

# ALASKA



## FOOD COALITION

**March 2013**

### **The Anti-Hunger and (Local) Food Movements: Why They Need to Work Collaboratively**

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*This is a summary of a presentation given by David Lee, Program Development Specialist for Feeding America, at the 2013 AFC Annual Meeting. David has worked on “both sides of the fence,” having extensive experience within both the local food movement and anti-hunger world. He serves on the steering committees of the Farm Foundation’s Dialogue Project for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agriculture and the National Conference of State Legislature’s Hunger Partnership. He is also a member of the board of directors for the Outpost Food Co-op, a natural foods cooperative in Milwaukee, WI.*

#### **Overview of the Global Food System**

The global food system is awe-inspiring and magnificent in its scale, producing roughly 4 billion tons annually. In the United States, we produce more than 75 million tons. Despite the magnitude of the global food system, it is also a system that produces over 1 billion people hungry worldwide, including 50 million here in the United States. It produces about 1.3 billion tons of edible food waste, including about 23 million tons here in the U.S.

Why is this? People like to eat. And furthermore, they like to have ready access to food, which historically was not always easy. Perhaps the best way to understand where we are now and how to move forward is to take a look at where we came from, and how the anti-hunger and the food movements began and fractured in the context of changing macro-political trends.

#### **History of Food and Anti-Hunger Movements**

From the beginning of time, wherever humans could grow, cultivate, share, and sell food, vibrant societies and civilizations developed. People moved to where they could eat. Fast forward to the founding of America, where we began as a nation of farmers. An early harvest celebration would later become our national holiday of Thanksgiving. Moving forward many years, industrialization and the Green Revolution made farming much more efficient and created a population shift from rural to urban areas. But it was during the 1960s that three particular things happened that led to the establishment of both the local food and anti-hunger movements:

- 1) There was an explosion of the counter culture and a growing recognition of food and environmental concerns. This led to the growth of organic and natural foods.
- 2) Dr. Raymond Wheeler exposed the third-world style malnutrition that was occurring in the rural south, which led to the establishment of the major Federal anti-hunger programs.
- 3) The rates of urban hunger and poverty were growing and the civil rights movement began creating programs to address them. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense started the Free Breakfast for Children Program, which was basically run out of church basements

where members of the party cooked breakfast for children and fed them on their way to school.

These three movements had very similar agendas – fix food and feed people, and as a result, a more level playing field is created for people.

At around the same time, John Van Hengel noticed the bizarre paradox that while there were people going hungry, there was also simultaneously prodigious food waste – and so began modern food banking. The food bank network expanded quickly due in 1980s due to the dismantling of anti-poverty programs and an economic recession. In fact, many of the Black Panther school breakfast programs grew into food banks.

In addition to the sudden increase of food banks, local food policy councils started to crop up the 1980s as a way to try to bring these stakeholders together to begin coordinating and connecting the dots. Some were successful and some failed, but here is where some of the fissures in the three movements began to show themselves.

### **Moving Forward**

Recently, the food movement has gained a lot of momentum due to increasing public awareness of food quality, local foods, rising obesity rates, the environment and food production. In this context, food quality often trumps food access. For the anti-hunger movement however, the goal of ensuring that low-income families have access to an adequate diet is paramount. While food quality and food access goals are similar, they are not always mutually inclusive and in those instances, the dissonance creates confusion and frustration amongst stakeholders and audiences.

This schism has been particularly vivid in the big policy battles in the Farm Bill, both historically and in the recent reauthorization debates of 2012/13. From the food movement's perspective, the Farm Bill could be improved by removing agricultural subsidies and fund tons of small food projects. From the anti-hunger perspective, defending SNAP (food stamps) from the very real threats of cuts or structural program changes is the top priority, since the scale and impact of the program simply cannot be replicated.

All of these projects and programs are important if we hope to both end hunger and improve our food system but we spend so much time and energy fighting for attention and educating and re-educating constituents and policymakers that it takes away from any collective impact we could make if we had more solid alignment on our broad goals. It's incumbent upon us to reclaim and rejoin the original mission of our three movements, cross-leverage our strengths, and minimize our weaknesses.

*The Alaska Food Coalition partners closely with the Alaska Food Policy Council, and makes an effort to bring together food producers, like farmers, and food distributors, like food pantries. We will continue to share success stories that highlight this collaboration, both nationally and within our state.*

*Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available online:*

<http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml> For additional information, contact Cara Durr, Alaska Food Coalition Manager: [afc@foodbankofalaska.org](mailto:afc@foodbankofalaska.org)