

**Collaborative on Health and the Environment-Washington (CHE-WA)
Quarterly Meeting
Antioch University Seattle, Room 100
October 25, 2006
2:00pm – 4:00 p.m.**

NOTES

Participants:

Katie Atkins - Cascadia Consulting
Morgan Barry - Public Health - Seattle & King County
Marnie Boardman - Washington State Department of Health
David Bobanick - Rotary First Harvest
Michelle Chow - American Lung Association of Washington
Tim Crosby - 21 Acres
Kate Davies - Antioch University faculty in Environment and Community, CHE-WA
Research & Information Working Group
Nancy Dickeman - Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Mary Embleton - Cascade Harvest Coalition
Holly Freishtat - Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Brittany Gallagher - Institute for Children's Environmental Health
Steven Gilbert - Institute of Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders, CHE-WA
Precautionary Principle Working Group
Jane Koenig - University of Washington
Erin MacDougall - Public Health - Seattle & King County
Kyoko Maruyama - Seattle Biotech Legacy Foundation
Elise Miller - Institute for Children's Environmental Health, CHE-WA coordinator
Kay Ogren - Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Janna Rolland - Institute for Children's Environmental Health (board member)
Gail Sandlin - University of Washington
Margaret Shield - Toxic Free Legacy Coalition
Gregg Small – Washington Toxics Coalition
Heather Trim - People for Puget Sound
Karl Unterschuetz - Portage Environmental

Next Meeting:

Thursday, January 4, 2007, 2:00 – 5:00 pm, Antioch University Seattle

NOTES

Weclome and Introductions

Elise Miller, who coordinates the Collaborative on Health and the Environment, welcomed everyone to the meeting. CHE-WA has been holding quarterly meetings and sending a weekly bulletin on environmental health issues since March of 2003. Elise added that, as part of CHE-WA's efforts, the Institute for Children's Environmental Health is preparing for its annual environmental health lecture series this winter, with the theme of "Seeking Solutions." Topics will include green chemistry, nanotechnology and precaution, biofuels, and sustainability. The Seattle Biotech Legacy Foundation is generously funding this annual series.

Updates

Precautionary Principle Working Group / WSPHA Meeting

Steve Gilbert gave an update on the meeting of the Washington State Public Health Association Meeting, held October 16-18 in Yakima. WSPHA voted to endorse an initiative making the Precautionary Principle a "vital component" of public health and dealing specifically with PBTs. He said he plans to introduce another resolution next year applying the PP to children's health. Nancy Dickeman added that Margaret Shield assisted with the Safer Chemicals resolution, which also passed.

A resolution on the built environment and a fourth on family planning passed as well.

Environmental Justice/Health Disparities Exploratory Session

Morgan Barry reported on the session, held October 5, which brought together about 30 representatives from agencies, community-based organizations, non-profits and tribes to talk about commonalities and possibilities for collaboration. There was a lot of interest curiosity and sharing among participants about what various groups are doing to address environmental justice issues and health disparities in King County. She said the group will now focus on next steps such as a mapping project and creating a database with a list of resources, organizations and links for the county.

Elise added that the conversation was at times challenging and the issues are complicated. There was a lot that came up the group was unable to address because of limited time. Heather Trim, who participated, added that most participants were not members of minority groups and the perception of funding was a sticking point. Margaret Shield, who also participated, said that many more days of conversation are needed.

Elise explained that while "environmental justice" has been defined by an executive order at the federal level, every community defines it differently in practice. Steve agreed, noting that he tried to insert an environmental justice piece into the Precautionary Principle resolution, but WSPHA was unclear on its definition.

Health and Environment Fact Sheets

Katie Davies reported that the fact sheets are now finished and awaiting printing, and she thanked Brittany for her work on the project. There are 18 sheets on health effects, contaminant levels and other topics related to health and environment. One hundred sets will be bound and 150 copies of each will be made loose. They will also be available as PDFs on the Research and Information Working Group's part of the CHE-WA website.

Kate invited anyone with ideas for the Research and Information Working Group to speak with her.

Climate Change and Health Working Group

Elise said that, based on the meeting CHE National and CHE Core recently held in San Francisco, it is very likely CHE National will start a working group on climate change and health. Peter Myers is looking to hire a science reporter to tell the story of people affected by climate change in Alaska. Fishing villages there are already affected by melting ice, which releases chemicals. Elise invited anyone who was interested to participate in a conference call on this topic in November. She said climate change conversations rarely include health and there is certainly a relationship between the two.

Food and Health Presentation

Tim Crosby, Mary Embleton and Erin MacDougall came to speak to the group about food and health programs in the Seattle area. **Tim** is the Farm to Cafeteria director for 21 Acres, an organization whose mission is to connect urban people and rural landscapes. **Mary** is the executive director of the Cascade Harvest Coalition, a regional nonprofit working to promote a sustainable regional food system that translates into health for workers, the economy and consumers. **Erin** is the program manager of Healthy Eating and Active Living of the King County Overweight Prevention Initiative.

