

The Power of Policy and the Reality of Food

Food Security Summit 2008

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Jennifer Hagan-Dier (moderator)- Assistant Commissioner, Liaison to Department of Economic and Community Development, Tennessee Department of Revenue

- Dianne Killebrew, Registered Dietitian and a Packaging Innovation Specialist.

Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Dietetic Internship Program

- Avi Poster, Community Activist/Education Consultant

- Megan Macaraeg, Director, Middle Tennessee Jobs with Justice

Why do so many American states and cities have agencies and budgets for everything from trash collection and waste water treatment, to public health and environment, yet few, including Tennessee and Nashville, dedicate serious planning and money toward ensuring that it has a healthy and sustainable local food system where all residents have access to nutritionally adequate food? Local advocates talk about the power of state, local and federal policy and how these policies or the lack thereof impact the entire food system from production and distribution to access. The people on the panel have used many different ways to generate awareness and create grassroots support for programs and policies that will ensure that we all have an inalienable right to access to safe, fresh, nutritious, culturally appropriate foods.

Dianne Killebrew

Dianne talks about how aspects of our food system are in the end governed by policy. There are two ways of thinking about it, our personal Food System and the Big Food System. A lot of brainstorming has been done over rethinking school lunches. There are many innovative ways we can collaborate to bring local and healthy foods into the schools.

Discussion of food and policy from a local/state impact perspective focusing on access issues through "farm to school" and "farm to hospital" type programs and why these types of programs are important and how local and state policies impact institutional purchasing.

Avi Poster

Avi shared his experiences participating in Nashville's Food Stamp Challenge. The Food Stamp Challenge was created to raise awareness about how difficult it is for food stamp recipients to eat a healthy diet while worrying about other costs such as rent, healthcare, education, transportation, and childcare. By bringing together political, community, religious, and governmental leaders and activists their goal was to have a better understanding of how difficult it is to have a healthy diet on a limited income.

People need to understand the importance and great impact of the farm bill on nutrition programs and the importance of education. Eliminating hunger is within reach. As a city we need to be committed to poverty reduction.

With the food stamp challenge and through voice, they work to educate the citizenry and public officials. Hunger is the gateway of eradicating poverty. Eradicating hunger is possible. A plan to cut hunger in half is to add 10 billion dollars additional money to subsidized programs such as food stamps, school lunches, etc. (Report reference: Center for American progress task force on poverty). Addressing hunger not an issue of charity but of justice. Don't underestimate the power of voice in social change. Meet with and let your elected officials what you want and demand for a socially just community.

Lessons from the Food Stamp Challenge and why do it? There were three reasons: Educate the larger community, Educate public policy makers, Activate our own field

Lessons learned from the challenge were, when shopping on 21 dollars a week, could not afford fruits vegetables or meat. Some food stamp recipients find a way to buy expired milk at ½ price at Kroger or ask the butcher at the store to cut up a package of meat into a 1/3 of package of meat so it can be lower cost.

It is important to change the outlook of the public. Congressmen, city council members, and the media all took the challenge. They are advocating for increased dollars placed on nutrition stamps and more dollars for food stamps.

Megan Macaraeg

Megan stressed the importance of educating the public about policies that affect them. Public policy and living wages are linked; living wage is a term used to describe the minimum hourly wage necessary for a person to achieve some specific standard of living. Challenges to change include lack of education versus lack of political will.

In response to the number of people eligible for food stamps who don't get them, Megan shares a personal experience. There are many reasons why people who are eligible don't apply for food stamps. Logistical hurdles, they didn't know they are eligible for food stamps, or are too proud to ask for assistance.

In her work with MANNA, Megan saw that many families in Nashville are not accessing their food stamps benefits. There is a big problem with undocumented immigrants, who have citizen children that are eligible for food stamps but are afraid or have legal hurdles (such as off the books jobs) that make them unable to access or collect stamps. HOPE is an organization helping families impacted by INS raids in Spring Hill Electrolux plant. 1600 people fled the city of Spring Hill, many families with citizen children. Some of them have received food assistance through Feed America First.

The Vanderbilt living wage campaign was mentioned as an example of community organizing. The minimum wage did not come close to a family supporting wage. There

was a lack of political will to support workers in the University. It had had to be built in community first through a group of workers, students and community members.