councils to facilitate democratic engagement across civil society, business and the local state. Other policies have emerged entirely from within existing local state structures in health and/or local authorities. But as the Symposium heard, in England the merger of public health back into local authority structures (where it was developed in the 19th century) has cast a pall over valuable and hitherto energetic policy development. Few who watch the local food policy scene in the UK could not know of the remarkable work in Sandwell in England's West Midlands, a highly deprived region. Its work was reported as in the throes of dislocation in the name of local democracy. By contrast, from Sheffield, Bristol and Vancouver, Canada, different tales emerged. They provided case studies of the creation of new food policy frameworks.

Another question was: is there agreement on what to do? The answer, I felt, was No, but for a good reason. We are in a period of democratic experimentation. Some cities, like Bristol or Brighton & Hove, appear to have received most energy from what we might loosely describe as a 'green' agenda. Others were being shaped by the health divide. Others by the opportunity for a revitalised local identity: 'this is our town'. Too few from job-creation, in my view. Across

the country, the slow impact of creeping retail uniformity has been noted. Wariness about concentration of power is much more common than even a few years back.

A major theme in the Symposium was resources. How are sub-national food policy developments funded? Who pays for the labour force, or is it voluntary? Some presented the case for rooting action in people power, the ultimate resource being people's energies, what they are able to donate. From all our case studies, we heard how local identity gets people out of bed, encouraging them to feel their efforts make a difference. Whether discussing lobbying councillors (or being one), or the long-term education of mayors, or creating positive stories, it was clear that food offers rich opportunities to win hearts and minds, and to present local food commerce as essential for meeting food needs.

Indeed, the Symposium brimmed with lessons from public engagement and heard tales of dynamic thought leadership. But this model of policy development relies upon people having employment elsewhere. In the nicest of senses, it's parasitic, in contrast to the older model in which policies are developed through core officers within existing institutions. It's clear that the current democratic experimentalism relies heavily on voluntary efforts. Even mighty London's experience, rooted in the elected Greater London Assembly, depends on a tiny paid labour force. Only from the case study of Belo Horizonte in

legitimated opportunities for local food policy action to become effective.

Here in Britain, local authorities are being massively squeezed. The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health presented Local Government Association budget forecasts for local authorities. They are being slashed. Starkly, the CIEH reported that in this context, room for food policy development is being reduced. Only statutory work has a claim on the local state. This suggests that the future for local food policy is increasingly up to voluntary rather than employed activism. Scotland, Wales, N

Ireland might say they take different routes, but the broad picture is set by national politics.

On a positive note, a rapid and remarkable cross-fertilisation of experiences is already underway. Cities are speaking to each other. A network has been created. International learning is being shared. Although its focus was on the UK, the Symposium heard from two cities in Canada, besides Belo Horizonte in Brazil, and also of a comparison of UK and USA urban food policy development. Although times are hard over here, they are not without data or encouragement.

Where might the UK local food policy movement be headed? I feel sober about the context but hopeful about the energies being brought to bear. I respect greatly the process of experimentation underway. This is as it should be – diverse, no blueprint, full of tensions but also full of vitality. Much depends on galvanising and motivating local people, not just decision-makers. But as the Symposium heard, the great strength of the local food policy movement is its nimbleness: taking chances, being opportunistic, going for the vision. Dogged hard work is necessary, of course, but so is imagination and the pursuit of the view that the food system

WHERE ARE WE NOW? THE STATE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT TODAY

By Jenny Morris, Principal Policy Officer at the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health

The UK economy is not in good health. The national debt at the end of October was calculated to be £1068.8 billion, equivalent to 67.9% GDP. Growth for 2012 is predicted to be negative – a contraction of 0.1% is expected. Austerity measures are expected to be in place until 2017/18.

