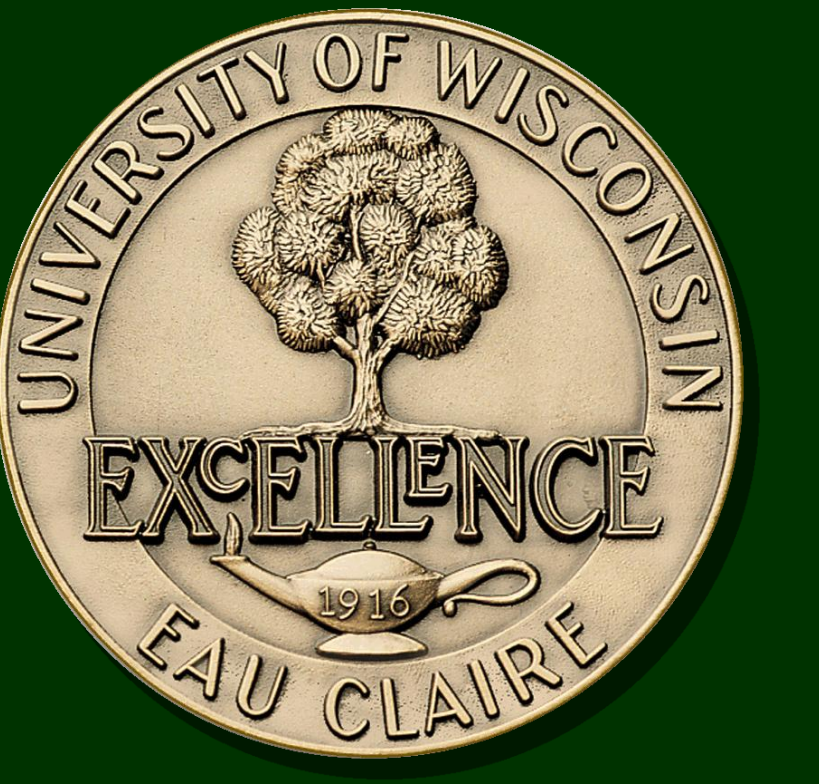


Connecting the Dots: Integrating Local Food in Western Wisconsin



Mary Canales, PhD, RN ❖ Allison Mentink, BSN, RN ❖ Christine Ostendorf, BSN RN
College of Nursing & Health Sciences ❖ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Significance of the Issue

- ❖ According to the Wisconsin Dept of Health Services, 65% of Wisconsin adults are overweight or obese
- ❖ Obesity increases risk for chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease
- ❖ Research links obesity with increased consumption of energy-dense, nutrient poor foods high in saturated fats and sugars
- ❖ Modern food conveniences often hide the increasing health, social, and economic problems associated with today's food landscape
- ❖ Efforts to address the growing obesity epidemic include reconnecting people and food through local and sustainable agriculture

Research Purpose

- ❖ Explore integration of local food in Western Wisconsin from multiple perspectives
- ❖ Identify barriers and facilitators to the use of local food in large organizations and sustainability efforts
- ❖ Identify lessons learned from the development and integration of local food

Methodology

- ❖ Ethnographic research methodology
- ❖ Individual and focus group interviews and field notes
- ❖ Multiple approaches used to recruit participants from Eau Claire, La Crosse, Hudson, and Rice Lake regions

Summary of Participants

Total Number of participants: 26
 Years in local food: <1-30+
 Years in current position: <1-30+
 Types of organizations represented:
 University= 2; Farmer=8 (produce, meat, dairy);
 Hospital=4; Food Service =2; Liaison=4;
 Restaurant=3; Retail grocer=3

Results

- ❖ The overarching theme that connected barriers, facilitators and lessons learned was relationships
- ❖ Relationships need to be built, nurtured, and maintained over time for local food to be successfully integrated
- ❖ Quotes highlight perspectives from buyers and producers for identified barriers and facilitators

