

March 2012

What's On Your Plate?



**An on-going community
conversation about the
food system in New
Hampshire's Lakes Region**

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Belknap County Conservation District ▪ Prescott Farm Environmental Education Center
North Country Resource Conservation and Development Area Council

The most current version of this report can be found online at:

www.extension.unh.edu/Counties/Belknap/Belknap.htm

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Food system: All processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption, and disposal of food and food-related items. It also includes the inputs needed and outputs generated at each of these steps. A food system operates within and is influenced by social, political, economic and environmental contexts. It also requires human resources that provide labor, research and education.^{1 2 3}

Overview

In his recent book, *The Real Dirt*, UNH professor John Carroll reveals that New Hampshire only produces 5-6% of the food consumed by its population (compared to 20% each by neighboring Vermont and Maine) – the rest is trucked in from other states and countries⁴. Put another way, if all trucking-in of food to New Hampshire ceased tomorrow, grocery stores would only have enough food available to feed the entire population for a few days!

While there is an appearance of plenty on supermarket shelves, our current food system is, frankly, dangerously insecure. Unfortunately, most of us are unaware of this reality, and assume that we don't need to grow or produce our own food, as we can always just buy it from "somewhere else." In recent decades, the predominant source of food has shifted to supermarkets, restaurants and convenience stores which sell highly processed, nutrition-depleted foods and foods that are grown hundreds or thousands of miles away and trucked in, rather than locally-sourced, farm-based foods.

This is a dramatic departure from the locally-based food systems of New Hampshire's past; from colonial times until the mid-twentieth century small, diverse family farms dotted the landscape. In Belknap county, many of these small farms not only produced food for the families that ran them, but were able to send their surplus to markets in larger nearby cities such as Laconia, or further south to Concord or Manchester. Transportation of food from any farther away was extremely expensive and was limited to non-staple luxuries such as coffee, tea, spices and sugar.

Cheap fossil fuels in the twentieth century brought "progress" which changed how we grow food and made almost any type of food from anywhere in the world available to us on demand. Today we take such convenience and novelty for granted, and the structures and systems which make it possible are largely invisible to us. However, the number and extent of pressures on the food-production systems of the world are increasing every day and there are no guarantees that there will be sufficient food for all. Since our current system relies heavily on fossil fuels, food is likely to become more and more expensive as fossil fuel availability declines. Serious climate changes that affect food production are afoot. Arable land is being lost all over the world, and water is becoming scarcer. Given that we all have to eat, and the reality of our near complete dependence on a global food production system, the insecurity of our food supply should be of more concern to each and every one of us.

¹ Discovering the Food System – A Primer on Community Food Systems: Linking Food, Nutrition and Agriculture.

<http://www.foodsys.cce.cornell.edu/primer.html>

² Ericksen, Polly J. (2006). "Conceptualizing food systems for global environmental change research." Environmental Change Institute, Oxford University Centre for the Environment, Oxford, UK.

³ Maxwell, S. and Rachel Slater. (2003). "Food Policy, Old and New." Development Policy Review, 21 (5-6): 531-553.

⁴ Carroll, John. (2010). *The Real Dirt: Toward Food Sufficiency and Farm Sustainability in New England*. University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH.

These facts are not meant to frighten, but rather to serve as a “wake-up” call to action – we can all play an important role in the solution, simply by making different choices each time we shop for food. Many community and regional solutions are already being implemented; the number of farmers’ markets is increasing and more young people are getting interested in farming, among other positive trends. It is our hope that this report will serve to increase awareness of community food security issues among the citizens of the Lakes Region, as well as generate additional ideas about how we can build greater capacity, resilience and vibrancy in our local food system. The report will also be the basis for additional community conversation events, with the goal of inspiring others to join us in translating these ideas into action.

Background

In July 2010 a group of Lakes Region citizens came together to envision a possible future for the former Laconia State School property, which was once part of a very productive farm. They advocated for the property to return to its agricultural roots, perhaps through the establishment of an agricultural training center to prepare people for jobs in New Hampshire’s \$935 million/year (and growing) agricultural sector. Agriculture is not just farming. It also includes forestry, horticulture, fruit production, fiber production, and tourism.

The group, known as Back to Farming at Laconia State School, gathered information about similar projects and developed supportive rationales for their vision. They became increasingly concerned about the weaknesses in the current food system, and excited by the possibilities inherent in localized food systems. As a result, the group expanded its focus to the larger issues of community food security and localized food systems, while maintaining interest in the future of the State School property.

The average person in the Lakes Region may have little or no awareness of the global issues that affect our food system. While the number of farms is increasing, the Lakes Region is not perceived as an agricultural region, as many of our farms have been converted to housing developments or shopping malls, or left to be reclaimed by the forest. In response, the Back to Farming at Laconia State School group decided to sponsor a community conversation about the local food system. This event was held on September 30, 2011, and was attended by over 30 community members. In the course of the discussion participants identified a wide range of issues and action ideas relative to community food security and the current status of the local food system. For ease of discussion and presentation, these issues have been grouped into the following components:

1. System Change
2. Education & Skill Development
3. Economy
4. Health & Safety
5. Security
6. Affordability & Access
7. Environment & Energy

It should be noted that these components are listed in no particular order, and none is considered more important than another. Furthermore, none of these components exists in isolation – a food system is complex, dynamic and interdependent. As John Muir aptly said, “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” Throughout this report will be examples of overlap between the “topic” areas; ultimately, each is intimately connected to the others.