The public sector deficit is high and cost-cutting has taken place and will continue, with the greatest effects yet to be felt. According to the Local Government Association (LGA), local government has taken the brunt of the cuts in the public sector so far. The LGA has stated that “If the pattern of cuts so far is repeated in the next Spending Review, councils will not be able to deliver every (current) service offer by the end

of this decade”.

For some time councils have been looking for efficiency savings, eg by transforming services, sharing services and reducing (mainly) management layers. So far some 200,000 jobs have been lost. However, efficiencies can only go so far. LGA modelling shows a widening gap between income and expenditure. It predicts that if the direction of travel continues then front line services will need to be cut. The modelling further predicts that by the end of the decade statutory/obligatory services will consume some 90% of funding, leaving practically no funding for discretionary services.

Currently councils deliver a

range of food-related services. Some of these are statutory, eg food safety checks carried out by Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs).

Others are discretionary, eg promoting healthier eating or using local and sustainable food -- EHPs have a key role here also. The future of all these services is uncertain; there is even consideration of whether food safety controls should be carried out at a local or national level.

The economic situation poses significant threats to food service delivery but there are also some opportunities emerging. The transfer of community leadership on public health to councils in April 2013 may be one. Councils

demonstrate progress against a public health outcomes framework. Obesity reduction is one of the outcome measures and this may offer more opportunities to tackle poor diet (and exercise) more systematically.

However it is only one of a

number of areas for action and decisions will be made based on local prioritisation. The future for promotion of the use of sustainable food by councils is much less clear. Where it can be tied to economic development the chances of getting funding will be greater.

New ways of working will be essential to support council food services if these are to continue. Food partnerships will be ever more essential. Breaking down barriers between the different parts of councils, industry and NGOs will be critical to local food activities in the future. ■

LOCAL FOOD POLICIES IN PRACTICE: THE STATE OF THE SUB-NATIONAL

By Martin Caraher, Professor of Food and Health Policy at the Centre for Food Policy

The 'local' in food policy is on the ascent. There are many reasons for this. Some seek alternatives to the dominant food system and look to reclaim some control over food; others act because they have to, due to withdrawal of the state; some participate as a form of protest and yet others because they view the local as helping kick-start an alternative business and employment model. All this results not in one food movement but a series of overlapping movements at local, regional and national levels. Activity in the local sphere exists within a global food supply system where more and more power is concentrated in fewer and fewer companies. Concomitant with this concentration are increasing poverty and food insecurity.

We know little about the outcomes of many of these local and sub-national food policies, as most of the evidence is in the realm of process and impact. There are some indicators that they can become alternative business models, helping local employment and increasing local money flows or, at a more cynical level, act as distractions from changing the dominant food system. Within evidence-based policy we have

yet to see proof of any comprehensive food policy being successful at local or sub-regional level. We are witnessing what are called 'policy cycles' where local and regional initiatives are revived, again and again and again. We noted this in the state of Victoria in Australia, where an initiative was started in 1986/87, again in 1992 and more recently in 2010, all funded and supported by the state, but which ended in the 1986/87 and 1992 programmes being taken over by the food industry.

There is a need to co-ordinate the activities of the various movements to bring about some consensus and agreed outcomes. As in the case of local food policy councils (which can be called various things ranging from food alliances or food sovereignty movements to food citizens groups), such developments are fraught with difficulties, as players come to the table with different agendas. For example, small farmers may not agree with the development of a business model which seeks to maximise local money flows, seeing this as counter-intuitive to their sense of business expansion. Or social campaigners for better food may

object to sitting round a table with big business representatives.

Food policy councils/coalitions have shown a way through these various tensions to develop local and regional consensus. They do this by:

- Offering examples of good practice at local and regional levels.
- Building alliances with other regional and national groups.
- Building consensus among a range of players and/or food movements.
- Becoming advocates for change, representing the voice of the citizen and those in need.
- Becoming an alternative business model, eg co-ops, etc.
- Blending public health and ecological-sustainability agendas.

