

The HEN Post

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Spring 2012

Adventures from Clinic to Farm

by Janice Giddens, MS, RD, LD

In February of 2011, I moved to Jenny Jack Sun Farm (JJSF), a small, diversified fruit and vegetable farm with a flock of laying hens in Pine Mountain, GA. I traded my position as a clinical dietitian to become a sustainable farming apprentice for nine months and promptly packed up my white lab coat and pulled out the overalls.

My family, friends and colleagues only suffered a mild case of shock when I announced my resignation and “new” direction. Truth be told, the direction wasn’t really a new one but rather one that I had been following throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies. As an undergraduate at the University of Georgia, I had completed a certificate program in International Agriculture, in addition to my food and nutrition degrees. The capstone course involved a minimum three-month long internship experience abroad working with an organization that had a sustainability focus. I chose a couple of farms in Ecuador that I wanted to work and live on and took off. During those months, I worked high in the cloud forest of Ecuador on a diversified farm that grew a wide variety of medicinal plants, fruits and vegetables and raised pigs, cows, and goats. We learned to make furniture from cob, how to save seeds, basic construction skills, how a person can spend hours upon hours planting/weeding and how you can enjoy a very warm beer at the end of a long day with good company. My time on that farm gave me an understanding of the hard work that goes in to growing food and a love for the land and people who do it.

Fast forward a few years and I found myself longing to return to the land to get an aggressive education in sustainable food production and direct market distribution. My search for where I could get such an education ended when I found the National Sustainable Agriculture

Information Service, also referred to as ATTRA (<https://attra.ncat.org>). Here, I was able to find a wide range of apprenticeships on different farms all over the country. The type of farm apprenticeship I was looking for was

one that provided hands on training, working side by side with the farmers and participating in every aspect from growing food to the business of farming. I wanted to live on the land where I would work and focus primarily on learning how to intensively manage a few acres to grow a wide variety of produce that would be sold locally through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscriptions and farmers’ markets.

I applied and interviewed at JJSF with farmers who were married and the same age as myself. Most apprenticeships require an on-farm interview where dressing in a suit is strongly discouraged as you will be interviewing while doing farm chores. After an exhilarating day of interviewing while thinning and pulling carrots, I knew that I really did want to pursue this opportunity. When

the position was offered to me, I took it and moved in to a small loft in a big barn.

Living and working on the farm consisted of long laborious hours, rain or shine and endless opportunities to learn, grow and be in complete awe of nature. Learning about soil made me realize the ways in which we as human beings are more like the earth than we realize.



Janice Giddens with a wheelbarrow full of bell peppers



Message from the Chair

by Alison Harmon, PhD, RD

Dear HEN Members:

Spring is so inspiring. The frost is melting away here in Montana (a little earlier than usual, actually), and so the ground is soft enough to start digging. But I am seeing signs that something bigger than an annual phenomena is occurring. It feels like more than winter is melting.

For example, last night was a big event for the student organization I advise, called Friends of Local Foods. It was our second annual chili-off and seedluck (like a potluck but for exchanging seeds). Last year's event had been really fun, drawing 30-40 people and eight or nine tasty chili recipes. This year at least 250 people poured into our humble venue, and there were so many crock pots of chili, we ran out of tables, bowls, and chairs to sit on. Among a variety of short presentations made by others, I had the honor of recognizing members of the Sustainable Food and Bioenergy System Degree Program's inaugural graduating class. There are nine this year. Next year there will be 30. The university recently announced that they will provide permanent funding for the coordination of the degree program and its accompanying student farm. I am inspired both by our students and by our decision makers.

Montana dietetic interns also spend time on that student farm. Our internship concentration is Sustainable Food Systems. We have just finished selecting the second class of interns from our own graduating seniors, and this year also from the national pool. I am inspired by the flood of applications we received, and by the impassioned voices I heard when I read personal statements and conducted phone interviews. It is apparent that the issues on which HEN focuses are salient for dietitians in training. Emerging professionals will not need to be convinced of that!

I am inspired by incoming chair, Stacia Clinton, RD, LDN, and chair-elect Ashley Colpaart, MS, RD. Both are ingenious, efficient, and brave. As I pass the torch, I know HEN leadership is in strong and resilient hands. Together we are planning to hold a second annual meeting (via conference call) with Academy leaders where we hope to collaboratively determine how to ensure that the Academy's corporate partners share our values and how HEN can collaborate with other DPGs to address issues related to sustainability both in our professional organization and in our food and water systems.