The following section is a compilation of the results of the community conversation on September 30: it offers a brief narrative summarizing the current status of each of the above components of the food system, opportunities and ideas for improvement, as well as an example of a project in New Hampshire or New England that illustrates a strategy that is being used to address one or more of the issues in each component. Additional resource information for each component is available in Appendix 1.

It is acknowledged that this there are additional issues, resources, ideas, and constituent groups that should be included but did not emerge during this initial event. As the conversation progresses, the report will be revised to reflect the new material.

Issues, Opportunities & Action Ideas and Project Case Studies

1. SYSTEM CHANGE

The number and magnitude of the issues facing our prevailing food system can be overwhelming; we hear about salmonella outbreaks, climate change, non-livable wages, government policies, soil erosion, water scarcity, genetically modified organisms, pesticides, hunger, peak oil and more. The system as it stands is multi-faceted and huge – farms and producers on several continents, multi-billion dollar trans-national corporations, complex trade agreements, multiple modes of transportation, and international politics. We have become so far removed from the sources of our food that it is difficult to understand or know where to start to change it, and in many cases it may seem easier to just ignore the problems altogether.



Urban agriculture: what would NYC look like with all available rooftops converted to food production?⁵

Opportunities & Action Ideas:

- Educate the public on the complexity and importance of our food system.
- Initiate change locally and regionally first – the smaller feedback loops of a local economy can be much more easily identified and understood. Problems can be broken down to manageable pieces over which people have more control at the local level.
- Build strong, resilient communities that can better cooperate to solve problems. As we support and educate each other we will be well on our way to becoming less dependent on the global food system.
- Start Transition Towns initiatives in Lakes Region communities. (See Appendix 1 for more information about Transition Towns.)
- Teach people about Permaculture. This is an ecologically-based systems approach to growing food and living in a less energy and resource dependent manner. Its main ethics are “people care,” “Earth care” and “fair share.”

⁵ www.openideo.com/open/vibrant0cities/inspiration/green-roofs/gallery/green20roofs.jpeg

Example

Monadnock Farm and Community Connection

www.cheshireconservation.org/MFCC

In 2007, the Cheshire County Conservation District received a grant to host community forums and conduct interviews related to market access by local farmers. After two community forums were held, the Monadnock Farm and Community Connection (MFCC) was formed in 2008. A volunteer-run effort, MFCC has conducted additional community forums on local food, hosted such as food-related film festivals and farm appreciation gatherings, created a Farm Education Initiative to connect more youth to local agriculture, held Matchmaker events to connect producers with buyers, and created a Master Farm list of area farms. MFCC was also the driving force behind starting the Monadnock Community Market, Keene's first cooperatively owned grocery store. Their newest initiative is "Monadnock Menus," which aims to get more locally grown food on restaurant menus.

2. EDUCATION & SKILL DEVELOPMENT

We are faced with a general lack of awareness of the problems with our food system. No one walking into a grocery store would think that there was a scarcity of food. The systems that bring us our food have such a hold on our society that they are taken for granted and largely invisible. Most of us live busy lives – stressed by demands of family and work, with little time to think about our dependency on a vulnerable food system.

Secondly, there is a general lack of skills related to food purchasing and preparation. If we couldn't just hop in the car and drive down to the grocery store to pick up something for dinner – or worse, if the grocery store shelves were bare because the delivery trucks didn't show up – how many of us would know what to do? The skills to save seeds, grow, harvest, preserve, safely store and prepare our food have declined in the last several decades as we have become increasingly dependent on packaged/processed convenience foods and restaurants. Many of us were not taught these skills as children. Furthermore, we lack intimate knowledge of the seasons, weather, and soils, knowledge which is necessary for growing healthy food.



Opportunities & Action Ideas:

- Integrate teaching about food systems into school curriculum at all levels, as well as a focus on partnerships with farms to bring local foods into the cafeterias. Teachers and administrators need to see that food education is not only important, but can be used as an interesting and engaging way to teach many other concepts.
- Establish a community kitchen that could teach the arts of cooking seasonally appropriate foods “from scratch” and food preservation: canning, drying, freezing, lacto-fermentation, as well as provide a central shared-use facility for processing/preparation.
- Provide more community education on gardening techniques including season extension (building hot houses, cold frames, high tunnels, etc.) seed saving, harvesting, root cellaring.
- Engage in public awareness campaigns similar to the Victory Garden campaigns during WWII to make gardening and self-reliance desirable.
- Create neighborhood gardening co-operatives – everyone grows a little bit of something and trades.

- Encourage people of all backgrounds and abilities to participate in community gardens to grow food for themselves, as well as gain marketable skills.

Example

The Cornucopia Project

www.cornucopiaproject.org

The Cornucopia Project is a grassroots, non-profit organization that provides school-based and community-based organic gardening opportunities, educating both children and adults about the importance of local, organic foods. The project has facilitated the development of gardens and garden curriculums at five Monadnock region schools, as well as Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center. In 2010 they were granted use of Brooks' Side Farm (a privately owned farm) in Hancock, which has enabled them to provide learning opportunities beyond the classroom setting, both after school and during summer months. Children are involved in growing the food from start to finish, including cooking up the harvested bounty for their school mates.

