Local Food Systems in New Jersey

A Roundtable Discussion and the Foundation for a New Distribution Model

Tag Words: local; food; produce; imports

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Summary

About 15% of the American diet consists of imported foods from various countries. The predominant countries that import food to America are China, Mexico, and Central and South America. Only about 1% of the total imported food is inspected by the FDA. Our group researched about the detriments of importing from countries such as China and South America vs. the benefits of buying local. We organized and conducted a round table discussion about buying local and a distribution system for such involving key players in the NJ food system.

(MM)

Video Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyuyHG-KLT4

Food Imports from Mexico, Central America, and South America

(MM) Some statistics

Many of America’s food imports do not actually come from within America. About 40% of fruits in America are imported from Latin American countries. These fruits are mostly off-season fruits that America cannot produce during colder seasons. Namely, these fruits are bananas, grapes, and melons from countries like Chile, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and other South American countries. The famous banana brand, Chiquita, has farms spreading from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, and Ecuador. Brazil, by itself, is known to export oranges and other citrus juices to America. As of 2007, about 27% of fruits in America are imported from Mexico and 38% of vegetables are imported from Mexico. The main imports from Mexico are currently tomatoes and bell and chili peppers.

Though fruits and vegetables are major imports from these southern countries, fish is also another import that the United States receives. The U.S. receives imports of fresh and chilled fish and other seafood products from primarily Chile. In 1998, Chile and Canada were both equal in
the amount of fish they exported to America, which was about 31%. Yet, Chile’s share has more than doubled since then while Canada’s share has halved. Overall, other South American countries account for about 28% of total fish imports into America as shown by the statistics of 2007.

Since, Americans are becoming more health conscious when it comes to eating, more vegetables and fruits have been imported from these countries. For example, 70% of America’s fresh vegetables are imported from Mexico. Peru, China, and other countries in Central and South America make up the remaining imports of fresh vegetables into the United States. Though America continues to receive imports from these southern countries, it seems many questions arise about the health risks associated with these imported foods.

**Health Risks**

It is known that most of these countries, if not all, are not required to meet similar standard regulations when producing food as America does within its own boundaries. Thus, many violations have occurred in the past years as well as many recalls. A violation, or an FDA violation, “means that the product appeared to violate one or more of the laws enforced by FDA, including adulterated or misbranded products” (Regmi & Buzby). Though a violation may seem to mean the food is not adequate to ingest, this is not always the case. A violation can mean many things from not labeling the food correctly to testing the food positive for any food-borne disease.

Of the 8,263 violations recorded for fruit and fruit product refusals during 1998–04, the top three violations were for filth (23.7%), manufacturer failure to file information on its scheduled process of a low-acid canned food or an acidified food (9%), and unsafe color (8%). The remaining violations were spread over a wide variety of reasons, such as inadequate labeling, unsafe pesticide residues, and microbial pathogens. For example, there were 131 Salmonella violations, 270 Listeria violations, and 11 Shigella violations (Regmi & Buzby).

Even though a violation can mean something as trivial as a mislabeled package, the refusals to import the food by America’s FDA implies that the food is a safety hazard.

The countries that are now importing many fruits, vegetables and fish into America, i.e. the Southern American countries, Mexico, and Central American countries, are experiencing a rise in violations as designated by the FDA. Therefore, there is a correlation between a rise in imports from these countries and a rise in FDA violations of refused imports. These countries have more violations with the FDA because their fruits, vegetables and fish are not produced under strict regulations as other more developed countries, such as the United States.

**Shocking Examples**

Sometimes, these imports can accidentally enter America’s borders. For example, in October of 2007, a truck full of cantaloupes from Mexico was stopped as it crossed into American borders. Tests were done on the cantaloupes to find any food-borne diseases. The tests
showed the cantaloupes to be positive for Salmonella. 5,000 cantaloupes had already been
shipped by their company, Timco. Within 24 hours, Timco had recalled the cantaloupes to
reduce the risk of poisoning from consumption. Yet, it had already been 2 weeks after the
cantaloupes were already shipped, so recalling the cantaloupes did not do much to halt
consumption. Thankfully, no illnesses were recorded to have happened. However,

Since then, five other U.S. companies have recalled more than 700,000 cantaloupes
grown in Mexico and Costa Rica because FDA or company tests found salmonella.
Fewer than half were recovered before being sold, the companies say (Schmit, 2007).