Lastly, I am inspired by RD farmers like Diana Dyer, MS, RD, and Mary Jo Forbord, RD. One of the things I am looking forward to most in my year serving as past chair for HEN is working with both of them on our School-to-Farm program. This program provides an opportunity for dietetic students and interns to spend time working on a farm or ranch to better understand food, agriculture, and sustainability. If you are an RD farmer, please be in touch with me if mentoring new and emerging food and nutrition professionals is of interest.

What is inspiring you? Consider letting it nourish other HEN members by sharing it on the Electronic Mailing List (EML)!

Alison Harmon, PhD, RD, LN
2011-2012 Chair, HEN DPG

CALL FOR PAPERS

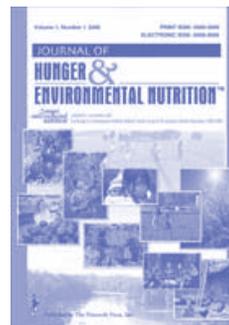
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Information about submission requirements is available at:

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1932-0248.asp>

Questions may be directed to Marie Boyle Struble, PhD, RD, Editor, at mstruble@cse.edu.

(Adventures from Clinic to Farm
continued from page 1)

When we read through soil tests and learned about amending different fields with nitrogen, potassium, magnesium, calcium, lime and a variety of other micronutrients, I exclaimed, "Amending soil is like writing TPN!"

As winter turned to spring and spring turned to summer, our days went from non-stop seeding in the greenhouse and putting transplants in the ground to abundant harvests. At the height of production, we would have days that we could only get two crops harvested and put away between sun up and sundown. Since there were only four of us total, the two farmers, my apprentice partner and I that worked full-time, harvesting one crop such as tomatoes could take most of the day. One particular harvest day that will forever be engrained in my mind was one where we harvested 500 pounds of tomatoes and 200 pounds of rattlesnake beans. When we were done, we flung our bodies, covered in welts and sunburn, directly into a spring fed lake and washed that day away.

Once market season rolled around, Saturdays and Wednesdays were days we all looked forward to. Not only did we get to see the incredibly happy faces of our grateful customers as they picked up the produce and examined it like a work of art, we got the chance to socialize with them, find out what was going on in a world other than our own and remind

ourselves of why we had chosen to be a part of this "good food movement." Our CSA members are the reason our farm was and is able to exist. Without their dedication and support, JJSF would not be possible. The CSA was comprised of 110 members who showed up weekly to one of three locations to pick up their food. As a RD, I often found myself giving lots of food guidance to customers who would tell me of various health issues they had or to members who were struggling to figure out how to use up their abundant supply of produce or what to do with that "mystery" vegetable they had never seen before. I will truly miss that dedicated bunch of souls who lined up every week to greet me, chat about the weather, pick up their produce and wait with me to pack up because they didn't want me to be alone at the end of market.

After nine glorious months on the farm, my apprenticeship ended. I began looking for a job that required my expertise in human health and nutrition and needed me to have a unique understanding of the way that food is produced and distributed within local food systems. This month, I will begin my new job as a food security coordinator for the Clarkston Community Center near Atlanta, GA doing exactly what I set out to do when I realized I wanted to become a RD—help alleviate food insecurity through food and nutrition based initiatives that emphasize the importance of local, sustainable food systems for community wellness.



Farmer Jenny Jackson and Janice Giddens seeding cool weather crops in the greenhouse.

HEN MISSION

To empower members to be leaders in sustainable and accessible food and water systems

HEN VISION

To optimize the nation's health by promoting access to nutritious food and clean water from a secure and sustainable food system

THE BENEFITS OF HEN MEMBERSHIP INCLUDE:

- Quarterly newsletter with occasional CPE articles and reproducible fact sheets.
- Access to the HEN Electronic Mailing List (EML) that provides the latest information and relevant conferences.
- Subscription to the Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition published by Taylor and Francis.
- Member-only access to articles and resources via the HEN Web site — www.HENdpg.org.
- Collaboration with food and nutrition professionals across the United States and the world.
- Opportunity to be nominated for HEN awards.
- Notices of related conferences around the country.
- Potential for national and international recognition when working on HEN projects.
- Eligible to vote in HEN Executive Committee election.

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Going to the Source: Bringing Healthy Food from Healthy Farms Into Our Internships

by Katelyn Dinkgrave, RD

One lack I felt during my dietetic internship was any discussion of where our food comes from. While one's dietetic career may focus on foodservice, community or clinical nutrition, I still feel it's important that we be able to explain to our patients and clients the process of how a seed in the ground becomes the food on the table.