3. ECONOMY

Currently a large percentage of every dollar we spend on food goes out of state. Strengthening the local food system by creating demand for foods produced in New Hampshire will have positive ripple effects throughout our economy. Unfortunately, many federal and state regulations make it impossible for small producers to compete with larger industrial farms. With slaughterhouses, for example, small local processors lack the volume necessary to make it cost-effective to hire a USDA inspector. Currently there is one USDA slaughterhouse in NH, and many farmers are taking their animals out of state for processing which is a loss to the NH economy.

Furthermore, there is little infrastructure for storing local foods beyond the growing season, which would extend farm sales into the winter months. Surplus crops for which there is no market are left rotting in the fields at the end of the season, rather than contributing to the farm bottom line.



Despite the many challenges, the numbers of small farms, farmers' markets (including winter markets) and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs have been on the rise in New Hampshire in the last 10 years. The newly established Saturday Winter Farmers' Market in Tilton has seen an increase in customers from 1000 to 1500 in just weeks of operation. The more demand for local foods, the more jobs will be created in order to grow, harvest and prepare the food. Local agriculture jobs are rooted in the community, and help keep dollars circulating in the local economy.

Opportunities & Action Ideas:

- Encourage people to buy food directly from farmers, which enables them to keep a higher percentage of the food dollar. Fair compensation for farmers is essential to keeping farms economically viable.
- Encourage restaurants to source foods locally.
- Develop innovative businesses such as shared commercial kitchen facilities to promote new small value-added food businesses.
- Work towards state inspection of meat processing facilities. Expand access to mobile slaughterhouses that can be used by farmers or brought to farms rather than farmers transporting their animals.
- Provide incentives for people to buy food from local producers (coupons, etc) and keep money within the community.

Example

Mad River Food Hub

www.madriverfoodhub.com

The Mad River Food Hub is a fully-equipped and licensed vegetable and meat processing facility. Processing rooms can be rented by the day, and dry, refrigerated, and frozen food storage options are available. The facility offers weekly food distribution services to retail markets in the area, including Montpelier and Burlington. Designed for the small-scale food producer, the staff of the Mad River Food Hub assist with business planning and HACCP (Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Plan) development. The facility offers an affordable, flexible option that enables small-scale food producers to build their businesses one step at a time, greatly improving their chances for long-term viability. In doing so, it creates jobs and strengthens the local economy one small business at a time.

4. HEALTH & SAFETY

The standard American diet of oversized portions of processed, pesticide-laden, nutrient-depleted “food-like products” (as author Michael Pollan would say)⁶ is making people sick. As a result of poor eating habits, the rates of obesity, diabetes, cancers, asthma, and learning and behavioral disorders are all on the rise. For instance, in 2008 65.7% of Belknap County adults were determined to be overweight or obese compared to 63.1% in NH⁷. Moreover, Belknap County has a high percentage of WIC-enrolled children that are overweight (17.9%) and obese (18.9%)⁸. It is apparent that, for a number of possible reasons, many people no longer make healthy life choices that reduce the prevalence and risk of the previously mentioned diseases.



The typical citizen is inundated by advertising (including TV, print, coupons, and internet) from corporations that care more about making money than about human health. For instance, we are told that it is healthier to feed babies formula than breast milk and doctors routinely prescribe pharmaceuticals rather than healthy food for our ailments. Additionally, many of us lack daily physical activity and exercise to sustain healthy bodies and minds—yet common treatments for overweight and obesity are to consume pharmaceuticals, diet foods, and even to surgically remove excess fat.

Home economics and food education have been cut from school curricula and many consider home cooking to be recreational and for special occasions, at best. People crave highly processed, addicting convenience foods that have been transported from faraway using fossil fuels that are expensive and pollute our air. Factory farms over-rely on antibiotics, which is leading to the emergence of “super-bugs” that are resistant to the antibiotics used to treat numerous infections in humans. To quote another farmer/author, Joel Salatin, “Folks, this ain’t normal!”⁹

Low-income families are most vulnerable to diet-related health issues (and as the income gap grows, more and more people are at risk). There is a common misconception that it is expensive and time consuming to buy fresh, local, wholesome food than it is to swing through the drive-through for a quick meal. It is difficult to convince people, who have no experience cooking fresh foods, of the importance of changing their diet—for both health and economic reasons. Additionally, food assistance programs in New Hampshire rarely focus on local foods or healthy diets.

Furthermore, the health effects of large corporations’ practices such as genetic modification to produce super-plants or herbicide resistant plants are not well-researched, such that we are all part of a large uncontrolled experiment without our knowledge or consent.

⁶ Pollan, Michael. (2008). *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.

⁷ NH Obesity Databook 2010. <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/DPHS/nhp/documents/obesity2010.pdf> (pg. 16)

⁸ NH Obesity Databook 2010. <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/DPHS/nhp/documents/obesity2010.pdf> (pg. 28)

⁹ Salatin, Joel. (2011). *Folks, This Ain’t Normal: A Farmer’s Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World*. New York, NY: Center Street Publishers

Opportunities & Action Ideas:

- Provide incentives to buy local produce (such as coupons).
- Encourage eating local foods which tend to be fresher and more nutritious.
- Teach nutrition (including portion control, healthy shopping habits) across all grade levels as part of comprehensive food system education.
- Serve healthier foods in schools (from local farms or community gardens) – studies show that students will perform better.
- Increase the amount of physical education time in the schools.
- Support programs such as family nutrition clinics.