This is a frightening fact. Not only have cantaloupes been found to have salmonella, but
these cantaloupes were tested too late and sold too early so that consumption before recall was
very probable. As Julie Schmit, author of the above USAToday article says, “...the cantaloupe
recalls reveal another vulnerability in the nation's food-safety defenses: Imports are escalating,
but the FDA's ability to inspect them and police their safety isn't keeping up…” (Schmit, 2007).
A scary fact today is that the U.S. only inspects about 1% of its imports as opposed to the 8% it
used to inspect back in 1992. This is due to the increase of imported produce and food from
Southern America, Central America, and Mexico. The USDA, in contrast, inspects 16% of its
imports, which are mainly meat and poultry. The USDA also requires countries importing meat
and poultry to meet the standard regulations that the U.S. has for its meat production. The
Governmental Accountability Office has said that the FDA should also do what the USDA does
with respect to managing imports.

The FDA has so few resources, all it can do is target high-risk things, give a pass to
everything else and hope it is OK,” says William Hubbard, a former FDA associate
commissioner who retired in 2005.”The public probably has the perception … that they're
more protected than they really are (Schmit, 2007).

Pesticide usage in developing countries like South America, Mexico, and Central
America is more so than in developed countries. This leads to more contamination in imports.
The quality of water in these countries is much worse than the quality of water in countries such
as America. Workers are also less likely to be trained competently in food safety. All these
contributions lead to the violations and recalls seen in imports from these countries. “A 2003
FDA study found pesticide violations in 6.1% of imported foods sampled vs. 2.4% of domestic
foods. It has not been updated. Several years earlier, the FDA found salmonella and shigella,
which can cause dysentery, in 4% of imported fruits and vegetables vs. 1.1% of domestic
products” (Schmit, 2007).

Another scary incident that has recently occurred with imported food from these
countries was the investigation of a farm in Ojos Negros, Mexico. This farm imported green
onions into the United States, but in 2003, was found to be the source of a green onion
contamination. This farm was then investigated after the green onions had been traced back. The
farm was said to have dirty runoff from shacks and crude showers flowing straight onto the farm,
contaminating the onions grown there.
As stated in this USNews article, “Photos of the site ‘show evidence of soiled diapers, soiled feminine hygiene products, and domestic waste’ lying nearby…” (Mundell, 2008). Just from this quote alone, many consumers would be disgusted to know they might be eating onions that grew next to or under a used feminine napkin! To go further, the farm was not only receiving runoff from local living quarters, but was also being irrigated by a pond which also served as a place where human feces and animal manure were disposed of. To know that our food may be coming from farms such as these is atrocious.

Not only was the farm physically polluted but the FDA team who investigated the incident also noted that, “green onions typically passed through the hands of at least six workers…and there was no evidence that workers were allowed time off for illness” (Mundell, 2008). Though the farm claims it washed all its onions in chlorinated water, it was also noted that the farm could not produce enough or any evidence to back up the claim.

The problem with importing food from neighboring countries which are not as developed as America is not necessarily that their food is worse, but that the FDA inspectors cannot keep up with the massive amount of imported food nowadays. As stated earlier, only a small group of the imported food is actually inspected which means consumers are eating food that may be contaminated or contain diseases. Instead of relying on other countries for a large portion of our food, why not start a new and safer way of attaining our food—eating local?

Sites used:
http://mortarblog.wordpress.com/2007/06/13/do-you-know-where-your-bananas-come-from/
http://www.choicesmagazine.org/magazine/article.php?article=69

Food Imports from China

(KM) It seems society today searches eagerly for cures for diseases, greener ways of getting around, greener ways to live and ways to live longer altogether on a universal level. Within these elements there is a major concern for something so fundamental it almost goes unnoticed. That is food. In recent years the topic of food safety has made its way to the surface. There was a time in human existence where we not only knew where our food came from; we were the ones growing it. Now, in a time when the world’s population is a whopping 6,775,235,700 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009) the demand for food is high. But where are the lines between quantity and health, efficiency and food safety? Is importing food (fresh food!) from places like China and South America hazardous to our health?

