



Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network
Partenariat sur l'économie sociale et la durabilité
Bridging, Bonding, and Building / Renforcement des liens et des capacités

Sub Node Three Mobilization on Food Security and Community Economic Development

Background

Sub-Node Three: Mobilization on Food Security and Community Economic Development, is one of six research clusters (sub nodes) that are part of the federally-funded *Atlantic Social Economy and Sustainability (SES) Research Network*, which is working to broaden knowledge about the social economy of the Atlantic region. The social economy can mean different things to different people, but in a general sense it means putting “people before profits” and allowing community organizations to prioritize social objectives and social values through democratic means. For more information on the social economy and the Atlantic SES Research Network, please visit www.msvu.ca/socialeconomyatlantic/.

From 2005-2010, Sub Node Three (SN3) has focused on developing partnerships and laying the foundation for participatory action research (PAR) projects on community mobilization on food security and community economic development (CED) in Kings, Hants and Annapolis counties. The SN3 partnership has brought together both academic and community partners who are committed to improving community food security (CFS). “Community Food Security exists when all community residents obtain a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance, and equal access for everyone”.¹ Partners in SN3 have worked on several projects aimed at creating and disseminating knowledge around CFS and the social economy including two community-based forums on food security and several research projects exploring local efforts to impact CFS.

To access links and other resources please visit our webpage at:
<http://www.foodsecurityresearchcentre.ca/social-economy-project-sn3/>

Food Box Program: Current and Potential Contributions to the Social Economy

(Lead Researcher: Patty Williams, patty.williams@msvu.ca)

In 2006, the Kids Action Program (KAP) of Kings and Hants Counties, an SN3 partner, identified the need to evaluate its Food Box Program. The program is designed to assist pre and post-natal women facing barriers such as low income who are eligible for the Great Beginnings Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program. The Food Box Program has aimed to supplement families' existing food budgets, model healthy, local food choices and distribute information regarding nutrition, child development,

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and parenting, as well as support local producers and suppliers whenever possible.

The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the value of the Food Box Program to the social economy and explore the potential of the program to better serve the community. Six Focus groups with Food Box participants (N=33) and four in-depth interviews with a producer, supplier, coordinator of a farmer's market, and the coordinator of the food box program were used to evaluate the current Food Box program. Preliminary findings suggest widespread support for increasing access to healthy foods for people in low income households and expanding the program to reach other vulnerable populations beyond existing program eligibility. The food box program could also be improved by building stronger links with local food producers to increase the amount of fresh produce in the food boxes. Participants felt that building upon the Food Box Program could enhance the social atmosphere and viability of the community.

Resulting from the evaluation, the Food Box Program in Kings and Hants Counties has expanded their services and an article called "[Starting with Food Boxes: Participatory Action Research and Social Economy Contributions to Food Security](#)" was published by the [Canadian Association of Food Studies Journal](#)

Fall 2007 and Spring 2010 Forums on Community Food Security and the Social Economy

The 2007 forum brought together research partners, students, Food Box research participants, farmers, politicians and other community members involved with food security and social economy initiatives. The purpose of the forum was to reflect on food box evaluation findings, create a greater understanding of food security issues, discuss application of research results and initiate a dialogue on potential future projects for the sub node. From this forum, the SN3 put out a call for proposals that led to funding of three additional projects.

In the spring of 2010, a follow up to the original 2007 forum was held in Greenwich NS. At the forum, researchers and community members provided updates on food security projects and discussed plans for further action on community food security in Nova Scotia. To see the full 2010 Forum report click [here](#)

Kids Action Program (KAP) Gardening Project Making Healthy, Local Food Possible: Rural Community Solutions (Lead Researcher: Debra Reimer, kidsaction@xcountry.tv)

This project aimed to address individual, household and community food insecurity by increasing the amount of fresh produce available to families. The project addressed this issue in three ways: through creating individual family gardens, building a garden at Apple Tree Landing Family Education Centre and through creating an outreach garden. Gardening education, tools and mentoring was an integral part of the project; it is our belief that this has built capacity to sustain access to fresh, healthy food into the future.

This project was supported by Master's student, Joanne Llewellyn, who explored the literature around using the social-ecological model as a framework for evaluating the impact of community gardens on community food security. Currently the gardening project is undergoing an evaluation with the aid of current graduate student, Sarah Lake, wherein interviews and focus groups will be conducted with families who participated in this project. The evaluation aims to assess the successes and challenges of the three garden models and assess whether having community and backyard gardens impacted local food security.

Cultivating Food Security in Nova Scotia Public Schools: A Case Study of an Elementary School Garden Project: Graduate Thesis (Lead Researcher: Liesel Carlsson, supported through NSHRF Graduate Student Award, liesel.carlsson@acadiu.ca)

School gardens have been promoted as a strategy for building CFS, but to date no research is available exploring the potential of school gardens to contribute to CFS. This case study explored, from the perspective of the school community and public health practitioners: 1) any health, social and ecological effects of the school food garden at River Valley Elementary School, and 2) what factors contributed to producing these effects. Results from this study

indicate that school gardens promote peaceful playground space and may impact food security by increasing knowledge and skills about gardening and sustainable food systems.

Just Us! Development and Education Society (JUDES) Research Project

In partnership with SN3, JUDES and Acadia University developed a research project called “Identification of Barriers and Tools to Support Community Mobilization and Action on Sustainable Food Purchasing Decisions”. This study aimed to investigate and mobilize community stakeholders to address barriers to making sustainable food purchasing decisions through a literature review, focus group research, and educational tool design.

This study has resulted in the development of a tool called “Great Meals for a Change” at www.greatmealsforachange.ca which involves training individuals to host a dinner party wherein guests prepare a local, sustainable meal and play a food security education game. This is followed by implementation of research tools (a survey and post-dinner interviews) to assess the amount of learning that occurred from trying “Great Meals for a Change”. Preliminary results indicate that *Great Meals for a Change* has potential as an educational tool to promote sustainable purchasing and a more vibrant social economy.

Mobilization around Food Security within the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships: A National Scan (CSERP)

The purpose of the national scan was to fuel discussions within the Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network and SN3 around potential collaborations and future research as well as identify gaps in the food security research fabric on a national level, and to initiate cooperation among Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERP) regional nodes to synthesize food security-related results. The scan was conducted from July 2007 to May 2008 and included a review of the CSERP tele-learning session on food security and the social economy, CSERP regional Node and Hub websites, and interviews with Node/Hub coordinators and those responsible for food security projects. The results of this research demonstrate how projects across the country are working on short, medium and long term initiatives to build food security. Many projects are working across the continuum, bridging stages. Opportunities for collaboration and future research are also identified in the report.

Masters Students’ Independent Study Projects

Former MSVU Master in Applied Health and Nutrition student, Liesel Carlsson, reviewed and described school gardens, farm to school programs and sustainable procurement policies, and three strategies that public schools use to procure food from within sustainable food systems, in order to consider the benefits of these strategies against the challenges they present. This resulted in a paper called “[New Approaches to the Health Promoting School: Participation in Sustainable Food Systems](#)” which was presented at the Canadian Association of Food Studies and published in the [Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition](#).

ⁱ Dietitians of Canada. (2007). [Community Food Security: Position of Dietitians of Canada. Public Policy Statements. Retrieved on October 22, 2007 at http://www.foodsecurityalberta.ca/library/DC%20-%20CFS%20final%20position%20paper%20April%202007.pdf](http://www.foodsecurityalberta.ca/library/DC%20-%20CFS%20final%20position%20paper%20April%202007.pdf).

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