Example

Wholesome Wave Fruit & Veggie Rx Program

www.wholesomewave.org/fvrx

The Fruit & Veggie Prescription Program, also known as Fruit & Veggie Rx, is one of three initiatives of Wholesome Waves Nourishing Neighborhoods program. The program aims to provide under-served communities with fresh fruits and vegetables by allowing consumers to exchange healthcare provider-generated “prescriptions” for local fresh fruit and vegetables at participating, local farmers markets. The idea is that if it is “what the doctor ordered” families are more likely to follow through, and increase their children's consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Three Massachusetts health centers are giving low-income families coupons toward the purchase of fresh produce, which are redeemable at local farmers’ markets. The coupons are valued at \$1 per day per family member. The program was recently featured in the New York Times.¹⁰

¹⁰ www.nytimes.com/2010/08/13/business/13veggies.html?pagewanted=2

5. SECURITY

It is difficult to discuss the reality of food security without creating panic in society at large. As mentioned at the very beginning of this report, fewer than three days of food is available at any given point in our grocery stores. Trucks pull in daily with just-in-time delivery to keep them stocked, but with food being transported from so far away, this system is quite precarious.

In New Hampshire, we lack the infrastructure to store local foods for longer periods, especially over the winter when we are not growing as much. Season extension in the form of high tunnels and greenhouses would help us grow more year-round, but again, there is little existing infrastructure for that.

The size of the current food system poses many hazards for food security for both humans and animals. The more steps in the chain from planting to consumption, the more opportunities there are for disruption from a variety of sources – lack of fuel, politics, terrorism, etc.

The practices of large agribusiness corporations affect our food security as well. As small seed companies are bought out by the mega-corporations, the diversity of the seed stock is decreased. Over-reliance on one or two varieties can lead to crop failures and food shortages, such as occurred during the Irish Potato Famine. More recent crop failures have involved staple grains such as wheat and rice, resulting in higher prices for us and starving people across the globe.

Nationally, the number of farmers has been steadily decreasing over the past several decades. The average age of farmers is estimated to be 57¹¹, and farming is no longer listed as an occupation on the US Census. Many farmers are barely breaking even, while others are watching their family farms fall to foreclosure. Here in NH we have a few large farms, but more small farms providing only a portion of a family's income. Distribution and market access are barriers to the expansion of production and sales for local farmers.

Opportunities & Action Ideas:

- Conduct public awareness campaigns about global food insecurity and alternative local options.
- Encourage gardeners and farmers to use more open-pollinated heirloom seeds and learn to save seeds.
- Utilize season extension for more locally grown food (greenhouses, high tunnels, etc.).



¹¹ www.epa.gov/agriculture/ag101/demographics.html
www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2002/Other_Analysis

- Build capacity for storage/preservation (winter gardens, root cellars, freezing, canning, dehydrating, etc.)
- Establish community/regional small-scale processing facilities.

Example

Wendell, MA – A Community Effort

www.wendellmass.us/index.php/community/wendell-local-food-project.html

Wendell, MA is a town of 850 people, with an aging population, 1/3 of the population accessing the local food bank, and very little arable land. Yet this small town has made a commitment to bolster their food security, even voting to dedicate \$5000 a year to hire a food system coordinator for the town. In a few short years, they have amassed an impressive list of accomplishments:

- 80% of their residents are producing food on some scale
- Commercial compost operation
- Community garden on town-owned land
- Two gardens dedicated to growing food for the food pantry
- A medicinal Community Supported Agriculture program
- A volunteer seed-saving coordinator and a local seed bank
- Annual plant swap
- Numerous workshops related to food-production and preservation
- Farmers share and co-own equipment
- Gardener support group and resource people for new gardeners
- Landlink program to connect farmers with owners of under-utilized farmland
- Local farmers market with a booth for food sales on consignment
- Plans for a cooperative farmstand
- Wendell homesteading project, to help with skill development including work with students to get academic credits for their participation

6. AFFORDABILITY & ACCESS

While the Lakes Region promotes itself as an upscale vacation destination, Laconia has some of the highest poverty rates in the state, along with a high number of children who are eligible for free and reduced school meals. Not every member of our community has access to sufficient quantities of healthy and/or local food. With rising fuel costs, the price of food will continue to climb and more people will fall into the category of “food insecure.”

Locally-produced food is sometimes more expensive because small farms are not subsidized by the government. Large corporations can more easily afford to offer coupons as a means of marketing their processed foods. Few if any coupons are available for non-branded fresh produce or whole foods. Most farmers’ markets do not have the means to process EBT transactions for SNAP (food stamp) recipients, limiting participation by people with low incomes. In New Hampshire, families participating in the WIC (Women, Infant & Children) nutrition program used to receive coupons redeemable at farmers’ markets, but that program has been discontinued.



Food pantries and soup kitchens that serve low-income residents have a hard time finding donations of fresh food, and many are not equipped to use it. Lack of adequate storage for fresh produce was recently mentioned as one reason the “Got Lunch” program cannot provide more fresh fruits and vegetables to the children they serve.