As Barbara Kingsolver points out in her book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, many people in developed countries – where we enjoy the “luxury” of having moved off of the family farm – are completely unaware that there is a part of the potato plant that grows above the ground. I would submit then, as many others have in recent years, that agriculture and dietetics are inextricably linked. If it is our duty to educate the public – to be the experts on food and nutrition – we must understand the bigger picture.

It was this desire to learn more about food at its source that I got in touch with Diana Dyer. At the end of my dietetic internship through Western Michigan University, I had the opportunity to spend two weeks anywhere in the country, focusing on an area of dietetics of my own interest, so long as an RD was willing to take me on as an intern. And so I ended up at the Dyer Family Organic Farm in Ann Arbor, Michigan, run by Diana and her husband Dick Dyer. Despite the fact that two weeks is hardly enough time to do more than scratch the surface of a local food system, Diana made up an incredible schedule for me. The majority of my time was spent at the Dyer farm pulling weeds, planting sets of leeks and onions, learning about invasive species such as garlic mustard and autumn olives, and discussing the interconnected issues of food justice, food insecurity, civil dietetics, and the health of the soil and its consequential impact on human health. Soil became the constant theme of my whirlwind two-week rotation.

To deepen my experience, Diana had set up visits at other local organic farms. At Capella Farm, I spent a day with owner Jennifer Kangas, learning about a different type of farming. Whereas Diana and Dick specialize in many varieties of garlic to sell to local chefs and at farmer's

markets, Capella is primarily a CSA farm offering a wide variety of produce in a weekly box for subscribers. Here again I heard the message of soil health – if the soil is not properly maintained

The Farm at St. Joseph Hospital. Here the connection between agriculture and dietetics was truly driven home. The Farm strives to provide fresh, local, organically grown produce to the

patients, visitors, and employees of the hospital. A truly collaborative project, The Farm incorporates multiple perspectives to achieve its goals – and it includes two dietitians on its advisory board – Lisa McDowell, MS, RD, and Diana Dyer. My day with farm manager Dan Bair again invoked the topic of soil, as he taught me how to amend soil with various substances such as compost and green sand. It is incredible to imagine the complex ecosystem that exists within the soil. There is so much more to the rich, earthy stuff that we simply call “dirt.”

While at St. Joseph Hospital, I also met with Hillary Bisnett, regional coordinator of Healthy Food in Health Care at the Ecology Center in Ann Arbor, MI. The Ecology Center has partnered with the Michigan Health & Hospital Association to create the Michigan Healthy Food Work Group. This partnership has produced

the Healthy Food Hospitals initiative, which aims to impact not only hospital food systems, but also local communities and economies. In addition to improving the nutritional value of pediatric menus and providing nutrition content information in hospital cafeterias, the initiative also encourages a commitment from hospitals to purchase at least 20 percent of Michigan grown and produced products. My conversation with Hillary has led to my involvement with the Healthy Food Hospitals initiative at my job, an exciting opportunity for me to continue learning more about sustainable practices and to play a role in promoting the health and well-being of my community.



Diana Dyer and Katelyn Dinkgrave working with organic hops

from one year to the next, crops fail to flourish and money is lost, and the damage to the soil compounds over time. Today in the U.S., we have fewer farms taking up much more acreage than the thousands of small family farms that they replaced. It is much more difficult to maintain adequate soil health on large areas of land – not impossible, but requiring a careful system – than to nurture a smaller plot over time. Many of us are likely familiar with the myriad of problems associated with large-scale farming practices that fail to maintain the soil – erosion, runoff, and large swaths of land that have been stripped of nutrients – in addition to drought, famine, and poverty.

I also had the opportunity to spend a day at

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Finally, I spent two days with Growing Hope, an Ypsilanti nonprofit organization that serves two purposes – running a weekly farmer’s market in downtown Ypsilanti, and providing materials and information for people who wish to create their own vegetable gardens. Participants can buy (or receive for free, based on need) a 4–by-4-foot- raised bed kit. Growing Hope also teaches participants how to build, begin, and maintain their raised beds throughout the growing season. I loved learning about this very local organization that sought to empower people in such a simple yet often overlooked way. Although my time with Growing Hope was very brief, I will always feel inspired by what a small group of people can accomplish when they seek to strengthen their own community.