The Garden State Parkway is an intricate practicality. We are festooned amongst the sandy barrens of southern New Jersey, the inner coastal plain and piedmont areas that bear the fruit of most of our “gardens”, yet most people buy their fresh fruits, eggs and vegetables, conveniently, from the supermarket shelves. Aside from the fractional increase of sale and perhaps the inconvenience of driving down a dirt road, it seems absurd why a consumer would
not want to buy the fresh yield of dairy and produce from the many farmers New Jersey has to offer.

As you walk through the outer aisles encapsulating the grocery store, you’ll find fairly fresh meat shipped three thousand miles from California, exotic fruits and vegetables from South America and South Africa, and only a very small stand of local produce. Even the tomato, the famous Jersey Tomato comes from the geographically similar Golden state on the other side of the continent. Why is that? Moreover, the age-old procedure of freezing and canning the fruits and vegetables to have all year round, made simple by food companies who do it for you, is shockingly manufactured in the ever-booming China. One might question the ethics of importing food, of all things, from China. In the past few years China has managed to export contaminated toothpaste, cat food and toxic baby formula (which fortunately did not make it to the supermarket shelves) to its trade partners, mainly the United States and Europe (NPR morning edition, 2011) (http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10410111).

It turns out the USDA and the FDA makes it very difficult for local farmers to sell their harvest. With all of the new and current regulations regarding production and profit, quaint farms like Polyface farms in Virginia (recently acclaimed and featured in “The Omnivore’s Dilemma” and Food Inc. for well raised pig and cattle) are not encouraged to produce more but are rather exposed to harsh laws and ignorant business legalities that prevent them from maximizing their profit and supplying decent product. The World Trade Organization supports the influx of export from China, and China drives a very hard bargain as they provide cheap labor and cheap product. The worry arises when the conditions in which China produces food product is observed. The waters are contaminated the same water that is used for raising fish and irrigating agricultural fields. This means the circulation of chemicals and fossil fuels are being mixed in to the food cycle. Fruits and vegetables are most susceptible to chemical penetration, fungi and bacteria and we are growing them in a country soaked with these crude substances. What we do not know is how much of what China grows in their agricultural market is frozen and put on our supermarket shelves. Packaging labeled ‘Organic’ or ‘Natural’ are labeled based upon varying qualifications. The consumers are being fooled.

Trader Joe’s, a supermarket proud of their low prices and healthy, organic and quality product, obtains most of their organic line form China. Only recently, when they realized the disruption this causes with our health conscious generation, did they take their products coming from China off the shelves (http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/a-decade-of-dangerous-food-imports-from-china/).

China is economically behind the United States but is catching up quickly. Now with their current water crisis and diminishing name in the organic, fresh food market they have developed organizations that create ways of producing in a sustainable market. But, regardless of how hard China tries to clean up their act, it will take tens of years to reverse the effect of their contaminated natural resources. China already produces organic rice and soybeans and this is what you will find in the organic section of your local grocery store. In the Yunnan Province in
China there is an aspiring Organic Farm growing vegetables and raising livestock, aiming to work sustainably and sell to Wal-Mart. But there is fraud in the market everywhere, and the regulations in China’s agriculture market are hard to come by, due to the heavily impacted deterioration of their soils and water supply. Their farmers may not be using chemicals or pesticides but it takes at least three years in the United States for soils to become certified organic; there is no wait period in China. Once the food is harvested, processed and packaged it is sent to the US borders. The US borders lack the manpower needed to inspect and test the shipments coming in and therefore many products are shipped without proper safety measures. This why we have had shipments of bacteria ridden spinach leaves, bean sprouts and tomatoes. These products are being shipped from other countries, and we would not have to face these dangers if we were to maintain local uptake of food.

(http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_31/b4044062.htm?chan=top+news_top+news+index_global+business).

“Most Chinese food imports are processed to some degree, and the most common problems cited by FDA—“filth”, unsafe additives, inadequate labeling, and lack of proper manufacturer registrations—are typically introduced during food processing and handling. Another of the most common problems is potentially harmful veterinary drug residues in farm-raised fish and shrimp” that is making their way into our food” www.ers.usda.gov.

What is the FDA doing about this? Well there is only so much they can do. The food companies have to start taking an initiative as well, to research the conditions imported food is undertaking before entering United States borders. People are unaware of what is in their food, and rely strongly on the label. But the label can be a falsity. The FDA did enforce a law that all food must have a label of its country of origin, though that reality only goes so far. Sometimes we just don’t have the time as consumers to read the labels and buy from local businesses. But it shouldn’t be our job, or even a concern that someone is producing a product unfit for human consumption, but welcome to the age of the economist!