Access to animal feed is also of concern. Most grains that are fed to livestock in New Hampshire today are not locally produced and are subject to the same pressures as grain grown for human consumption.

Finally, there is a great deal of waste in our current food system. Blemished food or food that is just past its expiration date could be given away to food pantries or used to feed animals, but is often discarded, adding to municipal waste management costs.

Opportunities & Action Ideas:

- Establish more community gardens in neighborhoods. Make school, church, community center, and municipal building lawns available for growing food. Assist people in need to grow food for themselves.
- Work to help food pantries expand their capacity to take and work with fresh produce.
- Create coupons for fresh local foods.

- Subsidize Community Supported Agriculture shares for people with low-incomes.
- Expand the number of farmers' markets that accept EBT cards from SNAP recipients.
- Work to "close the loop" regarding food waste through redistribution, livestock feed and composting programs.
- Offer free or very low cost gardening classes through local adult education programs.
- Establish community/regional small-scale processing facilities.
- Encourage co-operative farming/gardening work-exchange projects.

Examples

Seacoast Eat Local

www.seacoateatlocal.org

Seacoast Eat Local has implemented a system which allows foodstamp/SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) to be used at the winter farmers' market. SNAP customers swipe their EBT cards at the market info booth, and receive tokens that they can spend with approved vendors. This project has provided access to wholesome foods to people of all incomes. Debit card customers can also purchase tokens to be used with all vendors. For more information, e-mail snap@seacoateatlocal.org. Partial funding for this project provided by the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation.

Double-Up Food Bucks

www.doubleupfoodbucks.org/how-it-works

Taking it one step further is Michigan's Double Up Food Bucks program, offered at participating farmer's markets. When a person eligible for SNAP uses his or her SNAP Bridge Card to shop for food at a farmers' market, the amount of money that he or she spends is matched with Double-Up Food Bucks bonus tokens. The tokens can then be exchanged for Michigan-grown fruits and vegetables.

7. ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

What we choose to eat and how it is grown has a huge impact on the health of our environment. Large-scale industrial farming can destroy healthy soil ecology and as a consequence require on-going application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. These chemicals, many of which are derived from fossil fuels, end up running off farmland and into water supplies, and enter our bodies when the food is consumed. The scale of such operations requires a great deal of energy in the form of fossil-fuel powered machinery for every step of the growing process from planting to harvesting, processing to packaging and finally transportation from the farm to the consumer. Such complex operations also produce a great deal of waste, creating a problem that must be dealt with at each step.

As silly as it may seem, apples grown in New Hampshire are shipped to other states and apples from other states and countries are shipped to New Hampshire. Our food production system is so inefficient that some estimates indicate more calories of energy go into producing our food than the food itself provides.

Even food that is labeled “organic” or “natural” has its issues – it may have been grown abroad, thus requiring immense amounts of energy to transport it to New Hampshire or grown using destructive industrial methods. Furthermore, the rules governing the labeling of products as “organic” and “free-range” have been relaxed to allow large corporations to use them as a marketing tool, and may not always mean what consumers think they mean. Overhead costs related to organic certification can be cost-prohibitive to many small producers.

In New Hampshire, economic pressures and our increased dependence on the global food system have led to commercial and residential development on much of our prime agricultural land. For example, according to the 2007 USDA Agriculture Census, Belknap County has the lowest number of acres in farmland of all NH counties¹². At the same time, the number of farms in the county is on the rise, though the new farms tend to be smaller and focused on specialty crops rather than commodity crops such as grains or dairy.



Smaller-scale farms using sustainable practices preserve open space and contribute to healthy soils, water and air. Home gardening further reduces our dependence on the global food system and re-connects us to the natural processes on which we depend.

¹² www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/County_Profiles/New_Hampshire/cp33001.pdf

Opportunities & Action Ideas:

- Match young farmers with land/land owners. More incentives should be available to help young farmers get access to land. Establish farm incubator programs to help new farmers get off to a successful start.
- Promote Front-Yard gardening/Victory Gardens/container gardening. Bring food production out front and center!
- Support urban agriculture. While there are limited opportunities for large-scale farms within the city limits of Laconia because of commercial and residential development, there are opportunities for smaller, innovative urban projects. There are many opportunities for people living in urban/suburban areas to produce significant amounts of their own food.
- Encourage backyard beekeeping. Bees are important to pollination and have a delicious yield – honey!
- Make underutilized state, county and municipal land available to community gardens.
- Reduce waste. Growing food and buying in bulk means buying less packaging.
- Expand composting to include food waste. Composting takes care of organic wastes and reduces the need for energy to send these valuable nutrients away and/or the need to supplement with chemicals.
- Work with municipal leaders to pass local ordinances that support food production (chickens, etc.) and eliminate ordinances that are a barrier.
- Experiment with growing staples such as grains, rice, nuts, and other nutrient-dense foods that might not be as familiar, but are well suited to New England's climate (rather than just annual veggies).
- Encourage people to eat minimally processed whole foods while reducing consumption of factory-farmed meat and dairy.
- Focus on local small-scale grass-fed meat production to save energy used to raise grain-fed factory-farmed meat. NH's landscape and soils are especially well-suited to grazing animals.
- Buy local food whenever possible, which has not been transported from distant places.
- Expand the use of alternative energy sources for farm equipment and season extension.
- Investigate simple ways to extend the growing season such as high tunnels, small hoop houses and cold frames.