At the end of the day, the tension still remains in the engagement and relationship of the local with the dominant food system. ■

FROM THE PRESENTERS

LONDON Progress but definitely no time for complacency

Rosie Boycott and Kath Dalmeny

With over eight million residents and millions of visitors a year, London has a huge number of mouths to feed, presenting an enormous challenge in terms of health and the sustainability of our food system. Food generates many billions of pounds for London's economy, and the capital's richer residents can choose from a delicious and diverse menu every day. Yet London is also home to some of the poorest people in the UK, many of whom struggle to make ends meet, with food and health often being compromised as prices rise.

At the same time, London provides a very significant

demand for food, which could come from environmentally friendly forms of farming, fishing and production – yet often doesn't. Since the launch of the Mayor's Healthy and Sustainable Food Strategy in 2006, many food improvements have taken place, such as the Food for Life Partnership, Sustainable Fish City, Capital Growth (the campaign for 2,012 community food growing spaces for London by the end of 2012), work with London's wholesale markets to promote food from local farmers, and the adoption by the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games organisers of sustainable food standards. Good food and the need to protect land for food

growing now also feature in the London Plan – the development strategy for London for coming decades.

However, in the current economic climate, food poverty is once again on the rise and many of London's residents face the prospect of not being able to afford good food. Planning and action are needed from national government, city and borough authorities, and communities, to maintain the progress that has been made on social, ethical and sustainable food issues. ■

Rose Boycott is Chair of the London Food Board. Kath Dalmeny is Policy Director of Sustain and member of

SCOTLAND The development of food policy: national, regional, local?

Annie S. Anderson

In 2008 the Scottish Government initiated a Leadership Forum to work on developing a National Food and Drink Policy for Scotland that would promote economic growth as well as healthy and sustainable food choices, safeguard the reputation of Scotland's food and take account of food security.

The recommendations from the Leadership Forum (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/19142130/0>) reflected a range of shared and agreed objectives which were accepted by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs. However, in the final Food and Drink Policy document the dominance of pursuing economic growth of the food industry is notable. The need

to combine health and sustainability is made explicit in policy but the reality of translation is far from agreed. Activities to improve diet focus heavily on the concepts of consumer choice and re-formulation, although the potential for government regulation is hinted at. Food supply for vulnerable communities is recognised as a potential problem but little direction for action is presented.

An enlarged Leadership Forum was subsequently convened to help define relevant metrics for outcomes, although these rely largely on existing datasets and it is not yet clear what progress has been attained.

Food and drink play a major part in the economy of the country. Embedding health and sustainability within the food and drink policy ensures health is an integrated part of outcome measures but not necessarily a driver for change in food production, supply or consumption. The reality of cross-government work should be feasible in Scotland but the pace of action is far from ideal. The new food body (to replace Food Standards Agency, Scotland) due to emerge in 2014 will have nutrition as part of its remit and should have the capability to enhance government work in this area. However, any food policy work in the near future is likely to be related to favouring votes towards an independent

SHEFFIELD Developing a local food plan: aspirations and realities

Ellie Houlston

Sheffield is the fourth largest city in England with a population of over 500,000. It is best known for its contribution to the 'fork' end of the food chain, with a long history of cutlery manufacturing.

Significant inequalities exist within Sheffield, with a gap in life expectancy of 11 years between the most affluent and least affluent neighbourhoods. Food poverty, obesity and diet-related ill-health are all prevalent, particularly in deprived areas.

Sheffield has developed many local food policies and interventions. The last decade was dominated by more 'health-related' food policy. The Voluntary, Community and Faith sectors were key delivery partners for much of this activity locally. In 2009, Sheffield City Council led

the development of a new food plan for the city which was published in 2011. It is aspirational, wide-ranging and attempts to address issues such as sustainability and food security.

However, the scale of ambition set out in the plan has so far not been matched by a commitment to delivery. Reducing resources and changing priorities have limited progress. The development of the plan was resourced, but resources were not identified for implementation. Whilst limited progress has been made, it could be argued that, with few exceptions, most progress was not driven by the SFP.