Another scary fact is that a lot of rice, fish products, fruits and vegetables are incorporated into the ingredients of processed food. The United States spent 10.7 billion dollars on fish and seafood imports and another 13.8 billion dollars in fruit and nut imports in 2007 (http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fau/2009/08aug/fau125/fau125.pdf).

Much of these imports are sent to manufacturing companies that use these as ingredients for their products. Food from China is everywhere. And once incorporated into your Doritos bag or frozen Chicken Pot Pie there is no law that requires the country of origin must be stated for individual components of a larger product. Therefore your cereal box may say produced in the USA but most likely at least 50% of that product is imported from China. I challenge you to note the country of origin the next time you purchase a bag of frozen vegetables from your local grocery store. If it states the manufacturer, then I challenge you to call them and demand to know where the product started.
China gains a bad rap for their dire efforts to catch up in the economy. As Americans we should work together to maintain our own little sectors of the world. China has a lot to worry about over the next decade (http://indigodev.com/AEIPwhitepaper.html). Their primary concern is water, first and foremost, potable water for their own people. They are working on efforts to clean their natural resources and grow organically up to the standards we have in the United States. China is trying to make improvements as certain Agro-groups are separating themselves from the modern Chinese market. So that’s a good thing, for them. The impact this research is trying to have is to take a part in the health of your own life and the life of the ones around you. We have farmland in New Jersey; we have hundreds of farms yielding dairy, eggs, fruits and vegetables. Why not buy local? We can begin to reduce the risk of toxins, carcinogens and disease. If we support our local farmers we will be able to see the progress a community can make on bettering our environment and natural surroundings. Here we are shipping vegetables from across oceans, yet we won’t drive a town over to get the freshest possible option? (http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34080.pdf)

We live busy lives. We trust the brands we have been consuming since childhood, but those brands could have and most likely are bought out by someone else whose primary concern is personal economics (that is the pretty dollar) and not the safety of the consumer. Even looking at the labels when you buy your food won’t yield all the information needed to consume as healthy and economically as one would wish. There are not only health issues underlying the importation of food products from other countries there are the societal impacts and working conditions of the workers involved. We are entering an age where we are all becoming more health conscious and more worldly as to what is taking place in other parts of this planet that is directly linked to our daily lives no matter how far away the ‘other parts of the world’ may be. Get to know your local farmer, start a community garden, start your own garden, make your own bread, these are all ways to not only be more health conscious but to support your neighbor in an economically stressful time. If we work together to produce uncontaminated food we can all benefit. Buying cheap food from China does not pay off in the long haul.

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Buying Local, New Jersey Agriculture

(SB) What is Local?

With the rise of local food systems comes the question, what constitutes “local”? Some people consider it to be products from within the same state, whereas others draw circles of varying radii and consider all products from within these regions to be local. The New Jersey
The term “foodshed” is often used in discussions about local food systems. A “foodshed” can encompass the geographic region and the foods produced within it as well as the social and cultural factors in the community (Feenstra 1997). One study found an average distance traveled, or radius, for locally produced foods to be 65 miles, though this may vary from location to location (Pirog et al. 2009). Connections are made among producers, distributors, and consumers.

A local food system is more transparent and allows consumers to see the processes of production and transportation more clearly.

**On (Some of) the Benefits of Locavorism**

There are numerous community benefits to local and regional food systems, from economic to environmental. Local and regional food systems provide jobs and boost local economies (Brown and Miller 2008). Such food systems also have the potential to reduce fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions. Produce in the conventional system travels 8 to 92 times farther than produce in a local system, and conventional systems use 4 to 17 times more fuel, resulting in the release of 5 to 17 times more carbon dioxide (Pirog et al. 2009).

Furthermore, individuals enjoy health and safety benefits from localization of food systems. Consumers are concerned about the safety of a global food supply. While a majority of survey respondents agreed that local and regional food systems are safe, few believe that a global food system is safe. Most expressed concerns about produced from China (Pirog et al. 2009, Pirog and Rasmussen 2008). Many respondents also expressed an interest in knowing more about who handled the food and how it was produced (Pirog and Rasmussen 2008). Such information is difficult to obtain when foods are sourced from producers worldwide and travel through various supply chains. Foods produced, distributed, and consumed locally are more traceable (Halweil 2002).