Example

Grow Food Northampton

www.growfoodnorthampton.com

In Northampton, MA, collaboration and willingness to think outside the box led to the conservation of open space and creation of a community farm, while meeting the city's needs for more recreation fields. With assistance from the Trust for Public Land, two local farms consisting of some prime agricultural soils, were purchased with a combination of public and private funds. Sixty acres were purchased outright by the city for ballfields and to extend the Mill River Greenway, which left 120 acres for agriculture. Lilly Lombard, one of the local food advocates (they call themselves "the eaters") envisioned a space where agriculture, conservation, social justice, and history would all come together. As a result, Grow Food Northampton was born – a non-profit organization that eventually became the owners of the available farmland. They are leasing the land to local farmers, as well as to the city for a 400 plot community garden. Their goals include encouraging gardeners and farmers to engage in closed-loop, regenerative practices that create healthy outcomes for the people and land in their community.

Conclusion

The current threats to community food safety and security are real and pressing—especially in the Lakes Region and New Hampshire in general. Here, there is a large population of overweight and obese people, the majority of our food comes from abroad, and many people lack the information necessary to make healthy choices. Moreover, given the current economic and ecological climates, it seems reasonable to expand the capacity of the local food system by producing more food (both on farms and at home), increasing education about food storage and preservation, and to implementing alternative technologies that increase energy efficiencies.

Despite challenging circumstances, communities all across New England are addressing these problems by changing their thinking and behaviors—one small step at a time. We can follow in these footsteps and take advantage of developing networks to create positive changes in our local food system. Small changes can lead to large gains—every stride counts and each of us can play a pivotal role in the process of making the Lakes Region a more sustainable and healthy community.

As previously stated, this report is preliminary at best, and much more work needs to be done to gain a more complete picture of the Lakes Region food system and its possibilities. We hope the information, ideas, and examples included in this report will inspire others to join in the growing and ongoing effort to create a stronger, healthier local food system for all.

Appendix 1 – Additional Resources

System Change

Transition Town Movement

www.transitionus.org ▪ www.transitionnh.ning.com ▪ www.keenetransition.wordpress.com

“The Transition Movement is a vibrant, grassroots movement that seeks to build community resilience in the face of such challenges as peak oil, climate change and economic crisis. It represents one of the most promising ways of engaging people in strengthening their communities against the effects of these challenges, resulting in a life that is more abundant, fulfilling, equitable and socially connected.”

Re.Root.Ed - Dover, NH

www.rerooted.org

“We devote our time and resources to bring naturally bright, tasty, barely processed food the table through collaborative projects for research aggregation, to help our farmers, fishermen, producers, food service professionals; funding assistance for area food nonprofits; and education to all in between. We are working hard to help create better access to local food for all, align with the current efforts to encourage a strong local economic stability, and prepare our food system to mitigate the continuing challenges of climate change, population growth, economic recession, and community health.”

Monadnock Locavore Project

www.facebook.com/MonadnockLocavore

“Inspiring you to contribute to our local food & farm system in diverse ways by attending workshops, eating more local foods, supporting local farms, and growing and processing some food of your own.”

Seacoast Eat Local - NH

www.seacoateatlocal.org

“Seacoast Eat Local connects people with sources of locally grown foods and advocates eating locally for the health of our environment, community, culture and economy. Through advocacy, organizing and education, we work toward a sustainable local food system that meets the needs of both producers and consumers. We organize winter farmers’ markets, co-produce Seacoast Harvest, sponsor workshops and events, and provide information through our e-mail newsletter, blog and website.”

Slow Food Seacoast - NH

www.slowfoodseacoast.org

“Together, the volunteers of Slow Food Seacoast host events that focus on education and celebration. We seek to learn how food is produced and prepared by skilled farmers, artisans, and chefs, and what we can do to support farmers and their land, and how to appreciate fresh, seasonal and local food. With our celebrations, we seek to bring together people of all ages and backgrounds to share the community table. We host monthly potlucks which are open to all at no charge, and events small and large such as our summer Farm Picnic, autumn 100-mile Thanksgiving feast, and talks and tours throughout the year.”

Education & Skill Development

Central NH Permaculture Meetup

www.meetup.com/Central-New-Hampshire-Permaculture-Group

"The Central NH Permaculture Meetup is dedicated to creating real, face-to-face community, as well as an online calendar of events and permaculture information and discussions."

D Acres Organic Permaculture Farm & Educational Homestead - Dorchester, NH

www.dacres.org

"The mission of D Acres is to function as an educational center that researches, applies and teaches skills of sustainable living and small-scale organic farming." D Acres also has a partnership with Hannaford Supermarket to take non-sellable produce and distribute it first to food pantries – if not suited for human consumption they feed it to their livestock or compost it.

UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE)

www.extension.unh.edu

"UNHCE provides New Hampshire's citizens with research-based education and information, enhancing their ability to make informed decisions that strengthen youth, families, and communities, sustain natural resources and improve the economy."