Sheffield is at a crossroads. Public health responsibilities are shifting to local government and

continuing austerity is placing significant pressure on local councils. However, commitment to a food plan remains, particularly in the context of growing food poverty in the city. A single unifying vision is needed which can connect the local 'food jigsaw' together. SMART action must replace aspiration. The Council's priorities of creating successful children and young people, addressing food poverty and ensuring future sustainability must be addressed and, above all, the plan must be owned by partners and stakeholders. ■

Eleanor Houlston, Health Improvement Principal, Food and Weight Management, NHS Sheffield & Sheffield City Council

BRISTOL Planning from the ground up

Joy Carey

Bristol aspires to become a Green Capital of Europe and be a 'low carbon city with a high quality of life for all'. Runner-up for the 2014 award, it is trying again for 2015. Ironically food is not one of the Green Capital award criteria. So, what is happening about food? There are well-attended annual food conferences coordinated by Bristol City Council & Bristol NHS. Individual officers are as supportive as they can possibly be. An active grassroots Bristol Food Network is busy growing food, teaching cooking and much more, with minimal financial support. The 2011 report, *Who Feeds Bristol? Towards a resilient food plan*, which I wrote as a member of the Network, has provided a baseline analysis of the strengths and vulnerabilities in the

city's food system. It was commissioned by Bristol NHS and supported by Bristol City Council. The aspiration is that a resilient food plan based on this report will enable step change in food system reform across the city by providing a simple 'food system planning process' and framework to which many people and organisations can contribute.

In parallel, an 11-person Bristol Food Policy Council was established in 2011. The FPC is tasked with overseeing this process of reform and bringing its collective influence to bear on supporting action. The Bristol Food Network is represented on this body, has instigated most of the action to date and offers a delivery mechanism for

community-led aspects of the food plan. In practice progress is slow. The FPC has produced a food charter and an outline work plan but is still clarifying its role. Many 'activists' are frustrated by a perceived lack of action or commitment. However work on a city-wide food plan is finally underway and, fingers crossed, progress in 2013 will be more visible, hopefully backed by the new mayor. ■

Joy Carey, member of Bristol Food Network and author of Who Feeds Bristol?: Towards a resilient food plan (2011)

SANDWELL Food policy and strategy: current status and future prospects

Laura Davies

More than two decades of work have gone into building a local food supply chain in Sandwell, aspiring to a 'healthy food economy'. This cumulative investment totalled several million pounds, aimed at tackling inequalities and improving food access across the social gradient, latterly driven by the Marmot agenda on the social determinants of health.

A Food Policy Board was established in the early 2000s, and in 2005 the Sandwell Food Policy was developed. The Policy aims to protect and enhance the health of the population, contribute to tackling inequalities, and demonstrate sustainable development, through nine policy goals.

But, since the crisis in capitalism

of 2007-8 and the general election of 2010, the threats to Sandwell Food Policy and programmes have been gathering. With the 'no top down reorganisation' promise quickly broken, the 'Liberating the NHS' bill and the virtual disappearance of structural regeneration funding have had a major impact on both the public and the voluntary and community sectors.

In 2012, the first real impacts of the cuts and reform measures started to bite, eg the purchaser/provider split in the PCT, which broke up the Food Team through successive waves of redundancies, and the complete transformation of the NHS and social care landscape. This means that capacity to carry forward Food Policy actions is now critically low: severe cuts have

limited the public sector's ability to fund work in the VCS. Also notable is the entry of local politics into public health, and the entry of what one observer has called 'the council's money men' into decisions about allocating public health funds, as well as political reticence towards partnerships and strategy.