In a culture that was built on farming, but later turned its back on self-reliance in favor of industrialization, we are slowly returning to our roots. As I walk through my neighborhood in southwestern Michigan, I notice more backyard gardens than I ever recall seeing as a child. Within a thirty-minute drive, I can visit at least eight different farmer’s markets. “Locally produced” and “organically grown” are becoming points of pride for both consumers and producers. Dietitians have an opportunity to further this movement by helping people from all walks of life get involved. Involvement does not have to be something on a grand scale – it can be as simple as discussing with patients and clients the benefits of buying as much local, in-season produce as possible. Preservation techniques such as canning and dehydrating are enjoying a recent revival, with people of all ages learning these tried and true techniques to keep local fruits and vegetables on the table all year long.

I have since finished my internship and started my career as a clinical dietitian, but I have not left my experiences of these two weeks behind me. In my transition from intern to professional, I have already connected with many of my patients on the topics of gardening, local food, and



Katelyn making a rustic tomato pie with pesto

the simple joys of cooking. Food is a universal common ground for people of all walks of life; it is something that we can all relate to, discuss, and enjoy. I would challenge students, interns, and dietitians alike to look deeper, to seek to understand where our food comes from, how it is grown, and what we can do as individuals and as a society to preserve and maintain the quality of the soil in which it is grown. As Diana told me, a handful of soil has as many, if not more, organisms within it as there are living things on earth. The best way to understand this microcosm of life is to get into it. If my two weeks is any indication, experience is the best teacher. Start a garden, volunteer on a CSA farm, start a compost pile, find a local growing or planting organization, talk to local farmers at the market, and don’t be afraid to get dirty!

More information can be found on the web at the following links:

<http://www.dianadyer.com> – Diana Dyer, MS, RD

<http://www.growinghope.net> – Growing Hope, Ypsilanti, MI

<http://stjoefarm.wordpress.com/about/> – The Farm at St. Joseph Hospital

http://www.noharm.org/us_canada/news_hcwh/2011/may/hcwh2011-05-31.php – Healthy Food Hospitals Initiative Press Release

Planting Seeds of Sustainability through the HEN DPG School-to-Farm Program

by Diana Dyer, MS, RD

To help facilitate the rapidly growing interest within the dietetics profession regarding sustainable food and agricultural systems, HEN established the “School-to-Farm” Program, a means of connecting Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics members who are farmers and growers with dietetic students and interns seeking volunteer experiences related to HEN’s vision, mission, and definition of sustainability.

The School-to-Farm Program, created in 2009 and approved by ADA in 2010, seeks to provide opportunities for dietetic stu-

dents and interns to immerse themselves within a farming operation that is focused on using organic, sustainable agriculture practices and owned or managed by a registered dietitian (RD). It provides an opportunity for dietetic interns to step back from “we are what we eat” to develop a deeper understanding of the food and agricultural system with a starting point of “we are what we grow.” It will allow them to experience the cycle of health from its roots in order to become leaders within the food and nutrition community at both local and national levels to advocate for policy changes that pro-

mote increased access and affordability of “good food for all.” As fellow HEN member Angie Tagtow, MS, RD states, “Healthy soil grows healthy food, which nourishes healthy people who create healthy communities.”

For more information about HEN’s School-to-Farm program, visit www.hendpg.org. The program is actively seeking additional RD farmers willing to host dietetic student/interns. To get involved, contact Diana Dyer, MS, RD at dianadyersrd@provide.net.

Interns on the Roof

by Catherine Tong, Dietetic Intern, Nora Minno, Dietetic Intern, & Iman Marghoob, MS, RD

Each fall, Stony Brook University Medical Center (SBUMC) in Stony Brook, NY accepts 16 interns into its dietetic internship program. Over the course of their ten month program, the interns participate in a variety of rotations, including a five-week public health rotation. In the past, this rotation has included school nutrition policy work and physician education regarding breastfeeding practices, both of which are grant-funded programs. More recently, however, the interns at SBUMC have been given the additional opportunity to work with a nutrition-focused community garden grant during their public health rotation.

In 2010, the Nutrition Division within the Department of Family Medicine at SBUMC, under primary investigator and executive director, Josephine Connolly-Schoonen, PhD, RD, received a grant from the New York State Department of Health's *Healthy Heart Program* to develop community gardens in Suffolk County, Long Island. The goal of the program was to increase access to fresh produce for low-income populations and thus improve the overall health and well-being of the participants. Interns have become an integral part of the success of this program.

Since its inception, the community garden program, coordinated by registered dietitian and landscape designer, Iman Marghoob, has established nine community gardens and is currently planning its tenth. The gardens have been established in a diverse array of settings, including an elementary school, youth recreation centers, faith-based organizations, an Indian reservation, and a homeless shelter. Additionally, the Nutrition Division has established a rooftop farm at home base on the fourth level of SBUMC.

