

Marin Food Policy Council
Meeting Notes
July 16, 2013
[HHS campus](#)

Next Marin Food Policy Council meeting scheduled for:

Tuesday, August 20th, from 3:00-5:00 p.m. @ [HHS campus](#)

Handouts:

Presentations on CX3 work being done in Marin City and the Canal

Action Items:

Chair Janet Brown welcomed all attendees with the following opening remarks:

“Welcome to Marin Food Policy Council, the place where dreams come true.

In the words of systems thinker and writer, Meg Wheatly, “In order to improve the health of a system, connect it to more of itself.” This connecting function is Marin Food Policy Council’s unique contribution and purpose. As an agent of change, we rely on the testimony, authenticity, and expertise, of our Marin communities to ensure that our policy recommendations remain connected and relevant to the problems we are addressing.

Policy is the way we can all work together to solve common problems in the food system, alleviate food insecurity for our neighbors and ourselves, and attract resources where they will be the most welcome and wisely used.

In Wendell Berry’s essay, “Solving For Pattern”, from his book, *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural & Agricultural* (North Point Press, 1981). the Kentucky farmer and writer examines what he calls three kinds of solutions. The first kind of solution is the solution that causes what he calls a ramifying series of new problems, beyond the ability to solve of the minds who proposed the original solution. His example is when the solution to boosting meat production and profits is an animal confinement operation where certain efficiencies can be achieved.

However, there are significant problems associated with holding concentrated numbers of animals in tight quarters such as declines in herd health, increases in veterinary treatment and use of antibiotics, manure buildup, increase in water and air pollution, etc. Remedies to any of those problems fall outside the narrow expertise of the business advisors who proposed the confinement operation as a money-making solution.

The second kind of solution, he says, is the solution that immediately worsens the problem it was intended to solve. He describes it as, “A hellish symbiosis of problem and solution”, as when the problem is soil compaction, and the solution is to get a bigger tractor.

Then, Berry says, “Perhaps it is not until health is set down as the aim that we come in sight of the third kind of solution: “that which causes a ramifying series of solutions, as when meat animals are fed on the farm where the feed is raised, and where the feed is raised to be fed to the animals that are on the farm. The farmer has put plants and animals into a relationship of mutual dependence, a reciprocating connection in the pattern of the farm that is biological, not industrial, and that leads to a series of solutions to problems of fertility, soil husbandry, economics, sanitation - the whole complex of problems whose proper solutions add up to health: the health of

the soil, of plants and animals, of farm and farmer, of farm family and farm community, all involved in the same interested, interlocking pattern – or pattern of patterns.”

These are the kinds of systemic solutions we strive for when we meet as Marin Food Policy Council— solutions that cause a ramifying series of solutions—that solve more than one problem without creating new ones. The solutions we seek are part of a pattern that takes health into account when making decisions that usually depend on other considerations. Health as an aim is complex enough to force a deeper level of thinking that moves toward the pattern that connects.

Our work on community gardens advocacy and policy is based on a systems approach to solving problems of inequity and inadequacy in the local food system. A quick review of our Community Gardens Policy recommendations will show that we have taken this council’s brilliant input and ideas, borrowed language from recent policy achievements from neighboring communities, elicited feedback from experts such as planners, master gardeners, and policy advisors, and reshaped our recommendations into what we are now referring to as an “advocacy packet.” It is designed to make our recommendations simple and easy for elected officials to understand and adopt. If approved, these policies will lead to the creation of a democratic, accessible, affordable, diverse, and healthful parallel food system within reach of every Marinite.

This kind of approach to problem solving is properly termed radical, in that it goes to root causes of problems, and addresses systemic failure and success at all levels of scale. It seeks to restore decision-making affecting the health of residents to the residents themselves. It recognizes the ability and desire of residents to be, at least in part, self-supporting with regard to their daily diet, if resources and policy align on assisting them to do so. The power and simple logic of this approach drives its acceptance and causes us to identify resources and allies to achieve its promise. “

Review of the document of draft Community Gardens recommendations:

- Sample letter to Mayors of Marin cities
- Resolution related to Community Gardens and Urban Food Systems
- Recommendations for policies and actions supporting home and community gardens
- Recommendations for garden management and support
- Request for the development of an interactive map of community garden sites

A timeline was offered – the Steering Committee will get the document out to the whole Council before the next Council meeting for Council representatives’ review, and hopefully approval at the August meeting. A letter to each mayor of each Marin city will then be sent out.

Presentations regarding specific community needs:

Council representatives and other community members gave presentations on food access issues including community statistics, project updates, needs, constraints, and areas for potential policy recommendations for the following communities:

- Marin City – Terrie Green, June Farmer, and Janice Mapes, CX3 through CSD ~ [presentation](#)
- San Rafael Canal – Erendira Olivas, LIFT-Levantate ~ [presentation](#)
- West Marin – Socorro Romo, West Marin Community Services
- Food pantry sourcing – Sheila Kopf, San Francisco / Marin Food Bank ~ [presentation](#)
- Marin County Health Hubs – Richard Waxman, LIFT-Levantate ~ [presentation](#)

- Breastfeeding Coalition – Susan Martinelli and Gueidi Beltran, WIC ~ [presentation](#)

Council discussion regarding specific community needs:

- Marin City
 - Healthier breakfast, lunch, and snack options for children attending Bayside and Martin Luther King Jr. schools
 - Affordable, accessible grocery store with healthy options
 - Community garden
 - Farmers market
 - Safety
 - Availability of physical activity spaces
- Canal
 - Affordability of healthy foods
 - Safety in walking in the Canal neighborhood
 - Farmers market
 - Healthier school lunches and snacks
 - Variety and quality of healthy foods
 - Promoting healthier options in retail
 - Availability of physical activity spaces
- West Marin
 - Food Pantry needs
 - Dollar value and distance
- Breastfeeding Coalition
 - Draft community support for breastfeeding policy and action statement.
 - Enlist MCFP member agencies and programs to develop breastfeeding support strategies of their own.
 - Draft letter of support for WIC Business-Community Alliance

Council discussion regarding shared themes by community:

- Healthy images and messages (public transportation, convenience store windows, groceries, billboards, posters, ads, pictures, text, "ambiance," etc.)
- Store intervention or training
- Store access
- Safe neighborhood
- Food pantry sourcing
 - Grocery stores
 - Farmers and ranchers
- Aging
- Homeless

Council discussion regarding food pantry committee work:

- Food bank has ramped and is providing food at more sites and serving more individuals since 2008
- Still there remains a higher demand due to the recession

- Desired increase through coordination for sourcing at all levels: independent grocery stores, major grocers, and individual farmers
- The hope is that the Council is the place to develop options and solutions

The meeting wrapped up just after 5 p.m. 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

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