However, the Food Policy remains extant; what has changed is the people and the funding to be deployed. Opportunities to rebuild and redeploy cross-sectoral actions in support of the Food Policy will be contingent on the impacts of existing and further cuts and reforms to the public sector, a weakened VCS, and reduced emphasis on working partnerships and strategy.■

Laura Davis works at and helped

TODMORDEN: A food renaissance in the Pennines

Pam Warhurst

Incredible Edible Todmorden is a community-led food-growing initiative. Or a food-led, community-growing initiative. From small beginnings growing herbs, it now plants veggies, trees and orchards all over town, and has spawned its own market garden and training scheme. Towns across the UK are imitating its success. It aims to provide access to good local food for all, through working together, learning (from field to classroom to kitchen) and supporting local business. It also aims to use the transformative power of food to change more than diet.

The project was born of passion – and frustration. Whatever the specifics around temperature

change, sea level or extreme weather conditions, we feel our children need our help. Even without the environmental sword of Damocles over their head, the economy, ill health and breakdown of social cohesion gives them enough of a headache to warrant concern. But where is the urgency of debate around all this in the corridors of power? To whom can we turn for the actions we need to offer hope for the future?

In this absence of leadership, we created Incredible Edible Todmorden. It is an experiment to test whether it is possible to find a unifying language that cuts across age, income and culture, that can inspire actions through which we

take more responsibility for the world around us and for ourselves, and through those actions help build a kinder world for our kids.

Over the last four years we have used the language of food to change the way we think and behave towards each other. We have seen the power of small actions and through them learned lessons, and inspired others to join our movement. We are passionate people working together for a world where all share responsibility for the future wellbeing of our planet and ourselves.■

Pam Warhurst, co-founder of Incredible Edible Todmorden and chair of the Forestry Commission

SOUTHERN ONTARIO Governing urban food systems: Lessons from a foodshed

Harriet Friedmann

In Southern Ontario, we have evolved several ways of working that are more comprehensive than food policies. Using something better described as *food strategies*, we are working to create relationships that cross the boundaries dividing cities from countryside, food from farming. By doing so, we are discovering together what policies need to be changed at different scales of government and across divisions of responsibility such as health, agriculture, environment, social services, and land use planning. I suggest that a useful way to think about food strategies is to locate

them in *foodsheds*. These are like watersheds, helping us to ground the work of re-embedding food, farming, and all the links between them not in an abstract idea of “local” or “short food chains,” but in specific territories.

Foodsheds are defined by analogy to watersheds, but because they are social as well as ecological, they focus on the tension between what exists now and what is possible. The southern Ontario foodshed is highly urbanized and contains the best farmland in Canada, much of it lost, some protected, much still in danger.

Food strategies link those working for renewal of farming with those working for equitable and healthy food systems. In practice, these alliances reveal the gaps that need to be bridged socially, demographically, economically, and culturally; model how very specific policies might bridge the gaps; and create solidarity to support policy changes which are very difficult for present institutions to do. ■

Harriet Friedmann, Toronto Food Policy Council and Professor, University of Toronto

VANCOUVER A city-wide policy emerges

Brent Mansfield

The City of Vancouver has had a formal food policy mandate since 2003, after many years of community mobilization and advocacy. That work has evolved through the formation of a Food Policy Council, the adoption of a Food Charter, the creation of an interdepartmental staff team, and other initiatives. The most recent is the development of the Vancouver Food Strategy, a comprehensive roadmap for action bringing the spectrum of food system issues within a single policy framework. It seeks to ensure that the variety of goals and actions are integrated and embedded across city departments and existing planning processes, pursuing a multi-functional approach to food that highlights how food systems can contribute to other health and sustainability goals. Complementary processes are also taking place within the Vancouver Board of Parks and

Recreation and the Vancouver Board of Education.

There have been a variety of positive impacts. The work has led to more integrative mandates and processes within key institutions in the city. Institutional capacity and organizational learning for ‘food system thinking’ have improved. And there have been high levels of public and civil society engagement.