The cold weather does not impede the pace in the gardens. Instead, our work shifts indoors. At the end of winter, we begin our seed selection and plan our crop layout. Spring and summer bring planting activities at the hospital and in the gardens. By fall, harvesting and garlic planting wrap up the season. When least expected, in the months of winter dormancy, the program kicks off a variety of nutrition- and gardening-related indoor activities, all geared to keeping community gardeners thinking about growing food, even when nature is least cooperative. During

these cold northeast months, community gardeners are offered classes ranging from eating from the garden as a means of managing blood pressure to fitness classes. At a youth after-school program, the site of one of our gardens, middle and high school students are introduced to concepts such as whole food antioxidants,

and are exposed to recipes with ingredients potentially grown right in their community garden.

The newly formed collaboration with the Sustainability Studies Department across campus will provide interns opportunities to work with undergraduate students. By semester's end, both interns and students will have worked

together towards the farm's expansion. Patients at this 600-bed facility will receive locally and organically grown produce. Beginning this spring semester, interns and students will begin seed selection and planting at the university greenhouse. Organic and sustainable farming practices, drip irrigation, garden design, and soil conservation are only some of the topics planned for discussion.

For the dietetic interns and dietitians at Stony Brook, the community garden program has taken on a greater meaning beyond learning

practical gardening skills. Interns have seen firsthand how community garden work leads towards resolving food justice, combating hunger, and providing an environment ideal for intergenerational, interfaith, and interracial partnerships. This program has provided interns and registered dietitians the opportunity to meet with elected officials, not-for-profit organizations, and community leaders as well as attend conferences that focus on greater food access and environmental sustainability. The community gardens have created a whole new format for nutrition education.



Science of Sustainable and Resilient Food and Water Systems Toolkit

by Ashley Colpaart, MS, RD

Last October, in celebration of National Food Day, leaders of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group (HEN DPG) announced the development of a Science of Sustainable and Resilient Food and Water Systems Toolkit. The toolkit is a set of resources aimed to provide registered dietitians, community leaders, activists, teachers and public health providers with accurate information and tools to help build more sustainable food and water systems. The Toolkit will be accessible through the HEN DPG website, strategically driving multidisciplinary professionals to join HEN in its mission to "Lead the future in sustainable and accessible food and water systems through food and nutrition education, research and action." The development of the toolkit will coincide with the development of Standards of Professional Performance (SOPP) in sustainable food and water systems.

Examples of toolkit resources include: how to start a farmer's market/EBT program, guides for food preservation, how to integrate school gardens in curriculum, practicing food safety when sourcing local food, how to build and sustain food policy councils, and a wide variety of books, movies, and reports aimed to enhance a visitor's understanding of the complexity of food systems. In the coming months, be on the lookout for a survey asking you, our members, for your favorite and most valued resources. Your participation will help make our toolkit robust, timely and highly utilized.

As the chair of the toolkit, I am excited to introduce our fantastic team of volunteers who have committed their time and energy to creating this important resource on behalf of HEN:

Carol Buhrman, MS (Co-Chair), Philadelphia, PA
Dietetic Intern

Ruth Aine, RD, Loma Linda, CA
Pediatric Dietitian

Stacia Clinton, RD, LDN, Boston, MA
Healthy Food Coordinator

Elizabeth Cowie, MS, RD, LD, St. Louis, MO
Store Nutritionist, CSA Coordinator, and Food Blogger

Erika Devore, MS, RD, Kansas City, MO
Director, Community Outreach

Lisa Dierks, RD, LD (SOPP Liaison), Rochester, MN
Clinical Nutrition Manager

Gayle E. Dietz, MS, RD, LDN
Community Nutritionist

Diana Dyer, MS, RD, Ann Arbor, MI
Organic Farmer

Mary Jo Forbord, RD, Starbuck, MN
Farmer and Healthy Food Coordinator

Lindsay Ganong, St. Joseph, MN
Student

Alison Harmon, PhD, RD (Advisory), Bozeman, MT
Professor

Kristin Holmskog, RD, Fairfield, CA
Clinical Nutrition Manager

Angela Jenkins, RD, LD, Springfield, MO
Pediatric Dietitian, Private Practice, and Non-Profit Educator