NH Farm to School (NHFTS)

www.nhfarmtoschool.org

"NHFTS is a statewide program working to connect New Hampshire farms and schools. NHFTS connections enable schools to serve healthy, locally grown foods in their cafeterias, integrate farms, food and nutrition into their curriculum, and explore food and agriculture-based learning opportunities."

NH Agriculture in the Classroom

www.nhagintheclass.org

"Our mission is to use agriculture as a vehicle to teach science in order to increase awareness and knowledge in youth of farming practices, to foster their appreciation for our agrarian heritage and rural lifestyle and to encourage them to be responsible stewards of our land."

Prescott Farm Environmental Education Center (PFEEC) – Laconia, NH

www.prescottfarm.org

"Through preservation and education, Prescott Farm celebrates the connections between our community and the natural systems which sustain us all." Prescott Farm offers a variety of programs for all ages on connecting with the natural world through exploration, gardening, traditional skills and more.

South End Community Gardening Club/Capital City Organic Gardeners – Concord

www.ccognh.org

"The mission of CCOG is to collectively share, learn and teach organic gardening methods, encouraging busy members of our community to grow healthy food and reduce their environmental impact. This group covers all ages and levels of interest/expertise, from children who can help pulling weeds to adults; from 'container' gardens to backyard gardeners to folks who have plots in community gardens."

Economy

NH Farm to Restaurant Connection (NHFRC)

www.nhfarmtorestaurant.org

The NHFRC's mission is to "enhance the viability of NH's farms, maintain our rural heritage and open spaces, to help protect the environment and sustain local economies through promotion of our agricultural products and education of the public on the importance of local food security." NHFRC has started a certification program which rates restaurants on the amount of locally sourced foods that they incorporate into their menus, and also holds frequent "growers dinners" to highlight local farms. In 2011, NHFRC hosted grower's dinners at Lakes Region General Hospital's Franklin campus and at Longhaul Farm in Holderness.

Neighbor Made Commercial Kitchen – Keene, NH

www.neighbormade.com

"One of the biggest obstacles to starting a food business is the high cost of opening a commercial kitchen. Neighbor Made is here to help with our fully equipped, commercially licensed, shared-use kitchen in Keene's Railroad Square district. We've taken the expense, administrative and financial burden of opening and operating a commercial kitchen and reduced it to an hourly rate on which to base your new or growing specialty food business. We'll help you build your business, on an as-needed basis with lower risk and start-up costs."

Small & Beginner Farmers of New Hampshire (SBFNH)

www.beginnerfarmers.org

"SBFNH is a farmer to farmer network with the goals of connecting farmers and the community, sharing ideas and information, and accessing technical assistance and agricultural education. Our collaborative efforts help small and beginner farmers achieve their goals, strengthen their communities, boost the agricultural industry and economy and improve the quality of life in New Hampshire."

Be Local Concord – Concord, NH

www.belocalconcord.com

"Be Local Concord is an initiative of Main Street Concord, whose mission is to promote and enhance the business environment, cultural activities, housing and appearance of historic downtown Concord."

NH Made

www.nhmade.com

"The mission of NH Made is to strengthen New Hampshire's state economy by increasing the awareness and demand for New Hampshire-made products and services and providing the support programs local businesses need to grow."

Hannah Grimes Center

www.hannahgrimes.com

"Hannah Grimes Center is a 501(c)3 with a mission to educate entrepreneurs that is rooted in the vision that the success of these entrepreneurs results in a thriving local economy and vibrant community built upon our region's heritage, culture, natural resources, and the entrepreneurial spirit of its people. Hannah Grimes is an essential hub in developing an innovative, creative, civic-minded network of entrepreneurs deeply committed to their community."

BerkShares

www.berkshares.org

"BerkShares are a local currency for the Berkshire region of Massachusetts....Berkshares are a tool for community empowerment, enabling merchants and consumers to plant the seeds for an alternative economic future for their communities..."

Health**Healthy Eating/Active Living (HEAL)**

www.healnh.org

"HEAL is a collaborative effort of philanthropic organizations, state agencies, and community partnerships concerned about the rising obesity epidemic and its consequences. HEAL aims to foster implementation of healthy eating and active living interventions through a statewide infrastructure at the local community level across five sectors – schools, worksites, health care settings, food outlets, and cities/towns. The focus is on interventions that affect policy and environmental changes that result in a demonstrable impact on health and quality of life for New Hampshire residents."

Two Angry Moms - Connecticut

www.angrymoms.org

"Angrymoms.org aims to collect two million moms (and dads and others) to send a clear message to school administrators, state and national legislators, and government officials acknowledging the connection between whole, nutritious food and better children's health and scholastic performance. There is a crisis of obesity, type II diabetes, asthma, learning, behavioral and emotional disorders among America's children. Angrymoms.org seeks to establish an imperative for taking better care of our kids by offering better food in schools and cleaning up the school environment. We advocate for making the school food environment a district-wide and nationwide priority."

Security**Intervale Food Hub - Vermont**

www.intervalefoodhub.com

"The Food Hub is a collaboration between the Intervale Center and local farmers. It began as a research project...in 2007. The goal was to identify the existing barriers and opportunities to increasing local food production and consumption and find appropriate solutions for moving local food forward in Chittenden County."

