

HEALTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK  
MARCH 18, 2010 MEETING  
SUTTER LAKESIDE HOSPITAL

In attendance: Lou Denny, Lake County Community Action Agency; Rachel Elkins, UC Cooperative Extension; Helaine Christensen, Health Services CHDP; Karen Tait, Lake County Health Services; Lorna Sides, Women, Infants & Children; Merrill Featherston, Lake County Tribal Health Center; Cornelia Sieber-Davis, Lake County Farmers' Finest; Joan Reynolds, Lake County Office of Education; Tom Jordan, Lake First 5; Susan Jen and Jackie Armstrong, Health Leadership Network.

'LOCAL FOODS FORUM'

In response to Susan's request for feedback regarding the 'Local Foods Forum', Lou said that he was impressed by the high energy in the room and many positive responses, adding that it appeared to be a tremendous start for the CDFA grant program. He said he was also impressed by the collaborative rather than competitive tone of the event which he expected would lead to increased transactions between buyers and local growers.

Cornelia said she appreciated discovering that the county's larger growers are also family farmers, not corporations as is often assumed. Susan added that she also valued exposure to information about the larger scale operations and their broader vision for marketing crops.

Helaine said that the obesity statistics that Susan shared at the beginning of the program "blew her away" and asked if there was a correlation between obesity and the increased use of corn syrup in processed foods. Susan responded that it was certainly possible, but a variety of other factors have been identified as contributing to obesity trends including reduced activity, access to fast foods and promotion of super-sized portions.

Rachel explained that it would be a mistake to categorically devalue all foods from large processors and distributors because they also represent important markets for local growers. She said that USDA surplus purchasing is an equally important resource for growers and institutions and that those products come back to the community's schools. She recommended supporting all, not just fresh, Lake County grown products because most local production is not sufficient to support local processing. She pointed out that Lake county Walnuts was forced to move their processing facility to Chico because local tonnage was not enough to make a living here.

It was suggested that HLN foster local value added products by writing an article about the various forms of Lake County grown foods, such as canned and dried pears.

In response to Lorna's question about the feasibility of diversifying local crops to better serve the local population, Cornelia said that crop diversity is restricted by geography and climate and that adjusting an area's microclimate is very costly. Susan added that she was surprised by A.G. Kawamura's statement

that 90% of California crops are irrigated, pointing out just how vulnerable state agriculture is to drought periods.

In response to Joan's suggestion to support California agriculture by educating the public to identify California grown products in the stores, Rachel explained that origin is not always clear with value added products. As an example, she explained that labels on Trader Joe products might identify a U.S. processing location but fail to disclose that the fruit in the package was actually produced overseas.

Lorna suggested using "shelf talkers," labels on the edge of the shelves below products that identify "Lake County Grown" foods. She said that Oregon stores have been promoting local products in this way for several years.

Karen said that she thought Susan's opening remarks at the 'Local Foods Forum' were effective in establishing nutrition as a central concept in the discussion about food systems. She added that the other point that made an impact on her was the difficulty of both growers and buyers planning without reliability about what would be bought or delivered.

Susan agreed that reliability represented a significant challenge to growing the local food system but expected that the online ordering system may resolve most of those issues. She added that HLN would spend the next two years promoting Lake County specialty crops by sponsoring more cook-offs and cooking demonstrations that could be played online and in waiting rooms at clinics and DSS. She said HLN would also be producing tip sheets with recipes and nutritional information. Lorna suggested contacting Andy Culberson regarding the tear offs being distributed by WIC, adding that it would be a good idea to synchronize the tip sheets with seasonally-available foods. Karen agreed with the importance of promoting consumption of seasonal foods.

Cornelia described Farmers' Finest efforts to establish a year round farmers' market at the old Kelseyville Lumber yard, explaining that the cost of that project motivated the group to consider other locations including the vacant building on Lakeport Blvd. between the bowling alley and Early Start. There was some discussion about the advantages of having an evening market that working people could get to on their way home. Cornelia added that the Co-Op had developed new drop-off sites for its modified CSA, also known as a buyers' club, and that the cost per box is \$15.

#### SMALL FARM CONFERENCE REPORT

Cornelia thanked HLN for providing a scholarship for her transportation expenses to the Small Farm Conference in San Diego. She reported that she'd attended the Farmers' Market track with about 80 other market managers and brought back information about veggie vouchers that can be used by SNAP recipients. She added that Farmers' Finest already had electronic debit equipment and that she would be assembling the other items necessary (WiFi connection, accounting system, etc.) to accept EBT cards at local farmers' markets.

Lorna added that the WIC veggie vouchers are issued in increments of \$6, \$12 or \$20 per year representing \$20,000 to \$30,000 in potential revenue for local farmers.

In response to questions about increasing food stamp participation in order to increase support for local growers, Joan explained that program and staffing changes at DSS may represent an opportunity to influence the system. Based on the experience of FESNEP project manager Ron Jones, Rachel emphasized the importance of securing the support of the Board of Supervisors in setting policy that recognizes expansion of the food stamp program as a business opportunity and makes increased use a priority. She added that she understands that DSS is overwhelmed and distracted by system abusers. Equally important to the success of such an effort, she added is changing the perception that enrolling more eligible recipients will attract more people to welfare and the widespread misconceptions that food stamp recipients waste funds on the wrong kinds of foods. It would behoove local merchants, she concluded, to lobby for the enrollment of every eligible recipient in the county.

Final thoughts on the subject:

- Tom suggested that both of those system problems might be resolved by moving the food stamp program from social services to the Employment Development Department.
- Rachel said that the development of community gardens can become a good substitute for food stamps. Susan added that it won't be easy to document the economic benefit of the gardens.
- Information from Network for a Healthy California regarding the economic impact of food stamp utilization will be forwarded to today's attendees.

The meeting was adjourned at 2 p.m.