Many challenges still remain, however. Lack of resources for both staff and the citizen-led Food Policy Council limit the extent of the work. On a crowded municipal agenda, food issues vie for attention with other matters. There is a significant lack of integration and support from higher levels of government. Even within the region it is challenging to make meaningful connections with other municipalities. More work needs to be done to engage the main corporate actors within the food

system.

To scale up improvements and overcome barriers, several things need to happen. More work is needed to increase profile, mandate and resourcing for local food policy and programs. There should be a continued focus on supporting institutional learning and engaging citizens and civil society. Greater attention must be given to developing connections across the region. Development of food policies at other levels of government should complement and integrate with local work. Finally, a bolder vision and political will are needed, at all levels of government. ■

Brent Mansfield, Chair, Vancouver Food Policy Council

BELO HORIZONTE, BRAZIL: Lessons from (and listening to) the South

Cecilia Rocha

With a population of 2.5 million people, the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, is a world pioneer in tackling food consumption, distribution and production as components of an integrated urban policy for food security. Since 1993, through its Municipal Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security, the city has been building a particular alternative food system. Marked by the comprehensive scope of its programs, its urban/rural focus, the partnerships in its initiatives, its cost effectiveness, and, above all, by its commitment to social justice and equitable access to food, Belo Horizonte has

developed a distinct mode of governance for food security. The unique 'alterity' of this food system is set further apart from those being attempted in Europe and in North America because it is government-driven.

Four main points could be taken as lessons for the development of local food policies in other jurisdictions:

- 1) The centrality and necessity of government action for the sustainability of food programs;
- 2) A focus on one central motivation (social justice),

- rather than many diverse (and sometimes opposing) goals;
- 3) The institutionalization of food programmes within the local government structure and in the minds of people;
 - 4) The scaling up of local programmes to the national level, which now, in turn, support the local initiatives.■

Cecilia Rocha, Centre for Studies in Food Security, Ryerson University, Canada

UK / US Comparing national policies on local food

Alan Hunt

My research has looked at the similarities and differences between national-level local food policies in the US and UK. It shows that the bottom-up, cross-sector coalition-building common to American advocacy on local food offers an important lesson for the UK.

Successful local food projects are collaborative. Often, they involve farmers, community members, local non-governmental organizations, and local businesses. However, at the national level in the UK, local food has often been seen as part of a single-issue campaign (eg food miles) or a single policy sector (eg agriculture, rural development). The collaboration that enables local food projects has not yet translated to national policy practice in Britain.

In the US, local food policies came from broad, diversified and inclusive coalitions. Because of their breadth, the coalitions were able to draw on different narratives when needed, expand their coalitions to unlikely congressional supporters, and form multi-objective policies.

As a result, none of the 16 national local food policies established into US law since 1976 has been repealed. However, their collaborative success was underpinned by funders who promoted cross-sector networking, government programs requiring low-income inclusion, and funders who paid groups to work together – especially traditionally excluded groups.

With a declining number of local food policies in England, can national local food policies happen without support for greater collaboration in civil society?■

Alan Hunt is completing doctoral research comparing UK and US local food policies. He is based at the Rural Environment and Land Use Project at the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University

THE WORKING GROUPS: LOCALISM IN PRACTICE

What have you got, what do you do with it, and who decides? Local food work often boils down to these three issues – which can be more formally expressed as *resources*, *institutions* and *power*. These three fundamental and interdependent themes were the topics debated during the symposium's three afternoon Working Groups. Will shrinking state resources mean more reliance on voluntary activities? Does that mean they could have more power? Or does power require money? How will the responsibility for public health now being devolved to local authorities affect decision making? In sum – in the current climate of institutional overhaul and resource constraint, how can local food activities balance competing (or conflicting) pressures and make good? It's impossible to do justice to the richness of the discussions in a quick summary. We hope that participants will have taken ideas and insights back with them to their own areas of practice. But each group was given the difficult task of distilling the session into two problems and two resulting opportunities ('solutions' was felt to be too simplistic and possibly too optimistic a term). These are presented here, with regret for the many contributions left out.