NH Farmers' Market Association (NHFMA)

www.nhfma.org

"The mission of the NHFMA is to educate the general public on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle acquired through locally grown agricultural products. We are dedicated to helping consumers understand the economic, social and ecological benefits of this lifestyle for themselves as well as for local farmers, growers and producers. The association seeks to educate local producers on best management practices and common operating procedures through a variety of means including workshops, seminars and multi-media. The NHFMA will work to provide the educational assistance, support and training that local producers need to provide healthy food in an ecologically sound manner."

Affordability & Access

“Voices from the Field: Perspectives on Food System Access” (Video)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=igb2VHAtx5M&lr=1&feature=mhum

Explores food insecurity through those directly experiencing it. This documentary film captures the hardship and resilience of those who have been unable to consistently access fair, affordable and nutritious food. This film was made and produced by Food Solutions New England and the University of New Hampshire (2011).

Gaining Ground Farm – Concord, MA

www.gainingground.org

Gaining ground employs one farmer, but the bulk of the work is done by volunteers of all ages and abilities. The food that is grown is given away for free to people who need it as well as food pantries and soup kitchens – many of those people work at the farm as volunteers. Money to operate is largely from individual donations, grants and fundraising events.

Farm Share/NOFA Vermont

www.nofavt.org/programs/farm-share

“NOFA Vermont’s Farm Share Program assists low-income Vermonters in obtaining farm fresh foods. Farm share participants receive partially subsidized shares [made possible from donations from the community] from CSA farms. Each year, the Farm Share Program assists over 1,400 individuals participating in CSA programs.”

SNAP Gardens

www.snapgardens.org

Promotes the use of SNAP/EBT benefits to buy food producing plants – one of the allowable uses under the law.

The Food Project – Lincoln, MA

www.thefoodproject.org

“Our mission is to grow a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system. We produce healthy food for residents of the city and suburbs and provide youth leadership opportunities....we grow nearly ¼ million pounds of food without chemical pesticides donating thousands of pounds to local shelters. We sell the remainder of our produce through CSAs and farmers’ markets.”

NH Food Bank

www.nhfoodbank.org

“The mission of the New Hampshire Food Bank is to feed hungry people by soliciting and effectively distributing grocery products, perishable foods, and services through a statewide network of approved agencies; by advocating for systemic changes; and by educating the public about the nature of, and solutions to, problems of hunger in NH.” The Food Bank offers programs in culinary training and safe food handling,

Environment & Energy

Northeast Organic Farmers Association - New Hampshire (NOFA-NH)

www.nofanh.org

“NOFA-NH recognizes that farmers, gardeners, and consumers of organic products share a “community of interests,” a common need to grow and consume safe, healthy, nutritious, great-tasting food and a common interest in preserving a healthy environment that nurtures all of us. In an age of industrial agriculture we’re working to re-establish a shared sense of pride and participation in a community-based food

system that links local farmers with local consumers, and rewards them both equally.”

Belknap County Conservation District (BCCD)

www.belknapccd.org

“BCCD promotes conservation practices in the community by assisting farmers, landowners, and municipalities with improvement of agriculture; conservation of soil, water quality, and natural resources; and nutrient management activities. BCCD oversees garden plots on the state owned land along North Main Street on Lake Opechee. Plots are available to residents of Belknap County to plant and cultivate vegetables for their own use. In addition, BCCD utilizes a solar powered system to help provide water for irrigation purposes.”

Land For Good - Keene, NH

www.landforgood.org

“Land for Good offers unique programs and services to keep New England's working lands working. We provide direct services to individual, families, organizations and units of government to help them acquire or plan for working lands. We conduct public education and professional training activities. We act as catalysts, collaborating with other service providers to strengthen service networks, build awareness, and foster supportive public policies.”

NH Institute of Agriculture & Forestry (NHIAF)

www.nhiaf.org

“NHIAF specifically serves the agriculture and forestry industries of New Hampshire, where high land prices and other start-up costs make for an uphill climb for the aspiring farmer or forester. Our programs are similar to agricultural incubators in other areas of the country, with the exception that NHIAF will be the first to operate on 100% renewable energy. Aspiring farmers and foresters compete for the opportunity to join us at our large farm, which we subdivide into 2-5 acre resident farms. These farmers receive extensive consultation from business planning through harvesting and selling their products. They also receive supplies, tools, starter livestock, etc. and share larger equipment with their fellow resident farmers. The incubator farmers own 100% of their operations and lease the land at low or no cost, depending on need. When they have developed their ventures to a level where they can thrive on their own, NHIAF assist farmers in transitioning to their own permanent farm locations.”

New England Small Farm Institute

www.smallfarm.org

“Our mission is to promote small farm development by providing information and training for aspiring, beginning and transitioning farmers. We maintain an extensive resource collection; produce publications; develop and offer innovative, farmer-guided programs; and advocate for policies that encourage sustainable small-scale agriculture. We seek collaborative program-delivery partnerships with service providers-associates, on-farm mentors, organizations and agencies-throughout the Northeast and nationwide.”

Plymouth Area Renewable Energy Initiative (PAREI)

www.plymouthenergy.org

“PAREI's mission is to encourage energy conservation and energy efficiency practices and to promote the use of renewable energy in the Plymouth, NH region. This is done through education, community building, increasing accessibility to professional energy-related services and by developing and sharing our model with other communities. The initiative takes a pragmatic approach by encouraging people to prepare for their energy future as they would their financial future.”