REGIONAL IS RELATIVE

CITIZENS’ PERSPECTIVES ON REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

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OBJECTIVES

1. Overview of research project- Anne
2. Topline results from the 8 focus groups – Ryan & Phil
3. Break into small groups - Carol
4. Report back - You
ENHANCING THE FOOD SECURITY OF UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS IN THE NORTHEAST U.S. THROUGH SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS (EFSNE)

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INTRODUCTION

• **Basic question:** Can regional supply chains provide “healthy” foods to low-income consumers, at a price they can afford?

• Hypothesis of underlying *market failure*
WHY A FOCUS ON REGIONAL?

- We want the scales to interact with each other so we can build a more resilient infrastructure.

- Geography and the potential for developing appropriately scaled and differentiated supply chains support the idea of studying a regional food system.

- Goal: Increase the amount of food, not to make regions self-sufficient.
DEFINITION OF REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

• For our particular research project, the region is defined as food that is actually grown and processed in the Northeast United States.

• Includes the Eastern states from Maryland and West Virginia at the southern end on up to Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.
FOCUS GROUPS

• Baltimore
  • African-American
  • Hispanic (Central America)

• Boston
  • Puerto Rican
  • African-American

• Delaware
  • Caucasian

• Vermont
  • Bhutanese/Nepalese/Indian
  • Caucasian
FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS
N=53

• Female: 80%

• Average age: 55

• Education
  • Elementary or some high school: 31%
  • High school graduate: 27%
  • Vocational/technical school or some college: 21%
  • 4-year college degree: 21%

• Benefit Participation: 55%

• Diet-Related Disease: 33%
TOPLINE RESULTS
WHAT REGION YOU ARE FROM?

- **City**: “Southwest Baltimore”
- **State**: “Lower Slower Delaware” or “Eastern Shore”
- **Tri-state**: “Delmarva Peninsula”
- **Multi-state**: “Mid-Atlantic” or “New England”
- **Larger**: “East”, “Northeast” and “as far away as Florida”
IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU FEEL CONNECTED TO YOUR REGION?

• **Food**: Crabs, scrapple, apples, maple syrup, fiddleheads

• **Place of origin**: Mexico, Colombia

• **Weather/climate**: Four seasons, cold

• **Cultural connections**: Festivals, shared culture among refugees

• **Farming**: Raising chickens, farming with other refugees

• **Children/family/friends**
DOES IT MATTER TO YOU WHERE YOUR FOOD COMES FROM & WHY?

- Doesn’t matter/not important
- Food safety
- Freshness/quality
- Variety
- Culturally important
- Price
- Availability
- Convenience
- Support farmers from both the U.S. and the area
- Social connections, exercise, trust
PERCEPTIONS OF GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM

• Good variety
• Culturally appropriate – (e.g. chicken feet)
• Important to supplement U.S. growing season
• International trade helps create jobs in other countries
• More markets for US farmers
• Safer because of inspections/Safer if from U.S.
• Local should be cheaper
BENEFITS OF REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

• Circulates money in the regional economy
• Increases variety available – culturally appropriate
• Supports farmland preservation
• More employment opportunities
• Increases self-sufficiency
• Healthier – fewer chemicals and more nutritious
• Transportation – should be cheaper but it’s not
DRAWBACKS OF REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

• Seasonality

• Weather related availability

• Lack of variety

• Too expensive – (e.g. energy costs in cold weather)

• Not enough capacity to supply all food

• Difficult to determine origin
CONCLUSIONS

• Wide variations in the scale and associations participants have when conceiving of their region

• Several factors that weigh in the importance of food source.

• From a practical perspective the Northeast region is a diverse and complex food environment creating challenges for developing programs, policies and research.
DISCUSSION
DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

• Is it better to focus on already existing associations with regions (i.e. bio-regions, watersheds, etc.)?

• Or should we start from scratch?

• What do you gain? What do you lose?
DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

• In your experience what aspects of a regional food system most resonate with your constituents?

• Are these useful for the general public? Do we need to get general public buy-in or can we operate at a different level?

• What is the ideal level of public engagement? Can it happen in the absence of public support?
DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

• Which messages can best be used to promote regional? Economic benefits? Cultural connections?

• How would you prioritize the benefits?

• What role can regional food systems play in natural disaster preparedness, climate change, resource depletion, etc?
DISCUSSION QUESTION #4

• Are there any benefits and barriers that you think of organizationally or politically, that may be inhibiting regional food systems?
  • State-level procurement policies?
  • Local-level plans?

• How can those be changed or used to benefit regional systems?