The knowledge of where and how foods are produced, and of who came in contact with the products between farm and plate, is more easily attained when foods are consumed locally. There are also fewer opportunities for contamination in shorter distribution schemes. Customers can rest assured that health issues that arise can be more easily traced to a specific source and consequently remedied. This assurance and confidence is highly valued (Halweil 2002). Not only are products in local food systems safer, they are often more nutritious. More than two-thirds of consumers agree that locally produced foods are healthier (Pirog and Larson 2007).

Produce at the farmers’ market or other local outlet is picked fully ripe, whereas fruits and vegetables intended for wholesale markets and eventually grocery store shelves are harvested under-ripe (Holtaway et al. 2009). In fact, local foods can be more nutritious. With shorter time spent in transport and more time spent on the plant, fruits and vegetables grown and
harvested for local distribution are generally of higher nutritional quality (Is Local 2007). Furthermore, local markets encourage farmers to cultivate a wider variety of fruits and vegetables and also those varieties not sold in conventional food systems (Brown and Miller 2007). The public can benefit from incorporating these products into their diets, especially as these unique varieties are often selected for their qualities in terms of nutrition and taste rather than their abilities to ship and store well (Is Local 2007). Through local distribution systems, including farmers’ markets and farm-to-institution schemes, farmers are able to educate consumers about the seasonal availability and nutritional value of produce items and to encourage their customers to try new foods (Holtaway et al. 2009). It is clear that there is great value in localized food systems. Such food systems will vary from place to place. New Jersey, the Garden State, needs to preserve its agricultural heritage and encourage local food distribution.

A bit about New Jersey agriculture

A bit more than half a century ago, the New Jersey state legislature overrode the veto of then Governor Robert Meyner to add the nickname “The Garden State” to New Jersey license plates (State of New Jersey 2011). The “gardens” the state is famous for are being converted to urban and residential areas. Though the rate of farmland loss is slowing, it remains a significant issue, particularly with respect to access to fresh, safe, and healthy foods. Considering the safety concerns mentioned above, it is necessary to preserve and promote New Jersey agriculture. According to the Agriculture Census of 2007, New Jersey has over 10,000 farms covering 733,450 acres (USDA 2009). This includes 64 certified organic producers on 1,680 acres of cropland and 8,915 acres of pasture and rangeland (USDA 2011).

The majority of New Jersey’s farms are owned by families or individuals (USDA 2011). Many operations are small farms with under 50 acres, and very few have more than 1,000 acres (USDA 2009). By acreage, the state’s leading crops are forage, grain corn, soybeans, vegetables for sale, and wheat (USDA 2009). The market value of all New Jersey agricultural products totals nearly $1 billion, with the top three products being nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod; vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes; and fruits, tree nuts, and berries (USDA 2009). Despite its small size, New Jersey is in the top ten producing states for spinach, bell peppers, tomatoes and sweet corn. It also produces the second largest blueberry crop, third largest cranberry crop, and fourth largest peach crop (NJDA 2006). It is truly amazing the quantity and quality of Jersey Fresh produce. Agriculture has a significant influence on the state economy. New Jersey farms employ about 20,000 workers and directly add $540 million to the state’s economy (Schilling and Sullivan 2011). An additional 16,000 workers in other industries are indirectly supported (Govindasamy et al. 2005). Farmland keeps municipal taxes down. Unlike residential properties, farms pay more in taxes than the value of the services they demand (NJDA 2006).

The economic benefits of agriculture are significant. A strong state agricultural sector offers benefits beyond economics. Farms can provide habitat for wildlife. Farmlands can also filter air and water and absorb excess moisture to prevent flooding. As of 2007, 5,976 acres of farmland were enrolled in conservation or wetlands reserve programs, up from 2,671 acres in 1997 (USDA 2011). Agriculture contributes to quality of life, whether it is by providing access
to fresh produce or “breathing space” (NJDA 2006). New Jersey residents highly value local produce. In one survey of New Jersey consumers, more than half of respondents indicated a willingness to pay more for local produce and 86% expressed a desire to buy New Jersey-grown produce (Govindasamy et al. 2005). However, less than half visited farmers’ markets weekly (Govindasamy et al. 2005). Locally-produced foods may also prove to be safer. In New Jersey, a traceback system has been instituted for produce.