WORKING GROUP 1: INSTITUTIONS

PROBLEMS

1) Food is not a local policy priority

Food tends to be low on the agenda in local policy – notable examples being Planning and Economic development.

2) Local food-supporting institutions are being dismantled

This is ongoing, for example with the disappearance of the Regional Development Agencies and Primary Care Trusts. And because many of the effects of overall budget cuts are yet to be realized, it is likely to continue.

OPPORTUNITIES

1) The receding state creates openings for local networks

Austere times call forth local collaboration and sharing, both among local groups and between local groups and local authorities. As local authorities feel the pinch financially, they will look for support elsewhere, and local groups are well placed to respond. This highlights the importance of having embedded local networks in place, which are already engaging with local authorities. Another, related benefit could be that local authorities themselves will be more likely to work across departmental silos to reduce costs, making life easier for local networks. This already seems to be happening in some places.

2) The economic gains from local food work will matter more

The positive gains, including economic gains, arising from local food work are likely to become more important. But there's work to be done on how to calculate and present these gains -- whether in terms of assets, benefits, costing or other metrics. The key thing is to look for the *benefits*. Rather than map everything that's wrong, local groups can start mapping things all the things that are being done, and the contributions that are being made.

WORKING GROUP 2: POWER

PROBLEMS

1) Jobs and procedures are in a state of flux

As discussed elsewhere in this report, the institutions and resources supporting (or obstructing) local food work are changing, and in many cases shrinking. Different people or groups will make different decisions with different criteria. Local food groups need to adapt and learn to work with the new arrangements.

2) The sources and users of power are not always obvious

Power is about influencing change. To work effectively, local groups need to understand who is making decisions, and why. But it can be hard to discover decision-making responsibilities, or decipher motives, pressures and lines of influence.

OPPORTUNITIES

1) Local food work is empowering

Local activity can achieve great things but a lot depends on empowerment: the finding, sharing and learning to use power, including by people who do not consider themselves to be powerful. Local food work has shown itself to be effective at helping people to find voice and confidence – which are aspects of power.

2) Determined resistance can defeat top-down pressure

Participants described the inclusion of sustainable food standards in the catering contracts for the London Olympics as an example of how tenacious, informed engagement by local groups can succeed in holding powerful organisations to their commitments. Power is often closely allied to money and hidden knowledge, but not invincibly so. Power comes from different places (bottom up and top down), and shows itself through persuasion and inspiration as well as coercion. Local groups need to understand where and how they can exert influence usefully, and a common goal is helpful motivation.

WORKING GROUP 3: RESOURCES

PROBLEMS

- 1) Powers-that-be are determining where resources go, and local groups can't exert influence
- 2) Local groups are not as adept as they might be at identifying resources and allocating them

Both these problems illustrate a mismatch between the resources available, and what's needed. Underlying causes include a general failure to appreciate where food comes from; an historic lack of funding for research on agriculture and the wider food supply; and a resulting lack of interest on the part of young people, who are not choosing careers in farming or food.

OPPORTUNITIES

1) Base the whole primary school curriculum on food

One answer to Problem 1 is to audit the existing arrangements, understand what you've got, then work out how to use it better. As an example, the group proposed using the school curriculum to combat systemic ignorance about food and its provenance. At primary level, the whole curriculum could be taught through food. At secondary level, aspects of agriculture, gardening and cooking knowledge could be incorporated into the curriculum, in place of token farm visits.

2) Money is not the only resource

The necessity to chase funds has led to a focus on money as the all-important resource, which has obscured the importance and value of other resources. A different, more varied 'currency' could be employed. Again, it's a case of auditing what you've got and then using it imaginatively. Options include 'bending the budget', networking, matching skills, and finding uses for resources that are going to waste (including unemployed people). Alternatives to the traditional forms of voluntary and charitable funding include very small grants that can kick-start things without many restrictions attached, and crowd sourcing.■