Elizabeth Lee MS, RD, Los Angeles, CA
Nutrition Coordinator

Dana Medaris, RD, LD, St. Louis, MO
Community Health Dietitian

Suzanne Polo, MS, RD, CLT, Malibu, CA
Private Practice

Ramona Robinson-O'Brien, PhD, RD, St. Joseph, MN
Professor

Judy Stadler, MS, RD (PPC Liaison), Madison, WI
Retired

Jasia Steinmetz, PhD, RD, CD, Stevens Point, WI
Professor

Kelly Wilson, Keene, NH
Dietetic Intern

Brenda Roche Wolford, MS, RD, Los Angeles, CA
Nutrition, Family & Consumer Sciences Advisor

Elizabeth Yakes, PhD, RD, Albuquerque, NM
Assistant Professor, Nutrition/Dietetics Program

The toolkit resources will be organized into the following areas all under the umbrella of Ecological Sustainability:

- Education
- Farm to Institution
- Public Policy
- Careers & Continuing Educations
- Food Access
- Agriculture and Public Health
- Agriculture and the Environment
- In the Kitchen
- Media

We look forward to keeping you informed of the progress of this amazing project and ultimately its launch at the end of the year.

HEN NEWSLETTER DEADLINES AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submission Guidelines: The HEN Newsletter features viewpoints, statements and articles that provide perspective on domestic and international food security, food production and environmental food issues. We also publish descriptions of programs, community intervention, research, legislation, websites or curriculums of interest to our members. We especially seek submissions from our members. These viewpoints, statements and other information do not imply endorsement by HEN and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Articles may be reproduced for education materials only. HEN Newsletter owns the copyright of all published materials unless prior agreement was made.

Submission Deadlines

June 15, 2012 –
Summer 2012

September 15, 2012 –
Fall 2012

December 15, 2012 –
Winter 2013

For more specific guidelines on article format, length, referencing and additional information that must accompany articles, see the HEN Web site – www.hendpg.com. Click on Members Area, enter your Member Number, click on Member Newsletter, click on DPG Newsletter Deadlines and Submission guidelines.

Going Beyond the Traditional Food Systems in Minnesota

by Hannah Miller

In 2009, then undergraduate and current HEN member Hannah Miller and Cheryl Smith, PhD, MPH, RD of the University of Minnesota traveled to seven counties of Minnesota to find out how people accessed the food system—defined as the production and consumption of food, including the growing, processing, packaging, distributing, retailing, and disposing of food products via eight focus groups. They recruited producers and consumers, home-based and homeless, program leaders and program recipients, ultimately focusing on the urban and rural split of the Minnesotan population.

Miller and Smith found that most participants accessed traditional food subsystems: conventional or corporate food subsystems (i.e., retail grocery stores) and federal nutrition assistance food subsystems (i.e., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, National School Lunch Program, and food shelves). These subsystems were most often accessed at the point of distribution or retail.

Frequently, however, many participants supplemented these traditional food subsystems by accessing family- or individual-based food subsystems. These included gardening, subscribing to a CSA, hunting, fishing, gleaning (dumpster diving, collecting roadkill), and raising animals for slaughter. Accessing these subsystems made it more likely for participants to interact with food before it became processed and packaged for retail. Participants reported accessing these subsystems for a variety of reasons: gardening for fresher, better-tasting produce, hunting as a social event or rite of passage, dumpster diving to make a political statement, and so on.

