

Marin Food Policy Council
Meeting Notes

May 21, 2013
[HHS campus](#)

Next Marin Food Policy Council meeting scheduled for:

Tuesday, June 18th, from 3:00-5:00 p.m. @ [HHS campus](#)

Handouts:

Farm Bill draft [letter](#); ChageLab Solutions - [Building Healthy Communities Through Policy, Systems & Environment Change webinar](#) handout; Community Garden General Plan Policy Approaches conference call with Bob Brown, Tom Lai, David Lewis, & Carlene McCart notes; Marin HHS Health, Well-being & Safety – Putting Healthy Food on the Table news insert in English & Spanish

Action Items:

Welcome and recognition of CalFresh Resolution approval by the Board on May 7th:

Chair Janet Brown welcomed all attendees to the meeting and celebrated the Board of Supervisors' approval of the CalFresh Resolution with the following comments:

“Let’s take a moment to celebrate the adoption of our Resolution to the Board of Supervisors that declares May to be CAIFresh Awareness Month. Many thanks to everyone who was able to attend the BOS meeting. It made the right impression about who we are and how seriously we take this work. This is our first policy effort, and it walked us through our process all the way to a product with a successful result. Of course, it goes without saying that this is only a first step and a Resolution will not end up making a difference in people’s lives without the relentless follow-up of this group and others like it, but still, an awesome start.”

CalFresh Month Activities update by Council Representatives Rebecca Smith and Marty Graff:

- Distribution of fliers in English and Spanish
- HHS community picnic with over 200 people in attendance
- AIM’s relaunch of Market Match program
- Two CalFresh Application Assistor trainings well attended and receiving positive feedback
 - 12 agencies represented by about 30 representatives who can pass along the learning in train-the-trainer settings

- Upcoming CalFresh in a Day

Farm Bill / SNAP ED funding letter discussion:

Chair Janet Brown and Council Representative David Lewis introduced the draft letter for Council's consideration to use in providing input in the Farm Bill process. The letter opposes proposed cuts to funding CalFresh and SNAP ED, and supports incentives for using SNAP at farmers markets. The Steering Committee proposed sending the letter from the Marin Food Policy Council, and offered the option of filling in the letter as your own organization if needed. The Council approved unanimously to send the letter as the Marin Food Policy Council.

Community Gardens Learning:

Council Chair Janet Brown introduced the topic of community gardens with the following thoughts:

"Writing a letter to elected officials about threatened and drastic cuts to supplemental food programs, hot on the heels of our 90 day effort to improve participation in the very same program, is frustrating but indicative of the futility of trying to solve long-term problems of hunger, access and inequity, with emergency measures designed as a temporary response for short term relief.

True community food security is based on the ability of all residents to be self-determining to some degree with regard to food production and distribution. We're dedicated to increasing the number, size, and effectiveness of community, school, and household gardens, and in solving problems related to chronic nutritional shortfall through the simple means of growing food to meet the needs of our residents.

We are aware of the almost unlimited potential to solve multiple problems of inequity in the local food supply through the expansion of community gardens. We understand that community gardens are capable of making tremendous contributions to the daily diet of all Marin's residents by providing one or more servings a day of fresh fruit and vegetables. This is one of our greatest untapped reserves.

Growing food near the people who are going to eat it is an approach that is becoming a national movement for its simplicity and realizability. The practical and sustainable vision of designing food into communities is a shared vision that is gathering momentum. At the TED Talks last year, a forum for advanced thinking and forward leaning social movements, community gardens made the program. It was rated as a radical, cutting edge social strategy with systemic benefits. Perhaps, if you've never thought about it before, that idea that food actually does grow on trees is a simple proposition with intriguing ramifications. From that talk, I will quote Ron Fairly, of South Central LA's community garden network, that "Growing your own food is like printing your own money."

