



Memorandum: APA Interactive Exercise Session – Chicago, April 2013

This memo has been prepared to inform the Principal Investigators (PIs) of the Growing Food Connections project about information gathered from the audience during the interactive exercise component of the APA conference session. The audience provided answers to the following three questions: 1. What research questions need to be answered; 2. What skills do planners need to develop in order to strengthen the connections between underserved residents and local agriculture; and 3. What are the most effective ways to engage community members and leaders to make this connection? The responses obtained from these questions are summarized below in a narrative format.

First question: What research questions need to be answered?

According to the audience's response, policies and regulatory barriers concerning the production of healthy foods are the most important research questions that need to be addressed. The audience was mostly concerned with the removal of barriers through strategies such as modifying zoning codes for urban agriculture and encouraging fresh production and distribution through incentives (i.e. offering financial incentives to developers to provide healthy food options in corner stores).

The audience was also concerned with how to shift the dietary intake patterns of underserved communities toward healthier patterns and increase the demand for healthy and fresh foods.

Food security was the second most important research question that the audience identified. Their concern about food security was evident in responses that addressed the need for building sustainable community gardens in underserved areas or offering more culturally appropriate foods. Overall, the audience raised questions about increasing food security in underserved areas and for vulnerable consumers.

The other research question that many audience members asked about was the impact of the global food market on local production and consumption. Questions such as "how to import less and consume more locally?", "how to change the overall policy regarding imported food products?" and "how can local product prices compete with imported food prices?" reflected a

concern about the role of globalization in local food production. Figure 1 shows the key words that the audience used the most to address the research questions that need to be answered.

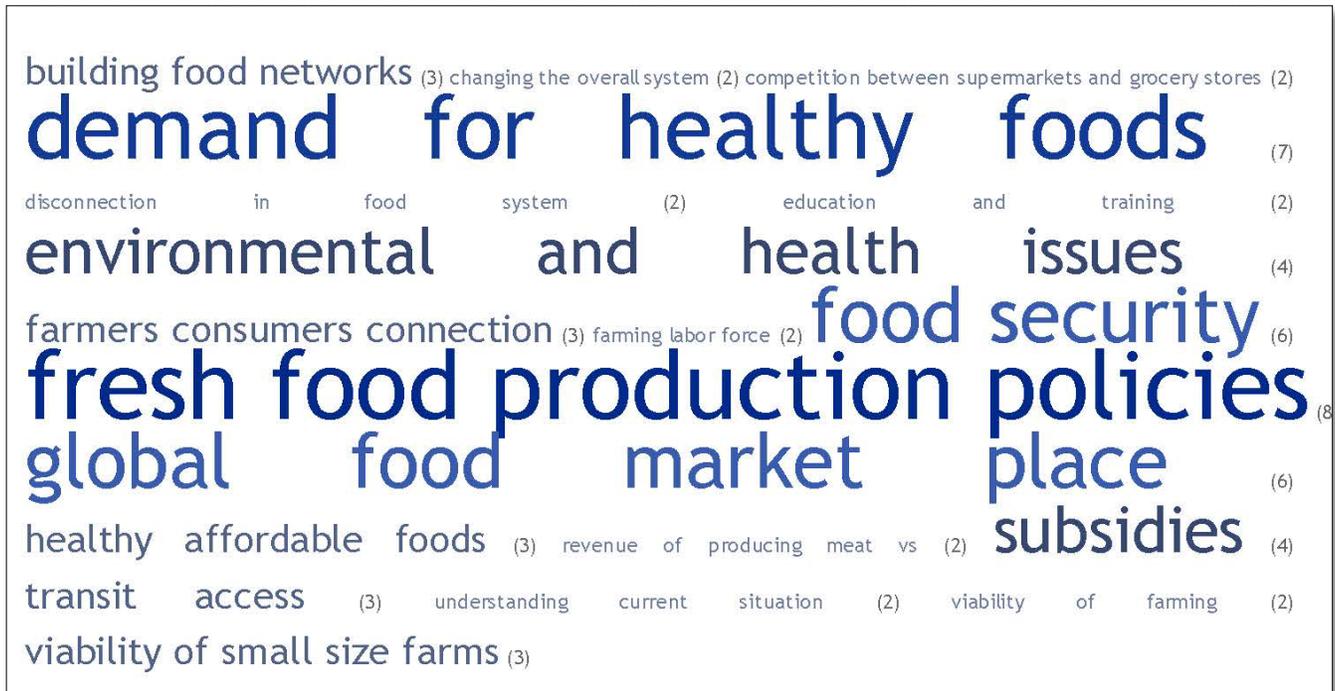


Figure 1. Most frequent key words that represent the research questions that need to be answered

Second question: What skills do planners need to develop supportive plans and policies to achieve these connections?

The audience’s response to the second question provides a list of skills and knowledge that planners should obtain in order to strengthen the connection between underserved residents and local agriculture. Based on the responses, the most critical knowledge that planners should gain is in the realm of food systems. Most of the responses directly indicated that it is necessary for planners to have an in-depth and broad understanding of what food systems planning is and how food systems work. There were a significant number of responses that suggested planners should have an understanding of food insecurity, food access and the spatial distribution of food destinations.

The audience mentioned that a combination of different knowledge from the areas of agri-business, economics, marketing and public policy is necessary for planners. Also, some responses directly indicated that having multidisciplinary knowledge is the most vital skill a planner can have. Some responses also indicated that in order to have economically viable agriculture, planners should be familiar with farming economy and agri-business and be equipped with marketing knowledge. Others responded that planners should be fully informed about the public policies that affect farming and food production.

Moreover, the audience recommended some practical skills for planners in order to build connections between leaders and community members. Characteristics like flexibility and persuasiveness, along with strong negotiation and communication skills, are necessary for planners to work with local governments. Figure 2 presents the most frequent key words used by the audience to describe what skills are necessary for planners to develop in order to strengthen the connections between local farmers and underserved residents.



Figure 2. Most frequent key words that represent the essential skills planners need to obtain in order to develop supportive plans and policies

Third question: What are the most effective ways to engage community members and leaders to make these connections?

The majority of the audience did not directly suggest effective ways to engage community members and leaders. However, they mentioned effective ways to increase the level of community participation in the food systems planning process. The most commonly suggested way to engage the community members was to educate children. The audience indicated that “engaging children is the key to engaging the rest of the community.” Public schools, media, churches and other community organizations were suggested as outlets for reaching and educating children. Also, it was mentioned that adding new curricula about local food production and food systems to elementary school programs could be helpful to engage the community members from early ages. The audience also responded that raising awareness about food-related issues should be a top priority for planners in order to engage leaders. They believed that it is crucial to draw the attention of local governments to current food-related issues in order to benefit from their support and help.

The second most common effective way to engage community members and leaders was food events. The audience suggested that food events with the participation of community members and local governments could be an opportunity for both groups to meet and support each other. Also, supporting and expanding community gardens with classes and events, as well as farmers’ markets, were identified as other effective ways to engage community members. The audience noted that community gardens and farmers’ markets are more effective at engaging community than building connections between community members and leaders. Finally, there were a few responses that recommended food policy councils and public meetings as ways to build connections between leaders and community members. Figure 3 shows the key words that were used most by the audience in order to describe the effective ways to engage community members and leaders.



Figure 3. Most frequent key words that represent the effective ways to engage community members and leaders