

Community Food Systems Tool

Purpose: The mission of the family and community food decision-making program is *Building family and community capacity for thoughtful food decisions through research and education*. The Community Food System (CFS) tool is designed to help community food system stakeholders (community nutritionists, community development programmers, food assistance providers, educators, food growers and consumers) achieve their goals and create resilient community food systems through collaborations.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand what constitutes a food system and recognize its web-like structure.
- Identify stakeholders and their interconnectedness in their community food system.
- Evaluate how their agency connects with others and what contributions they make and/or could make to improve their community food system.
- Improve knowledge about and be able to apply strategies and principles for effective food system partnerships (Gillespie et al, 2003).

1. Introduction

The program will begin by introducing systems thinking and its application to community food systems. Food systems include the foundations for production, social aspect of consumption, relevant governmental policies and all aspects of production, processing and distribution. Since food systems are so encompassing and interconnected it is sometimes difficult to picture where an individual/organization fits in to the bigger picture. Also, what other relationships does a partner need to consider in order to meet his/her goals? An integral part of creating effective community food systems involves understanding who is involved in the system and how to build effective partnerships among the members.

During the introduction, the program evaluation will be distributed, and the learning objectives highlighted. Before the activity, the participants will be asked to introduce themselves and share how they fit into the food system.

2. Mapping a community food system

Before the activity begins, small groups of unrelated participants will be assembled around a table with a blank poster-size piece of paper and a marker. They will be given paper cutouts of various constituencies and concepts related to the community food system as well as blank cards to add additional concepts. The terms are examples of the broader categories of the Working Model for Community Food System Dynamics¹. The group will be asked to arrange a concept map of the food system and draw connections between the various constituencies and concepts. The group will be shown the sample model from the Working Model for Community Food System Dynamics¹. Once the groups have completed the exercise, a discussion will commence regarding the placement choices. The activity should highlight how the participants conceptualize the community food system, and further direct the discussion about building the effective partnerships that link the web-like network.

¹ Gillespie A.H., Gantner L.A. 2001. Working Model for Community Food System Dynamics

2. Strategies for building effective partnerships

In a network like the food system, all partners must work together to achieve goals because all actions affects other parts of the system. This particular style of leadership fosters the involvement of all members. This style is necessary because of the web-like structure of the food system, and it includes sharing power, creation and achievement. The food system demands a balance between university-initiated education with community-initiated change programs. It also demands a balance between consumer and community focus for change and responsibility.

There are several strategies that have been identified that aid in engaging diverse stakeholders and building effective partnerships:

- a. Agree on common and complimentary goals
 - Ensure goals are compatible with those of team members and their organizations
 - Set and maintain project timelines
 - Define indicators of progress toward goals
 - Establish measures for indicators and goals
- b. Clarify Roles and responsibilities
 - Discuss roles and responsibilities for yourself, your organization, other partners, and community
 - Shift from dependence on outside “experts”, include program participants as partners
 - Acknowledge that community work takes time while being attuned to immediate needs of some members
 - Be mindful of professional and personal relationships
 - Periodically assess roles and responsibilities
- c. Develop protocol for partnering
 - Build on individual strengths
 - Share and balance power: “Power with” vs. “Power over”
 - Develop a protocol for managing disagreements
 - Form consensus about adding new partners
- d. Commit the necessary resources
 - Utilize existing resources when possible
 - Decide what you can realistically accomplish with available resources (time, money, energy, expertise)
 - Deliver what you have promised
 - Make use of intellectual, social and financial capital
- e. Create a flexible and trusting atmosphere
 - Be trustworthy- keep your commitments
 - Commit to the common good
 - Create a common language
 - Share credit
 - Seek out “trusted” sources for new situations/collaborations
- f. Celebrate milestones/Reward and acknowledge success
 - Don’t wait for the “big ones” down the road

- Celebrate with partners; be mindful to include program participants

A handout about these strategies is available for distribution.

3. Examples of partnership strategies at work

Examples:

- Satellite Farmers' Markets created in Ithaca, NY to meet the needs of low-income rural residents
- Development of a tool/guide to help families with limited resources make nutritious, low-cost meals. Create an easy-to-read, low-literacy, "how to cook" book with graphics and instructions
- Any examples from your own experiences

