

Food Policy Councils
Linking spuds and government

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Abra Brynne
Director, Engagement & Policy

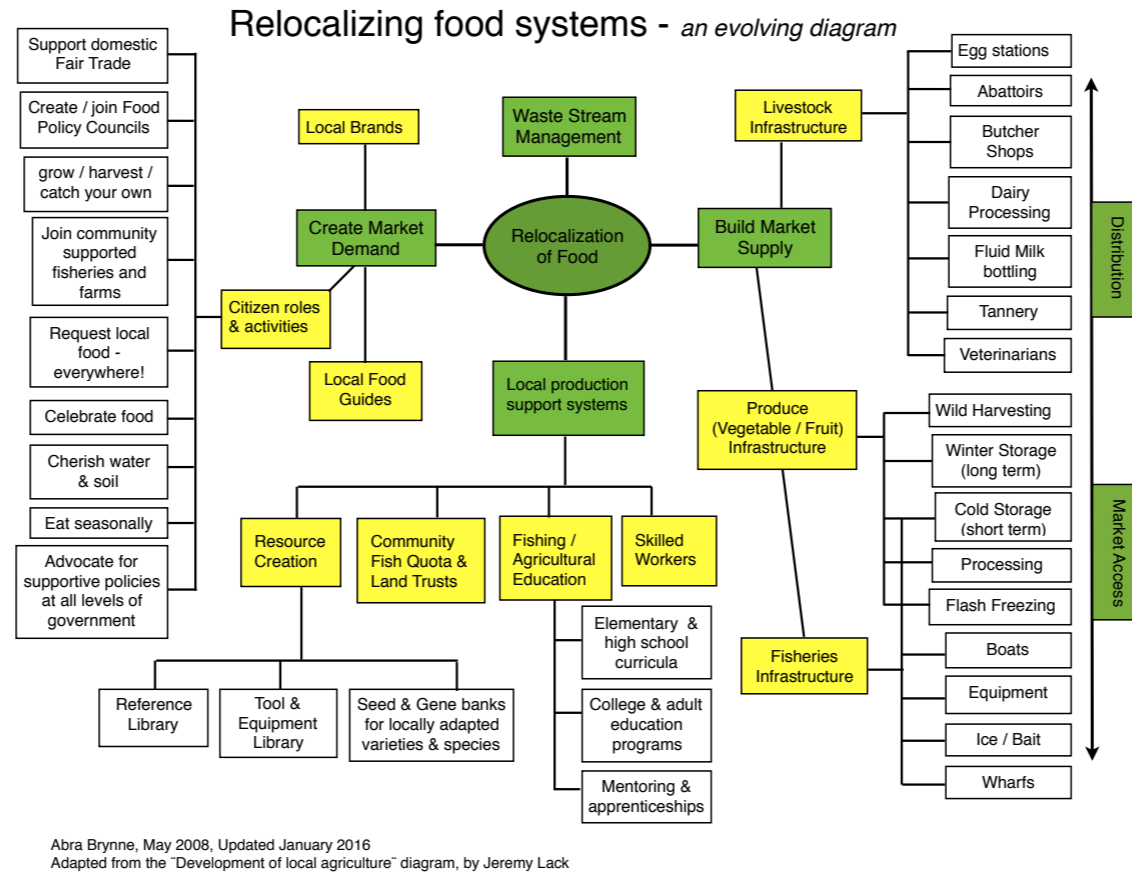


BC Food Systems Network

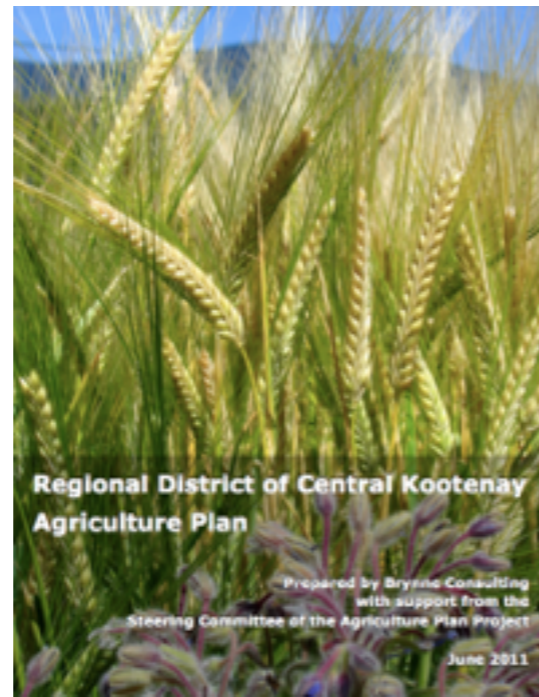
a project on Tides Canada's Shared Platform

Good afternoon, everyone. I am grateful for the opportunity to be a guest in the amazing traditional territory of the Ktunaxa people. I am also delighted by this opportunity to address you since I have lived and worked on food systems in this region for 26 years. Along with my colleagues at the BC Food Systems Network we engage communities across the province in identifying key program and policy interventions that will help to foster a more food resilient province. One such intervention is food policy councils.