Furthermore, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture provides training sessions on the basics of food safety for the state’s farmers (NJDA initiatives). Despite the high importance the state’s residents place on fresh, safe, locally-grown produce, and the economic benefits a strong agricultural sector offers, New Jersey has lost 30% of its best farmland over the past quarter century (Rutgers 2011). Urban and suburban areas have been growing at the expense of agricultural land (Hasse and Lathrop 2010). Though nearly 200,000 acres had been preserved by September 2009, farmland is still being lost (NJDA initiatives). How we can persuade institutions to procure local foods: Already, New Jersey institutions, from schools and hospitals to grocery stores and restaurants, are incorporating local produce. For instance, Rutgers University Dining Services does not purchase any Asian produce. When produce is in season in the Garden State, they buy mostly local fruits and vegetables. Of course pineapples do not grow in NJ; tropical fruits are typically sources from Hawaii, Puerto Rico and South America. Not only does Rutgers University Dining Services purchase local fruits and vegetables, they also procure local beef and poultry. Generally, they strive to source products from within a 75-100 mile radius, which encompasses not only New Jersey but also neighboring Pennsylvania. Their purchasing director estimates that more than three-quarters of the products they buy are sourced within 100 miles.

Furthermore, they are working with a group of students to grow lettuce for the dining hall on the Cook Student Organic Farm on Ryders Lane. Sometimes it is less expensive to buy local and sometimes more. However, Dining Services is not only concerned with costs. As their purchasing director says, "it's the garden state, and we want to keep it that way." Rutgers University Dining Services is committed to buying local foods and supporting Garden State agriculture. They are not alone. Princeton University Dining Services also prides itself in securing local food products (Dining Services 2009). According to New Jersey Farm to School Network, eight kindergarten through grade 12 schools have school garden programs. Schools are not the only institutions showing their commitment to Jersey Fresh foods. Somerset Medical Center serves New Jersey fruits and vegetables in patients’ meals and in the cafeteria. The hospital also hosts a farmers’ market during the season (http://www.somersetmedicalcenter.com/werejerseyfresh).

These institutions clearly value New Jersey agriculture and the health and well-being of their students and patients. Also deeply committed to preserving agriculture are Garden State grocery stores and restaurants. Whole Earth Center in Princeton, NJ, for instance, celebrates “Buy Local” month. Showcasing some of the Jersey Fresh foods they sell year-round, Whole Earth actively promotes these foods throughout October.

The wholesale club BJ’s runs a “Farm to Club” program, selling Jersey Fresh produce in their wholesale clubs throughout the state (http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/news/press/2011/approved/press110719.html). Customers
appreciate the convenience of purchasing local foods in these stores and value the fresh, high-quality goods that are offered. Local foods can be found in shopping carts and restaurant tables. Frog and Peach, a New Brunswick restaurant established in 1983, takes pride in using high-quality ingredients. When possible, they source local foods and have always tried to do so. However, there was and still is a major obstacle: distribution. Though this has improved since 1983, a robust local farm-to-restaurant distribution system is lacking. In the 1980s, some small farmers would reach out to restaurants, but availability was rather spotty.

About a decade ago, Mikey Azzara, then the director of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of NJ (NOFA-NJ), began advocating for a farm-to-restaurant system. After leaving his post as NOFA-NJ director, Azzara established Zone 7, a distribution company that connects farmers and restaurateurs. Zone 7 works with almost 30 farms, over 75 restaurants and food artisans, and more than 10 grocers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Garden State growers are beginning to get a better sense for the ingredients chefs need and want. Additionally, some restaurants have direct alliances with small farmers. A few, such as Eno Terra, even have small gardens of their own.

Though using local ingredients may be more expensive for restaurants, some owners find that their clientele value this service and will pay a premium for meals prepared from the freshest ingredients. Furthermore, some owners, including those of Frog and Peach, have a personal belief in and commitment to the use of high-quality, locally-produced ingredients. Restaurants can feature these products in flexible seasonal menus, encouraging diners to become more aware of the food system. For example, restaurants in South Jersey hold an annual Farm to Fork week, showcasing Jersey Fresh products. Both the farmers and the restaurants have seen the benefits of this yearly program (http://www.sjhotchefs.com/farm_to_fork/about.html).

