

A New Look Way to Look at Food and Agriculture: **Community Food Systems**

Looking at food and agriculture issue through the lens of community food security requires one to look at the whole food system and understand how each part affects the whole food security of a given community.

Community food security programs and policies address a broad range of issues, including, but not limited to:

- Participation in and access to federal food assistance programs
- Economic opportunity and job security
- Community development and social cohesion
- Ecologically sustainable agricultural production
- Farmland preservation
- Economic viability of rural communities
- Direct food marketing
- Diet-related health problems
- Access to emergency food

At first glance, some of these topics don't seem to be related. For instance, what does farmland preservation have to do with diet related health problems? Or direct marketing?

But digging a bit deeper, one can see the connections. In Oklahoma, high rates of obesity and diet-related health problems are due in part to diets with too many high fat, high sugar foods and not enough fresh fruits and vegetables.

Many argue that the best tasting, and therefore most likely to be eaten, fruits and vegetables are those grown nearby – picked ripe, handled properly and served as quickly as possible. When this is done, the nutritional value is high.

In order to have highly palatable, fresh fruits and vegetables close at hand, one must have a viable local agriculture and viable local markets such as farmers' markets where farmers make direct sales to consumers.

In order to have a viable local agriculture, local farm land must be preserved. Much of the best farmland in the nation surrounds cities, where it at most risk of being lost, converted into subdivisions or industrial parks (this is also true in Oklahoma). Hence, there is a need for farmland preservation programs.

Looking at food and agriculture through the lens of community food security allows one to see the connections between seemingly unrelated issues.

Sustainable Community Food Systems: The Main Idea

- ▶ Food is produced, processed and distributed as locally as possible
- ▶ Supports a food system that preserves farmland
- ▶ Fosters community economic vitality
- ▶ Requires less energy for transportation
- ▶ Offers consumers the freshest food



Excerpted from the Kerr Center Centennial Report: *Closer to Home: Healthier Food, Farms, and Families in Oklahoma*. The full report is available on the Kerr Center website, www.kerrcenter.com or by calling 918-647-9123.



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