Complex systems benefit from strategic interventions



Food systems are complex. If we are talking about Indigenous traditional food systems, it relates more to the provision and sharing of food from hunting, gathering and fishing and various means of preservation. When we are talking about the dominant food system in North America, we mean the deliberate organization of the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food. This organizing can happen at many scales - predominantly now it is at a global scale, but there is also a growing food system that places priority on place - on the provenance of the food and how it was grown or raised. So, as the slide states, food systems are complex and involve many actors and sectors. This very complexity and how tightly food systems are bound by policy and regulation, is part of what fostered the creation of food policy councils. The first food policy council in North America was formed in Knoxville Tennessee in 1982; since then food policy councils tied to various levels of government have developed across the continent. The first Canadian food policy council was in Toronto in 1990. In the late 1990's the American Planning Association began developing materials and training to integrate food into the perspective and activities of professional planners. Across BC, government planners are involved in food systems policy in various capacities.



RDEK Agricultural Plan

October 2014

Submitted By:
WAST Resource Solutions Inc.



One food policy activity in which planners in each of our three regional districts have been involved in recent years is in the creation and implementation of Agricultural Area Plans. As of late 2014, all three RD's now have ag plans that are in various stages of being implemented. In order for them to be implemented, it is necessary to bring political will, expertise and community buy-in to the host of recommendations that are common in Ag plans - this is not always an easy thing. Fostering the conditions and making the connections that help clear the way to implementing the recommendations in an agriculture plan can be part of the work of a food policy council.

“Food Policy consists of the actions *and in-actions* by government that influence the supply, quality, price, production, distribution, and consumption of food. What government doesn’t do, whether by design or neglect, is as much a policy as a specific action like a city regulation that prescribes the location of farmers markets or a state statute that protects farmland.”

Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned
by Alethea Harper and colleagues, 2009
Institute for Food and Development Policy



However, food policy councils and food policy expands much beyond planning for agriculture. I don’t normally read out my slides but this one is worth reinforcing. *Food policy consists of the actions and in-actions by government that influence supply, quality, price, production, distribution and consumption of food. What government doesn’t do, whether by design or neglect, is as much a policy as specific actions.* Those of you in local government are probably very familiar with the fact that both your actions and in-actions have an effect and are noticed by your constituents. Food policy very much falls into that conundrum - in part because it is implicated in zoning, waste management, transportation, business licensing and a host of other realms that are tied to other levels of government.

The role of food policy councils

- a forum to discuss food issues
- a venue to bring diverse actors together
- a platform to evaluate and influence policy
- an opportunity to enhance resources and activities devoted to food systems



Food Policy councils are the way to effectively address, policy and program needs related to food systems because civil society, government, industry and others are working together. It is not always obvious that food systems are implicated in the work and mandate of local government but they are: in transportation policy - how are large vehicles navigating our communities, can the residents in low income neighbourhoods readily access public transit to and from grocery stores; in water quality and access - without reliable water, most agriculture sectors and processors could not survive; in waste management - from production through to household organic waste it must be appropriately and safely disposed off, ideally without undue burden on either the environment or on budgets. And then of course there are all the programs and policies that are put in place to address poverty and hunger in our communities.



This slide represents but a selection of the many non-governmental agriculture & food systems organizations that exist across our three regional districts - and this does not even include the various social service agencies that provide, for example, access to food for those who are hungry. As you can see there are many many organizations working on food systems in some way or other and they commonly share a couple of traits: they have few resources and they rely heavily on volunteers and project funding. A food policy council can provide a coherent, strategic and pro-active vehicle for enhancing the capacity of farmers and food producers as well as the resiliency of the region's food systems and residents. It enables a formal bridge between the many civil society and industry organizations working on food systems in the region and our government. And a food policy council improves the efficacy of food systems work and helps to bring coherence to the many visions for the region.



The challenge for regions like ours is that most food policy councils - all the precedents we can learn from - are based in large municipalities and do not generally encompass a region that includes diverse small communities and rural land activities. But we are not entirely without elders in this endeavour: one such elder is the Puget Sound Region, which has a regional food policy council which was established in 2010 and from which we can learn. They have identified the diverse representation they wish to have on the Council and the key areas on which they focus: agriculture, economic development, education, environment, equity, health, and policy - all as they related to food systems. We have other information sources: the image on this slide is from the cover of a report from 2013 written by Rod MacRae and Kendal Donahue. They provide a useful analysis of the different sorts of food policy councils in Canada and what makes them work or stumble. There is a similar and larger report out of the United States that also shares some great lessons about what makes an effective food policy council.

Establishing a Regional Food Policy Council



And it is great that we can learn from others since I am pleased to be able to report that a partnership between the Regional District of Central Kootenays, Community Futures of Central Kootenay and the BCFSN has resulted in project funding to establish and run a regional food policy council. The project will be launched shortly and we expect the Council to be up and taking its first baby steps within a year. We are grateful for the support of Directors on the RDCK Board, of the local Osprey Foundation, Interior Health's Community Food Action Initiative and of the Real Estate Foundation. It is our intention to gather lessons we learn along the way and share them with our neighbouring regional districts, informally and formally at events like this.

**Thank you for your time
and attention!**

**Abra Brynne
Director, Engagement & Policy
abra@bcfsn.org
ph: 250.352.5342
cell: 250.777.2480
BC Food Systems Network
www.bcfsn.org**



There is much more that can be said about food policy councils but I know that our time is tight and so I will end here but will certainly be available later and throughout the conference should anyone wish to ask more questions or offer advice. Thank you.