



Local Artisan Enterprise: “A Taste of Place”

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Abstract.

Communities are based on unique culture and sense of place. New Urbanism is a concept that the City of Binghamton strives for that relies heavily on the benefits of place-based artisan enterprise. The knowledge that the products that we consume are made nearby has become a very gratifying aspect of closely-knit cities. The City of Binghamton has made great strides in order to become the culture-enriched place that it is today. It can also made many improvements in order to cultivate such locality to a new level.

Keywords: “Sustainability, Agriculture, Locally-Grown, Community, Culture, Artisan, Creativity, Culinary.”

Binghamton Keywords: “VINES Urban Farm, Binghamton University Food Co-op”

I. INTRODUCTION

As a whole, our country is becoming more cognizant of the fact that the majority of what we eat is anything but natural, locally grown produce. Instead, the majority of what we eat is bunch of processed, engineered, and manufactured ingredients that, when put together in a factory and packaged, is then deemed “food.” The great distance between where this “food” is produced and where it is then consumed

continues to increase. This distance allows for the clueless consumer to live in a world where a simple questions as “what exactly am I eating?” or “where did this food come from?” are left almost unanswerable.

It’s about time that we, as local communities stand up against this overly processed way of living. While several efforts have taken place here in Binghamton in support of local agriculture, i.e. farmers markets, more needs to be done in order to encourage gastronomic enterprise. Such enterprise should stress the importance of using locally grown produce in order to foster our local economy, decrease the appeal of mega-superstores that thrive off of globalized food, all while lowering the carbon footprint on Binghamton.

The idea here is to start a movement that will discourage the placeless relationship to the food that we, as residents of the City of Binghamton, consume. By doing so, we can create a system that foster’s place-based food and drink. This will cultivate a connection between the surrounding environment, the City’s culture, and the social aspects of the production of food. The interconnectivity that will occur will be invaluable to the city of Binghamton – this city has great potential, and perhaps increasing culture in such a closely-knit society will bring this potential to greater light. This could change Binghamton into a city that attracts visitors and inhabitants alike. Perhaps it will go so far as to convert visitors into permanent inhabitants.

But where to begin? In downtown Syracuse, at the South Side Innovation Center, Abigail Henson is in charge of the Syracuse Community Test Kitchen. This Kitchen’s motto is, “Creating a recipe for entrepreneurial success.” When I stepped foot into the kitchen, I was immediately inspired. If Binghamton had such a facility that could foster culinary innovation by using only local products, that would be extremely effective in encouraging a “taste of place” here in Binghamton. Perhaps, after such a facility is seen as a success, other sections of a potential center could open up, where artisans can come and foster their own local creativity. By encouraging such local artisan productivity, the City of Binghamton will see a greater sense of culture. Unique businesses will then pop up, and will be able to compete with chain restaurants, mega-markets, and strip malls in the suburbs. Their ability to survive in the competition will not be due to low price, but rather to the distinctive, quality, and local products and services that they might provide.

A. Urban Gardens

Community gardens and community shared agriculture (CSA) are seen as new ideas, but rather, they have been put into effect recently in order to take a step back in time when food was actually grown by the consumer. There are an estimated 18,000 community gardens now growing in the USA and Canada (American Community Gardening Association, 2007). Recently, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken a great interest in funding such community gardens – especially in communities that have marginalized populations who struggle with poverty and hunger. In Portland, Oregon and New York City, small food security grants (under \$200,000 per community) have assisted a great deal in establishing urban gardens in neighborhoods

that have a number of inhabitants under the poverty line. The overall objective of these community-based gardens is to provide for economic development opportunities for the inhabitants of the area, as well as providing basic food security (Donald 1253).

While the concept of the urban farm seems to hold its ground, some opponents to the concept have their reasons for being reluctant supporters. By institutionalizing urban gardens and using local municipalities to support them both financially and organizationally, the legitimacy of the planning process seems encouraging. The gardens create a form of sustainable agriculture in our capitalized society, all while creating a more sound sense of food security and involving community members in hands-on agricultural practices that will undoubtedly increase community cohesion and help to foster a sense of place. On the flip side, some may note that those engaging themselves in the urban farm will primarily be those who cannot afford to go to a grocery store and pay the jacked up prices that are offered. It can be argued that this might increase any racial or class-based tension that may linger in cities. However, in order to prevent these potential negative effects from holding their ground, community leaders must make an effort to educate the public as a whole – of the many benefits of participating in urban farm efforts. While it may be easiest to view the economic benefits as first and foremost, the health benefits, as well the advantages to the community are also legitimate reasons to be a proponent of urban community farming (Donald 1256).

B. Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets are generally seen as an alternative to conventional food networks in modern day society. This is interesting, considering prior to the success of the supermarket, the concept of the farmer's market was how things were sold and purchased regularly. It is only in the past several decades that the United States has seen a resurgence of interest in the concept of the farmers' market. This type of enterprise is the key to implementing the current trend of more sustainable agricultural practice. The success of the revitalization of the farmers' market is based on a variety of factors. For one, farmers can make greater revenue by providing their locally grown products to the consumer without having to bear the extra costs of shipping, packing, preserving, etc. Additionally, the consumers of products that are sold at farmers' markets are way more satisfied when compared to when items are purchased from industrialized institutions. The farmers are also able to connect with the community members and create a sense of trust. The social interaction that occurs is invaluable to the farmer, for it creates for a loyal customer who can put a face to the food he or she is buying. Additionally, since farmers can create such a sense of trust and establish rapport with the community, they need not partake in becoming certified organic – something that can be very costly and burdensome towards farmers who already take part in organic practice. Often times local farmers surpass organic requirements and yet cannot afford the label. Instead, they rely on letting community members taste their products, visit their farms, and observe their practices in order to understand the level of sustainability that these farms utilize (Vecchio 4).

By providing for all of this social interaction, a bond will be re-established between the consumer and the products in which he or she consumes. A disconnect

between food and its origin is something that individuals living in an industrialized society are used to. However, by providing them with that link, the phenomenon of the Farmers' Market will surely sell its appeal.

By attaining support from local municipalities, the success of farmers' markets is much more attainable. Such a joint effort would increase funding and promotions, which would make the concept more attractive for a small-scale producer. This would then stimulate local economic development by encouraging more producers to join the market. This increases variety for consumers, and over time, will increase the client base – which helps suppliers to have the luxury of targeting different distribution channels. In this new industrial revolution that we are facing, there is a new demand for small-scale artisan producers who can supply consumers with good quality food products (Guthrie, 7).

C. Think global, consume local

“Produced by your neighbors. Only natural ingredients. Regionalism is smart. Minimizing processing delivers taste. Jobs for neighbours. It is a rational movement. Quality is better. Save the planet. Eat well. Splendour in diversity. Traditional craftsmanship. Good food doesn't like to travel. Think global, consume local. Made for neighbours. Get political. Stay connected to the producer. Buy this product forever. Be radical” (Feagan, 23).

There is a great physical and psychological disconnect between food production and the consumer. This distance furthers the public from the social and environmental consequences of the food being cultivated and consumed. Essentially, the most complex and distanced the production of food becomes, the greater the loss of rural agricultural resilience and diversity. This leads to careless degradation of our surrounding environment, dislocation of community, loss of identity and a lost sense of place. There is great irony in this concept, for the global food system that we as a society rely on is heavily interconnected, yet at the same time, it creates effects of detachment and alienation. “Local food systems advocates see profoundly negative ecological, sociocultural, and economic manifestations in the trends of dominant food systems and believe the localization trend shifts the focus back to the context specific ecological and social factors global markets tend to externalize” (Feagan, 38). Feagan makes it clear that communities must take the proper steps in order to prevent this disconnect from being facilitated.

II. BEST PRACTICES:

A. Farmers' Markets

<http://www.binghamtonfarmersmarket.com/Home.html>

Bloodnick Family Farm - Apalachin, NY

Lisa Bloodnick – locally famous for her many varieties of lettuce and many other types of produce, works with her husband in order to farm four acres of land in

Apalachin, NY. After visiting her farm and speaking to her one-on-one, it was very interesting to see how dedicated one can be to growing healthy and sustainable foods. Lisa and her husband sell a great deal during the late spring and summer months at the Vestal farmers' market. She noted that there is a great demand for locally grown produce in the area – and she has no trouble selling out during the months that she sells.

B. VINES Urban Farm – Sponsored by Earth Day Southern Tier
<http://vimeo.com/5283098>

The VINES Urban Farm, located in downtown Binghamton, has been recently organized to help create and sustain a more resilient community food system within the city of Binghamton through the formation of an urban farm. Working as part of and in cooperation with Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments (VINES), with the support of the city of Binghamton's administration and including Binghamton residents, farmers and students, the project intends to build a sustainable and just local food system in our city.

Starting with one farm site and expanding as opportunities and funding become available, we will grow fresh, nutritious, safe and affordable organic food year round within and around the boundaries of the city. By providing and increasing access to such foods, creating jobs and volunteer opportunities, and implementing educational programs, the project will strengthen food security, stimulate and support a more equitable local economy, and empower the surrounding community.

"Promoting our vision of sustainability are the tenets of fairness, equity, food justice as social justice, ecologically sound practices, a strong work ethic, equanimity, and reciprocity."

C. Binghamton University Food Co-op

In the University Union on Binghamton University's campus, there is a student-run cooperative that offers healthy and organic foods. The food is mostly, if not all, locally grown. There are great selections for vegan and kosher diets.

D. Syracuse Community Test Kitchen – Creating a recipe for entrepreneurial success

The Syracuse Community Test Kitchen (COMTEK) is a joint collaboration with Nelson farms and Whitman School of Management. The Community Test Kitchen located within the SSIC will support new and existing food entrepreneurs with training and guidance to commercialize home recipes. New Entrepreneurs will receive training in the areas of commercialization; from the development process of formulating scratch recipes into full scale-up production formulas, marketing, sales, and distribution. Existing Small Business Food Entrepreneurs in need of growing their business to the

next level of profitability will be offered through a variety of business training programs and culinary product improvement Sessions.