Despite these efforts, there is still a long way to go. Using the power of consumer dollars, we will encourage more institutions to purchase local foods. Carrotmobs A “carrotmob” is a reverse boycott. A buycott. Started by Brent Schulkin in San Francisco, carrotmob is based on positive cooperation. Consumers are mobilized to patronize an agreed-upon institution on one day. That institution sets aside a percentage of profits from that day to make a positive change, for instance, installing more efficient lighting fixtures. Consumers are able to make a tangible impact, and the institution profits as well.

This is a great video from PBS: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/culture/video-using-carrots-not-sticks-to-get-companies-to-do-good/10308/. We hope to encourage local restaurants to procure local foods. We plan to work with a restaurant in New Brunswick and have contacted Frog and Peach. Press coverage, profits, and publicity may encourage other restaurants in the area to start including local products.

References: Dining Services and the Princeton Environmental Institute. 2009. Local, organic and sustainably produced food a priority with DFS.

Service: Roundtable Discussion
Unfortunately, we were unable to follow through with our plan for a carrotmob. However, we were able to locate a café at which to host a roundtable discussion of the New Jersey food system. On Wednesday, November 30th, at 6:30 PM, key players in the New Jersey food system will gather at Infini-T Café in Princeton, NJ, to discuss agriculture, food production and distribution, and food economics, as well as related issues. Invitations have been sent to farmers, restaurants, and experts in the field, and media advisories have been sent to local news outlets. We hope to have an intellectually stimulating discussion. Furthermore, we hope that this roundtable will provide a forum in which restaurants and producers can form a cooperative system to facilitate distribution of local foods to Princeton food establishments. If the event is well-attended and successful, we may continue to hold roundtable discussions in the future, changing locations so as to involve key players in different parts of the state.

Prior to the event, we sent a media advisory to various media outlets in the area and created an event page on Facebook.

The event was well-attended, with representatives from the restaurant and agriculture industries, as well as professors and interested citizens. A few key issues raised during the session were the lack of young farmers and the lack of strong distribution channels.

Following the event, we sent a press release to the same media outlets. The press release was as follows:

For Immediate Release: December 1, 2011 LOCAL FOODS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION SETS FIRM FOUNDATION (DECEMBER 1, 2011 – INFINI-T CAFÉ, PRINCETON, NJ) – Key players in the New Jersey food system on Wednesday, November 30, 2011, at Infini-T Café in Princeton, NJ to discuss the state of agriculture and local food distribution. Attendees included farmers, small business-owners, restaurateurs, researchers, and students. Participants gathered in the back room of the tea shop for a roundtable discussion. The conversation was informal and participants raised key issues, such as the need for farmers in the Garden State. Another key issue raised was the need for an improved distribution model to enable restaurants to more easily procure Jersey Fresh products. Going forward, we hope to have future discussions, and, more importantly, action to improve and strengthen our regional food system.

We also created a database of names and contact information and created groups on Facebook and LinkedIn to facilitate further discussion and solicit feedback.

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Editorials

(KM) Dear Editor,

Why is it that when trying to purchase fresh food from the grocery store I learn more about what other countries are growing at this time of year than what is available here from our verdant Garden State? I am currently studying in the environmental and biological science department at Rutgers University, doing research for a paper due about where our food is coming from these days. It is obvious to shoppers that our fresh produce comes from all over the World (the country of origin is now mandatorily displayed). I challenge you to find fresh produce in local stores. Upon research, I have discovered that many of our frozen vegetables and canned goods are coming from China. Even organic frozen produce is coming from China. And this is not good for anyone. The standards for China’s organic market are very low. It is a country with the largest population who can barely quench the thirst of their own people due to contaminated water, and are utilizing all of their last natural resources to do so, yet still their people are thirsty. They are irrigating their fields with the same polluted water. China still uses leaded fuel and coal ash from their power plants bleed toxic waste (i.e. cadmium, mercury, arsenic and lead) into the air, rivers and soil. This is not good for nutrient consumption. Many of us have heard the recent scares of tainted baby food formula and pet food imported from China and this has left many of us with an uneasy feeling. Even here at the United States border there is limited surveillance of food safety regulations. This is due to the lack of manpower and the inability to monitor the large quantity of imports that we ship across the country. My point? Buy local. Eat seasonally.

Let us stimulate our local economy and take care of our neighbors once again. Let us know our farmers and feed our families with fresh seasonal produce grown locally, where we can see first hand how the farming system progresses. We can work independently to look after our small sectors of the world.