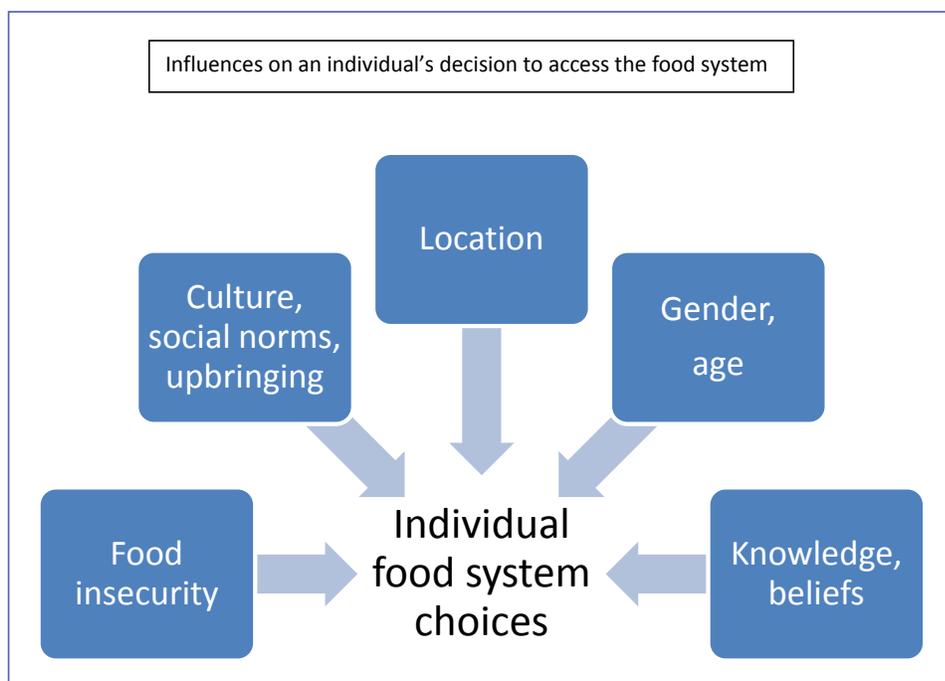
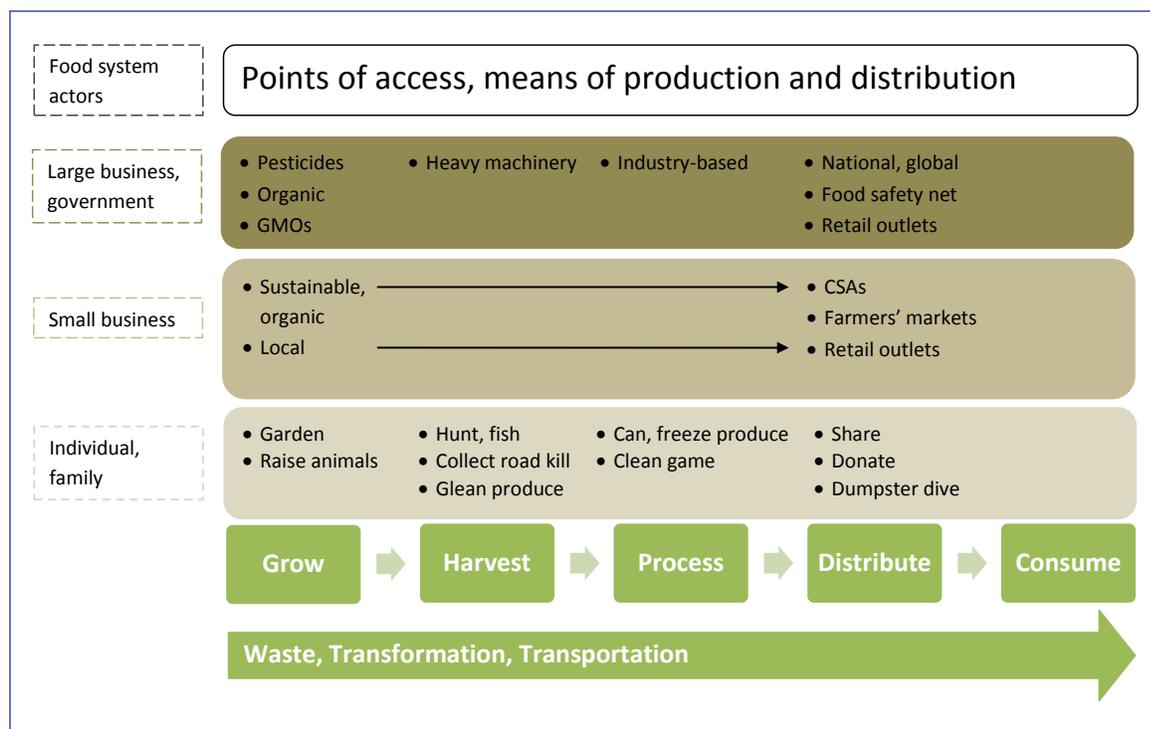
Interestingly, participants reported that the food procured at the family and individual level was more likely to be shared with members of their social network. One rural participant shared a story about the freezer of meat given to her by her new in-laws. Another rural participant described sharing the bounty of his garden with the senior citizens in town while an urban participant told of distributing the food found in dumpsters to many people. In addition, low-income urban participants reported sharing excess food with friends and neighbors, generally on a meal-to-meal basis.

This research sheds light on how well the

conventional and federal food subsystems meet communities' needs, and what families and individuals do when those subsystems fall short. It also suggests that accessing alternate food systems provides a richer experience for those accessing them, meeting more needs than just nutrition.

The full research article, "Accessing the Food

Systems in Urban and Rural Minnesotan Communities," published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (Nov/Dec 2011) includes discussions of community infrastructure around the conventional food system and food provisioning, and perceptions of exercise and diet's influence on health.