The goal of the Community Test Kitchen is to help entrepreneurs create new products that are profitable. Participants will be trained in the areas of business planning, market research, recipe development, sensory analysis, and FDA requirements while working in the Test Kitchen. Successful participants will be referred to Nelson Farms for Scale-Up production of a potentially profitable product. Nelson Farms is Morrisville State College's small-scale food processing center located 8 miles from the college in Nelson NY. It serves small business owners and entrepreneurs in producing, packaging, and marketing products.

E. Central New York Bounty

www.cnybounty.com

The mission of CNY Bounty is to support local farmers and producers by creating new markets for locally produced foods, thereby strengthening the local economy and providing healthy food to all citizens of Central New York in an environmentally responsible way.

Each week, Bounty staff coordinate weekly product availability with farmers and producers and upload the products, prices, photos and descriptions on the website. Consumers can go online to place an order by noon on Monday. Orders are collected from the farm on Wednesday morning by Bounty staff, taken to the shared distribution center in Sherburne, NY, and distributed by Bounty staff to customers' doorsteps or strategically located drop off points on Wednesday or Thursday afternoon. Delivery is free for orders over \$35 or for orders of any size to drop off points.

CNY Bounty operates year-round and currently works with over 100 farmers and producers. All processed/prepared products contain at least 25% locally grown ingredients, except where products are not grown in the region (ex: coffee and cacao).

F. Restaurants in Downtown Binghamton

Many restaurants in Binghamton already participate in local and sustainable agriculture. These types of restaurants also tend to be full of culture and help to bridge gaps in the community.

Lost Dog Café – This restaurant uses locally grown and organic foods when possible. It helps to foster a sense of community and culture by participating in and hosting a variety of civic events.

“Our food is prepared with vegetable stock (no MSG, no chemicals) and made to order with fresh ingredients.”

“ The original Lost Dog Café, located in an old garage at 60 Main Street in Binghamton, was started on a “shoestring” budget with the love of good food, good people, and a

strong sense of **community** as inspiration. We have grown in size but our original intention remains the same.”

Remilks – This restaurant has recently opened and is looking to start programs that partner with local farmers and food producers.

Whole in the Wall – “Our mission is to serve the highest quality all-natural food in our own unique and sometimes offbeat way. In a world where choices are often limited to "paper or plastic" we strive to provide a real alternative in food that not only tastes great but is great for you too.”

Cyber Café – This Café hosts many local events, and is known as Binghamton’s #1 live music joint. This establishment provides healthy food options while creating a lax and community-oriented atmosphere.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Test Kitchen on Court Street (Near Incubator)

Similar to the Test Kitchen in Syracuse, a kitchen in Binghamton would also be very beneficial to the community. However, a test kitchen that offers co-packing services and facilities would be ideal, so that those who use the kitchen are not limited by the overwhelming costs of packaging, processing, freezing, labeling, etc. their foods and products.

B. Community Gardens

Have community gardens in every development with special types of produce grown in each. Therefore – the community can get together, trade crops & interact! VINES is an excellent program that has grown a great deal over the past few years in downtown Binghamton. However, this program has a great deal of potential. The Vines program could partner with local schools – which could perhaps be turned into test kitchens over summer breaks when schools are out of session. Students would then receive healthy and locally grown food that was grown within walking distance. This would, in turn, increase student’s awareness of the benefits and importance of local agriculture, which would sustain a great deal of attention towards community gardening. If the city would make their city zoning code more agriculturally friendly, it would allow for individuals to take advantage of vacant lots more readily. Rather than making the process harder for Binghamton residents, it would then be clear to them, which areas are acceptable to plant on, and which areas are not.

C. Farmers Markets

Have a farmers market on every part of Binghamton: in the downtown area, west side, north side, east side, and south side. Involve campus organizations with this. Also, advertise which ones are food stamp friendly. This will make local foods more accessible to those in certain financial situations. Make sure they are all placed

in accessible areas to public transport. Incorporate locally grown foods into 20 Hawley and other student complexes so that students are exposed to the local culture and community.

D. Getting Students Involved!

Binghamton University students tend to put up a big barrier, consciously or subconsciously, between themselves and the surrounding community. Many of these students would indefinitely take down this barrier if there were incentives for them to become an integral part of the community. Awareness of this blockade must be brought to the attention of city leaders. Communication between leaders downtown and on campus must be fostered in order to create a cohesive and healthy relationship between the two areas. If they city would further advertise its many projects on topics of local agricultural sustainability, perhaps students would become more involved and would become active, rather than passive members of the City of Binghamton. There must be cooperation on both sides. (E.g. campus must create and sustain interest groups, and the city could perhaps partner with farmers markets to make their products discounted for SUNY students). Another way is to have the school partner with the Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition (BRSC) in order to start a food co-op, like the one on campus, in the downtown area. "BRSC is a grassroots, democratically-run organization, dedicated to increasing civic participation through education and collaboration to achieve enduring social, environmental and economic well-being. BRSC is working to become a regional information clearinghouse to promote new and existing sustainability efforts, a source for sustainability training and education, a center for networking and coordination and an advocacy group that builds community support for public policies that further our mission."

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