Founded in self-sufficiency and based on the best ideas of food production and community design, shared gardens at schools, parks, open space and public buildings is leading to a beautification of public places, reduction in crime, improvements in public safety, and a restoration of community spirit and neighborliness, as well as improved nutritional health and wellness.

The multiple benefits of feeding ourselves is profound. In 1941, America went to war. The war effort touched everyone. Throughout the country, people plowed front yards, lawns, back yards, flower gardens and vacant lots to grow their own vegetables so that the greatest part of the food supply could go to the war effort. Even public land was put to use, from the lawn at San Francisco City Hall to the Boston Commons, to portions of San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. San Francisco's victory garden program became one of the best in the country. There were over 800 gardens in Golden Gate Park alone.

Every park in the city had gardens and many vacant lots were used for growing vegetables. By 1943, as part of the war effort, 20 million gardens were producing 8 million tons of food.

These Victory Gardens, also called "war gardens" or "food gardens for defense", were gardens planted both at private residences and on public land. At their height of production, these gardens produced up to 41 percent of all the vegetable produce that was consumed in the nation. *-City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America, Laura Lawson*

Any discussion about land use and food production necessarily raises questions about who we are and how we want to live. In order to improve our perspective about our surroundings, we might consider Marin County as a kind of island with 86 miles of unbroken coastline, or certainly a peninsula, connected to the mainland by two fragile bridges and one ribbon of highway. At various times, we have seen all three closed down, or made impassable, and ferry service interrupted, due to various conditions including concentrated traffic movements, storms, flood, fire and earthquake.

It is not unreasonable to ask how long it would take to get food into some of Marin's more rugged, hilly, low-lying or isolated communities if they were cut off by a wide-spread disaster. Having multiple sites of food production throughout and nearby every community, and a distribution plan, is a practical way to carry residents through the immediate aftermath of extreme circumstances when they are the most vulnerable. These efforts are part of a disaster preparedness plan that can save lives and improve recovery.

As an organizing tool, we have devised a template that groups our policy recommendations into three categories.

The first is policy that eliminates barriers to community gardens through a simplified implementation track that offers relief from the permitting process if

garden organization meets certain criteria.

The second is policy that has to do with community garden management and support strategies that ensure that gardens get off to a good start and that they have the ongoing resources and support to be sustainable over time.

The third is a set of maps that will show this Council, and any resident with the drive and interest to do it, where gardens can be situated throughout the County and where there is the greatest need.

Trathen Heckman, Founding Director of Daily Acts:

Trathen shared an inspiring presentation of some of the work that [Daily Acts](#) is involved in, which he termed “home-grown, people-powered solutions.” Highlights surrounding community gardens and food security include:

- [350 Home and Garden Challenge](#)
- Marin's [500 Garden Challenge](#)
- [100 Greywater System Challenge](#)
- [Sonoma County Community Garden Network](#)
- Sonoma County's [Cash For Grass](#) program
- Petaluma's [Mulch Madness](#) program
- [Transition US](#)
- An example of a [backyard-turned-food forest](#)
- Important and powerful combination of civic incentive programs + engaged citizens
- Modeling what is possible with tours to show how much food can be grown in small spaces
- Neighbors teaching neighbors, transforming communities
- Integrated perspective connecting issues surrounding food, water, energy, and more
- Reconnecting to the power of choice to regenerate nature and nurture communities

Tom Lai, Marin Community Development Agency:

- The 2007 Countywide Plan Update asks for community gardens in public land and to require large subdivisions to include community gardens
- Zoning (development standards) dictates what you can do on property; 4 types of permitted use:
 - Permitted use – do not need a permit
 - Conditionally permitted use – need a permit
 - Permitted subject to standards – most appealing for community gardens if you define realistic, easily met standards clearly and succinctly
 - Not permitted
- In 2012 Marin updated the Development Code so that community gardens are allowed on residentially zoned lands