Barriers

- ❖ **Lack of understanding between producers and buyers**
"Because if you don't understand what they're [farmers] doing out there and you don't understand institutions, it's going to be very hard to make them meet in the middle. It's a give on all sides." (Liaison)
"So we've had a three-year relationship with another restaurant that was great, but then the chef changed. And, you know, boom, gone. Whatever we've got planted we're stuck with." (Farmer – Produce)
- ❖ **Requires more time with increased costs**
"It would be easy to just buy them [eggs] all from IGA and write one check. So keeping up those relationships, all the phone calls, accepting a lot of small orders instead of one big order, processing all those invoices; keeping track of all of that is a lot more work. And I think it takes, real, it takes actual dedication." (Retail Manager)
"You have to constantly maintain the relationship with as many people in the business that you can, not just the chef that's gonna order and not just the meat manager that's gonna order it. But with as much of the staff." (Farmer – Meat)
- ❖ **Fair pricing and food service contracts**
"A lot has been focused on the big food service manufacturing companies where they kind of keep narrowing down products that they put on their contract and, you know, driving pricing down that way so that big institutions are kind of locked in." (Admin – Hospital)
"For institutions they need to take a realistic look at this. If they really want to incorporate some local food into their program, they realistically have to look at spending a little more, allocating more resources to do that. And be fair to the producer." (Farmer - Meat)
- ❖ **Disconnect from food and cheap food mindset**
"In general, the US culture supports cheaper is better so we need to change the mentality around food to support sustainable practices." (Retail liaison)
"Now-a-days, there is such a disconnect between the consumer and the source of the food. So many people think milk comes from a bottle and meat comes from the freezer. They don't know where it comes from, they just really don't." (Farmer)



Kates, Kathryn. "Tending the crops." Photo. *She Knows Canada*. 17 Nov. 2010. 16 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.sheknows.ca>>.



Nicki. "Local food meal." Photo. *What's Fresh*. 12 Jan. 2012. 16 Apr. 2012 <<http://bentonvillefresh.blogspot.com>>.



Unknown. "Fresh from the Farm." Photo. *Flourish Magazine*. 04 Aug. 2010. 16 Apr. 2012 <<http://flourishonline.org>>.

Facilitators

- ❖ **Relationship building**
"Which was really great because I love the fact that we're selling to a place [hospital] that really wants to know where it came from, not that it's just local, but actually saw the farm and met us in person and all that, I think...I think that's important." (Farmer – CSA)
"But, there again, that's that relationship thing and it's not a short-term deal. I don't think it can be. It's not. It's about getting it right and getting it down the road so it's working for everybody." (Retail-Restaurant Owner)
- ❖ **Supports local economy**
"The co-op started in 1988 and has grown to provide over 300 jobs for a community whose population is 740. Nationwide, there are over 1,600 family farms in the co-op, all receiving sustainable prices for their product." (Retail Liaison)
"[I] Kind of get a charge out of giving my money to people that are right here in the, in the Chippewa Valley. You know, within a 50-mile radius of us. It's just kind of neat. Keeping the money somewhat local. It adds up, you know, at the end of the week it's hundreds and hundreds of dollars that are staying right here." (Retail-Restaurant Owner)
- ❖ **Value-added**
"And the nice thing is for a small operation, if we wanted to get corn on the cob from a vendor we'd have to get a 100 ears. Well when their [local CSA farm] corn is ready we're going to get two dozen and we'll just sell it that day in the cafeteria. So that's beneficial to us in that way, that we can buy a small quantity and just use it right away, so we have a really fresh product." (Dietary Manager – Hospital)
"And finishing our milk into a finished product where we could direct sell it to the customer. And we thought that might stabilize our milk prices. They go so up and so down. That we could continue to farm that way for the next generation if we had a long-range plan. And that's what we've done. Six and a half years ago we purchased a small factory, and since then we've been making our dairy milk products into cheese and selling 'em." (Farmer-dairy)
- ❖ **Food safety**
"Another great thing that we see about local food is the food safety issue. And every time another one of these E-coli scares happens, we see new customers at our door and people asking questions." (Retail Grocer)
"Maybe at first that [food safety] was an excuse, but then you start thinking...we're more in control right now if we can see where it's [food] grown, how it's been handled. If we trust the farmers that we purchase from, we really have more control rather than just ordering a case from a mega-distributor and not knowing where it [food] came from and how it's been handled." (Admin-Food Service)

Lessons Learned

Start small, think big, and plan carefully

- ❖ Develop & sustain professional relationships
- ❖ Commitment throughout the organization
- ❖ Benchmark goals to measure success
- ❖ Be creative and think outside the box
- ❖ Diverse knowledge and skill set important
- ❖ Communication across all levels
- ❖ Infrastructure in place prior to implementation
- ❖ Allocate resources to ensure sustainability

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UWEC) for funding this research and UWEC for providing the resources to print this poster. We also would like to thank all the participants.