We have undoubtedly entered a time of self-awareness. We have witnessed first-hand the aftermath of bad decisions in a world so dangerously close to self destruction that we are finally approaching the bridge to recovery. After all, we live in an area of Health Questers and workout fanatics, smoothie drinkers and cyclists, marathon runners and veggie lovers. We are on the road to self-reconstruction, right?

Sincerely,

Kathleen McPeek
A friend of mine and I were eating in campus dining hall together a couple of weeks ago and on his plate was a piece of veal. To my dismay, my friend looked up at me after a bite of the meat and asked, “What is veal??.” I was stunned that someone close to me did not even know what they were ingesting. However, I’ve since come to the conclusion that many Americans do not actually know what they’re ingesting. How did we get this way?

One contributing factor is the fact that we import most of our food from other parts of the world. Two major sources being South and Central America. Around 40% of fruits in America are imported from Latin American countries. These are off-season fruits that America cannot produce during colder seasons. Examples are bananas, grapes, and melons from countries like Chile, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and other South American countries. About 27% of more fruits in America are imported from Mexico and another 38% of vegetables are also imported from Mexico. So what’s the problem with importing from countries around the world? Well, not only do these countries not have to regulate their food production according to U.S. standards, but the U.S. only inspects about 1% of its imports as opposed to the 8% it used to inspect back in 1992. This means that about 99% of the produce that is imported is not guaranteed to be safe to eat. We consume these foods without knowing facts such as the above and without even knowing the basics about the food, where it came from and how it was produced.

Now, there is a way to ease the mind about this dilemma. Instead of relying on other countries for a large portion of our food, why not try a safer way of attaining our food and start eating local? It may not seem as easy as it sounds but it is very possible, as exemplified by my group project in my senior colloquium course, Ethics in the Sciences. My group’s goal is to connect a restaurant with a local producer so that the restaurant begins and/or continues using local produce in their cuisine. Infini-tea café in Princeton has agreed to our group project idea and will now use local produce from a farm in its vicinity. Please take this as a successful example and try buying local, even if it is just a few Jersey tomatoes.

Melissa Moya

I often jokingly refer to New Jersey as the “Pharm State.” (Granted, this is not my home state’s worst nickname.) Indeed, I have the sneaking suspicion that Johnson & Johnson and pharmaceutical companies own the state. However, I am proud to say that real farms in New Jersey are still growing Jersey Fresh fruits and vegetables and raising livestock for meat and dairy products. The “gardens” (more than 10,000 of them according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s 2009 Census of Agriculture) of the Garden State are productive, still growing strong, pardon the pun. Despite our small size, we produce the second largest blueberry crop, third largest cranberry crop, and fourth largest peach crop and are in the top ten producing states for spinach, bell peppers, tomatoes and sweet corn. The quantity, not to mention quality, of Jersey Fresh produce is truly amazing. I can think of nothing better than a Jersey tomato. Proud to be Jersey Fresh. Yet, we are losing valuable farmland to urban and suburban development. When I was in junior high, I watched as a local family farm was razed and a condominium
development erected on the land. I was devastated. Where would I get Jersey Sweet corn in the summer? Where could I buy apples and go pumpkin-picking and ride on a hayride? Not only was the farm a source of local, fresh produce, it was also a place where I could go to watch the Fourth of July fireworks, to escape suburbia, to breathe and enjoy open space. We can support our local farmers, and many of us do. We shop at farmers’ markets and subscribe to Community-Supported Agriculture programs. The state has a very successful Farmland Preservation Program, showing that our votes count. As consumers, we have more power than we may realize and can use that power to encourage local restaurants and grocery stores to purchase local products. We can use our consumer dollars (granted more people use credit cards than actual dollar bills) to convince managers and purchasing directors to procure Jersey Fresh products and ingredients. I am not talking about a boycott. Rather, I am proposing a “buycott.” I urge you to patronize those institutions that take pains to include local foods, and also those that don’t. Organize a carrotmob, mobilizing a “mob” of consumers to shop or dine at an agreed-upon institution on one day, after coordinating with the store or restaurant manager and ensuring that the institution will make changes in return. Cooperation is key. Wouldn’t you rather have a carrot than be hit with a stick? Especially if that carrot was grown locally. So give the grocery stores and restaurants some carrots. Help them support the state’s agricultural sector and keep the gardens alive in the Garden State.