- Code enforcement occurs on a complaint basis, so far there have been no complaints around community gardens
- In general, local government supports community gardens, it would be beneficial to develop a draft ordinance that designates community gardens as a permitted use with performance standards for inclusion in city general plans and development codes

Council discussion and summary:

- Community gardens have been seen as cost prohibitive in the past – examples of the Canal Gardens taking years to solidify and the Novato community garden project taking years to find a site and rumored at costing \$250,000, balanced with the example of the San Geronimo Valley community garden (albeit a much smaller garden) only costing \$5,000.
- Importance of engaged community members to volunteer at the ground level as well as local government support
- Cultural shifts around the notions of public land and potential use – example of the transformation of Petaluma City Hall turf into food forest being more an issue of land use ideas rather than policy
- Greywater – allowed, but tricky
 - Tom said it is permissive in Marin, all you need to do is register a request. However, MMWD then requires backflow prevention devices, which cost a couple thousand dollars
 - Laundry to landscape systems are allowed without backflow prevention devices
 - Council Representative Liza Crosse mentioned that Water Districts are generally interested in using recycled water, and there may be the potential to work on something there

Council Chair Janet Brown mentioned the land audit work that San Francisco has done to create a map of potential land for community gardens, a map of land that wouldn't be appropriate for use for community gardens, and a map of communities with the highest need for community gardens, suggesting that the Marin Food Policy Council could use this work as a template for similar maps. Council Representative Rebecca Smith reported that a lot of such work has already been done and that maps exist on healthymarin.org. Council Representative Richard Waxman shared the interest in leveling the barriers to community gardens across all areas regardless of need, and agreed with Council Chair Janet Brown that perhaps such maps could be more useful in the allocation of resources. Council Representative Rebecca Smith suggested that it would be pertinent to find out how many requests for community gardens are coming in, and from which communities, in order to focus efforts. Council Representative Liza Crosse thought it best to focus our attention on areas with known need and increased interest first.

Community gardens policy thoughts viewed through proposed 3 themes:

1. Zoning template language
 - a. "Model Ordinance" > policy recommendation

- b. Permitted use with performance standards (i.e. Petaluma, Berkeley, San Francisco)
 - c. Share with all 11 cities but focus where there is need and strategic opportunity
 - d. Joint use for language (school gardens)
 - e. Look for links with CalFresh
2. Management and support
- a. i.e. Sonoma's Community Garden Network
 - b. keep school gardens in the mix because of
 - i. their need for management support, and
 - ii. opportunities for multiple and outside land use
3. Mapping
- a. Departments with public lands
 - b. Lands not suitable
 - c. Opportunity criteria – already existing on HHS website
 - d. "Marin is smaller" so more known
 - e. Having equal opportunity across all city and county lands
 - f. Relationship with Measure A
 - g. Look for other examples of public lands for food production (Grateful Beds)

The meeting wrapped up just after 5 p.m. with the Council agreeing that the Steering Committee should meet to flesh out the above three Community gardens themes for the Council to work on at the next meeting, and Liza Crosse said she would like to be included in that work. After June's meeting, future meeting topics will likely return to Healthy Access. Chair Janet Brown made the following closing remarks:

"It is not easy to cross boundaries to adopt a whole-systems approach to health. It means leaving the areas we know well and venturing into fields where we have to depend on the expertise of others. It means learning unfamiliar concepts and mastering new tools to engage complexity. It means asking people to take health into account in making decisions that usually depend on other considerations. It may provoke controversy. It may make people we approach uneasy and even angry. It requires patience, imagination, courage, integrity, and a sense of humor."

- Dr. Richard Levins, John Rock Professor of Population Science, Harvard School of Medicine

Next Meeting:

- Set for Tuesday, June 18th, from 3:00 to 5:00 pm at the [HHS campus](#)
- Steering Committee will meet to plan for next meeting with potential topics including: Community Gardens, Return to "access" issues, CX3, HEAL Mini Grant, Sweetened Beverages, School Wellness