

Food Policies: Supporting Farmers and Promoting a Healthy Local Economy

Workshop at Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders 5th Annual Forum

June 25-28, 2007

Des Moines, Iowa

Thomas L. Dobbs

Professor Emeritus of Economics and

Food & Society Policy Fellow

South Dakota State University

Local policy alternatives for promoting the production & consumption of local foods

- Assure demand
 - e.g., assure public institution purchases
- Assistance with infrastructure
 - e.g., farmers markets
- Tax incentives for producers and/or distributors
 - e.g., Woodbury County
- Zoning
 - e.g., to restrict environmentally harmful CAFOs that also undermine local food systems
- Payments for environmental services
 - e.g., payments to organic farmers in western Washington to improve water quality in the Skokomish River

Should we be pessimistic or optimistic about scaling up?

“At the global level, I .. am pessimistic. It is looking pretty bad. Yet at the local level there are considerable grounds for optimism. There is so much innovation and good practice in local communities worldwide, so much evidence of sensible thinking and novel practice. But can we scale these ideas up to a seemingly indifferent world?”

Jules Pretty, *The Earth Only Endures*, 2007, p. 26

Issues/challenges in scaling up

- ❖ Economic and financial feasibility
- ❖ Interconnections in the food system, including transportation linkages
- ❖ Regulations
 - ❖ e.g., restrictions on inter-State commerce of meat that is not under Federal inspection
- ❖ Market forces
 - ❖ Powerful globalization forces at work
- ❖ National policies

Needed at National level: policies based on 'multifunctionality' perspective

- ❖ Shift money from 'commodity programs' to agri-environmental stewardship programs
 - ❖ European Union shifting funds from Pillar I to Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy
 - ❖ England has consolidated most agri-environmental programs into two entry-level tiers (one 'organic' and one 'conventional') and a competitive higher-level tier
 - ❖ U.S. could do something similar with Sen. Harkin's proposed Comprehensive Stewardship Incentives Program
- ❖ Price energy at true costs
- ❖ Support local/regional and organic food systems

Relevant supply-side provisions of 2007 farm bill

- ❖ Value-added Producer Grant Program
- ❖ Organic agriculture certification cost-share, transition assistance (proposed), and better integration with CSP
- ❖ Farmers Market Promotion Program
- ❖ Rural Entrepreneurs and Micro-Enterprise Program (proposed)

Relevant demand-side provisions of 2007 farm bill

- ❖ Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- ❖ Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program
- ❖ Farm to Cafeteria Projects (yet to be funded)

Combination supply & demand or other provisions of 2007 farm bill

- ❖ Community Food Project Competitive Grants Program
- ❖ Organic agriculture research & extension

Possible leverage points for sustainable funders

- ❖ Studies of the likely changes in consumer costs as the proportion of locally sourced 'sustainable/healthy' food goes up
- ❖ Studies of the proportions of different types of food that might ultimately be sourced ('economically') from local areas (especially in 'northern' climates of the U.S.)
- ❖ Studies to determine the proportion of local food system costs that must be born from public budgets even on a long-term basis