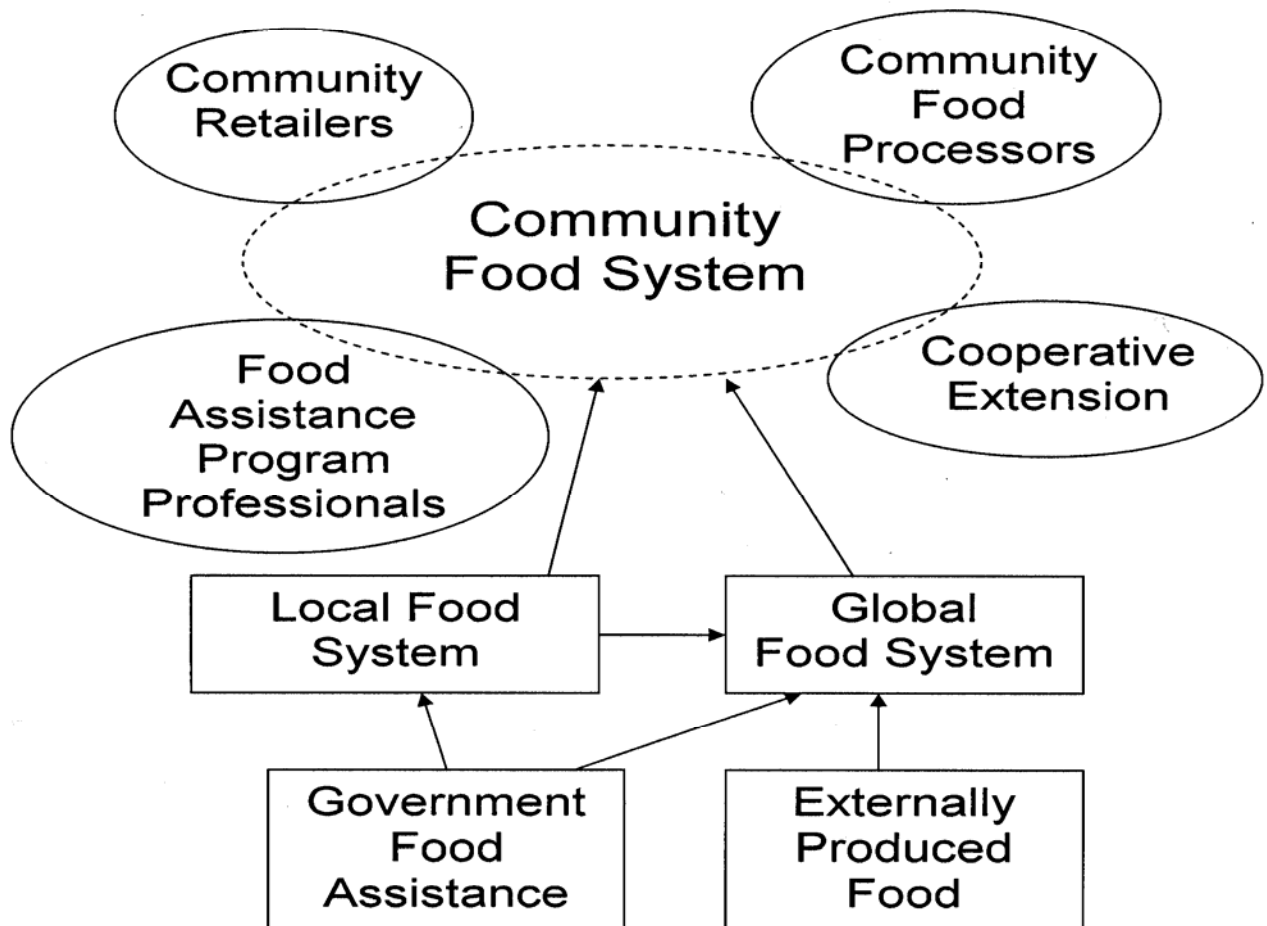
4. Sharing of ideas/strategies for successful partnerships:

- End with the Working Model for Community Food Systems Dynamics, so that the group can see how the whole system fits together.
- Discussion forum to share partnership strategies
- Feedback form handed out to share strategies
- Feedback form to evaluate workshop
- Sign-up sheets to document contact information for future sharing of stories, ideas and strategies

5. Contact participants via e-mail for continued networking and discussion for application of the strategies and activities

Since this activity is relatively simple, it can be tailored to fit most types of groups. The target of the project is non-profits, farmers and community nutrition professionals. If dealing with nutrition experts, the tool can be used to open up their minds and stimulate discussion so all participants can learn from one another. Even though one might be an expert in community nutrition or agriculture, she/he can benefit from understanding all of the connections that must be considered in order to work in the context of a system. With a group that has less background, this exercise can function as an introduction to the food system. It can also help these individuals realize their place in the system.

Working Model for
Community Food System Dynamics
Gillespie and Gantner, 2001



Terms for Paper Cut-outs:

Circle Terms (People):

Community Retailers
Community Food Processors
Food Stamps Workers
WIC Workers
CACFP Workers
Hunters
School Lunch Program Workers
Fishermen
Food Pantry Workers
Food Bank Workers
Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program Educators
Farmers
Agricultural Extension Educators
Farmers' Market Nutrition Education Program Educators
Community Food Security Coalition (USDA)
Dieticians
Consumer

Square Terms (objects or concepts):

Community Food System
Community Gardens
Family Gardens
Farmers' Markets/Roadside Stands
Religious institutions
Federal Commodities
Locally produced food
Global food system
Agri-business
Land Grant Universities
Hospitals
Cooperative Extension

*Also include several blank shapes so that the groups can write in their own words.

Family and Community Food Decision-making Program (2003)

Strategies for Building Effective Partnerships

Strategies for Productive Partnerships for Food²
<http://familyfood.human.cornell.edu/resources.htm>

Strategies	Components/Considerations
Agree on common complimentary goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure goals are compatible with those of team members and their organizations • Set and maintain project timelines • Define indicators of progress towards goals • Establish measures for indicators and goals
Clarify roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss roles and responsibilities for yourself, your organization, other partners, and community • Shift from dependence on outside “experts”, include program participants as partners • Acknowledge that community work takes time while being attuned to immediate needs of some members • Be mindful of professional and personal relationships • Periodically assess roles and responsibilities
Develop working protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on individual strengths • Share and balance power: “Power with” vs, “Power over” • Develop a protocol for managing disagreements • Form consensus on new partners
Commit the necessary resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize existing resources when possible • Decide what you can realistically accomplish with available resources (time, money, energy, expertise). • Deliver what you have promised • Make use of intellectual, social³ and financial capital
Create a flexible, trusting atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be trustworthy – Keep your commitments • Commit to the common good • Create a common language • Share credit • Seek out “trusted” sources for new situations/collaborators
Celebrate milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t wait for the “big ones” down the road • Celebrate with partners and program participants as partners

² Gillespie, AH, Gantner LA, Craig S, Dischner K, Lansing D. 2001. Productive Partnership for Food; Principles and Strategies, Journal of Extension 41/2, 2003. www.joe.org.

³ Social capital has been described at the individual, family and community levels. Similar in the definitions of all three is that there is value in the relationships between people and the networks they create.