Food Systems Diagram created by Hannah Miller

Cuba's Sustainable Revolution

by Dianne Lollar, MPH, RD, LD

On the ride from Jose Marti International Airport in Havana, Cuba to the city center, I see urban gardens with lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, beets and bell peppers. Basil and marigolds are interspersed among the vegetables to deter insects from eating the lush vegetables. Shade covers made from nylon protect the tomatoes from the hot Cuban sun. Compost piles and worm castings provide nutrients for a rich soil that grows an abundance of produce. This is only a few of the 5,000 sustainable urban gardens in the country. But it has not always been this way. When the Soviet Union Block collapsed in the early 90s, Cuba's economic assistance from the Soviet Union and the ability to import food was drastically reduced.¹ It was during this time the government embarked upon a transformative effort to restructure the economy in order to strengthen food security.

I was fortunate enough to visit Cuba February 24—March 3, 2012 during an educational trip with Insight Cuba whose mission is to bring people together through cultural exchange. Our Cuban host tells us the Cuban government is working to have more farmers grow food for the country. As an incentive to do this, the government is encouraging young students to attend technical school to learn the skills of organic farming and offering free land to establish their own farm. As change slowly comes to Cuba the Castro government has offered farmers the opportunity to sell fruits, vegetables, herbs, farm raised tilapia and catfish to hotels, restaurants, schools and hospitals. Farmers are the new Cuban entrepreneurs, and they are allowed to keep the income from these sales.

The average middle class Cuban salary is 334 peso nacional (\$16.70 U.S.) per month.² Each Cuban family receives a basic ration of staples each month in addition to their salary. Each person in the family is issued 6 pounds of rice, 3 pounds brown sugar, 20 ounces beans, 3 pounds white sugar and a dozen eggs. Chicken and beef are issued in 1 pound amounts every 15 days. Milk is only available for mothers with children below



Dianne Lollar with Cuban farmer, Benito

the age of seven years, pregnant women, elderly and the ill.³

While shopping in a Havana bodega and agromercados (farmers' markets), I saw the following prices on foods: 1 dozen eggs cost 1 peso while chicken and pork cost 23 and 43 pesos per pound, respectively. Fruit and vegetable prices varied from 4 to 30 pesos. Cubans are culinary artists making delicious meals from the most basic ingredients. Cooking with whole foods is the norm because processed foods are not available for purchase. A breakfast meal in Cuba consists of fresh fruits, bread and butter, boiled egg and Cuban coffee with milk. Lunch and dinner meals include beans and rice, plantains, chicken or pork and a dish called Ropa Vieja which is shredded flank or skirt steak simmered with tomatoes, green peppers, onions and garlic. Salads are also included with meals and can include cabbage, tomatoes and cucumbers.

Despite the U.S. Cuban trade embargo, the U.S. is Cuba's largest supplier of agricultural products. The Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act passed by Congress in 2000 authorizes direct commercial food exports from the U.S. to Cuba on an advanced cash payment basis. Rice, poultry, wheat, and dairy are a few of the trade items.⁴ It was interesting to find butter from Minnesota alongside Cuban bread served in homes and hotels.

The westernmost Cuban province of Pinar del Rio is home to the Finca Provincial Plantes Medicinal, a major eco-tourism attraction. This 200-acre organic farm grows medicinal herbs used by the Cuban Ministry of Public Health for distribution to pharmacies, hospitals and clinics in the Cuban health care system. Each community in Cuba has a medical

doctor. We visited with Dr. Herrera who works in Las Terrazas and is responsible for educating and treating 1,000 patients. Dr. Herrera's specialty is homeopathic traditional medicine. His model of care is based on health promotion, prevention, healing and rehabilitation. Acupuncture and medicinal herbs are used as part of the care for the patient. Dr. Herrera visits homes when patients are eating meals in order to see what they cook and eat. This approach allows him to provide education to improve eating habits and prevent disease. According to Dr. Herrera, the average life span for men in Cuba is 77 years and life span for women is 80 years. He states the major causes of death in Cuba are diabetes, heart disease and respiratory disease.

The Cuban people have a rare passion for life, family, music and art. Cuban homes have three or four generations living, working and playing together. The evening meal is a time when everyone sits down to enjoy a meal together and discuss the day's events. It is interesting to see grandmothers keeping pace to salsa dancing with grandsons, children actively playing in yards and parks, artists painting in town squares, and musicians playing lively music that lights up the most humid night. Amid their struggles, Cubans will tell you, it is the hope of every Cuban to own a private business. As



Vinales, Cuba

I watch the sunset along the Malecon in Havana over the crumbling buildings, I sense their hope for the future is not far away.

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