Erin MacDougall spoke first on her work with Healthy Eating and Active Living. She represents Public Health - Seattle and King county on the Acting Food Policy Council, which is concerned with the way food is produced and with ensuring access for all residents to local, healthy food.

Erin explained that the Healthy Eating and Active Living program was one of 12 invited to submit a full proposal to the Kellogg Foundation's Food and Fitness Initiative. Six of the twelve will receive funding for their initiatives. The proposal is for a nine-year initiative, involving system-based change, including local food access and access to safe exercise areas. The nine-year period consists of two years to plan, five years of implementation, and two years to disseminate the program.

Erin said one point of opportunity emerges around the fact that the major national funding entities - National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States Department of Agriculture and others - have not conversed. This lack of communication, she said, is an opportunity to develop knowledge about how we've gotten where we are now and how to go elsewhere in terms of public health and nutrition.

The two main points around these issues, Erin said, are the increasing prevalence of obesity and the reauthorization of the farm bill in 2007. She showed a slide on the rise of obesity in the US and in King County indicating that the rate has tripled over the past 30 years.

Erin took a moment to encourage everyone to read Michael Pollan's book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, as it applies to the topics we're discussing today.

Erin cited evidence supporting healthy practices such as breastfeeding and maintaining organic diets. Studies have shown that organic foods often have higher nutritional value than conventionally grown foods. She wonders if it is okay to continue to send the message that kids must eat fruits and vegetables when conventional ones are so contaminated.

Other issues Erin noted included organic certification and labeling of wild-caught fish. She showed a slide explaining the benefits of subsidies for fruits and vegetables and nutrition programs versus subsidies for crops and anti-hunger programs.

One example she cited arguing for the importance of nutrition and exercise is the life expectancy on Okinawa, where people routinely live to 100 years old and maintain a healthy diet and active lifestyle.

Questions and Comments

Tim commented that after World War II, there was a question of what to do with the extra chemicals, and one answer was to use them in "the war on bugs." He noted the vocabulary used in the marketing of pesticides (i.e., "Raid") is warlike.

Elise said that she is amazed that public health realms haven't included endocrine disrupting chemicals like bisphenol-A that can affect metabolism when considering causes of obesity. She said it's disturbing that these don't seem to be integrated. The New York Times Sunday Magazine didn't mention anything about endocrine disruptors or toxics being a factor at all. Erin asked Elise if there was human data on this, and Elise advised her to check with Frederick Vom Saal and Pete Myers. She added that it is best to use a precautionary perspective in the absence of human data.

Gail Sandlin asked about the assumption that local might be healthier and said we need data on the quality of locally available food. Tim said that although we can't prove that local food is healthier, there are other issues and factors making it a better choice - for example, reduced greenhouse gas emissions because of transporting foods a shorter distance.

Mary Embleton spoke about the work of the Cascade Harvest Coalition (CHC) next.

There are many reasons why the US/world food predicament looks like this, Mary explained, noting the post-WWII chemical surplus and the unique nature of the institution of agriculture.

Shortening the food supply chain has lots of benefits. The average distance traveled, field-to-plate, is about 1,500 miles. If consumers paid the actual cost of that transportation, would grapes flown in from Chile really be affordable?

Often in industries like shrimping, big multinational corporations come into a place, displace the people, use chemicals that destroy the environment, and then leave when they can no longer catch anything.

We in the US make food decisions that have impacts all over the globe. For that reason, CHC focuses on local production. Mary added that there are things we've gotten so used to that it would be difficult to live without - chocolate and coffee, for example - and aren't grown regionally. But that's where Fair Trade comes in. It's important that what we buy is produced sustainably and with respect for the environment, the community, and the farmers involved.

CHC's Northwest Farming for Humanity program joins farmers, feeding programs and the community. Each farm work party results in 500 pounds of fresh produce donated to the local food bank. Last year, over all the work parties, over 4500 pounds was donated to food banks. In addition, it works with conservation districts, extensions and farmers on how to shift to integrated pest management.

The Farm to Table program works with local schools, hospitals and other institutions to encourage local food sourcing. CHC worked with UW to develop a "Farm to College" pilot project.

One goal of the projects is to reduce the energy consumed by the processing, marketing, transportation and disposal of food, and to prevent tons of waste from going into landfills.

Organic is not enough, Mary said. "Industrial organic" must be avoided. Producers of industrial organic foods recognize that this is a growing market where they can make money, but they don't buy into everything about how and why organics started. They often try to weaken standards for certification in order to get the most profit, regardless of environmental and community sustainability. Earthbound Farm, Mary said, is an example - its fields are thousands of acres of monoculture.

Mary acknowledged that there must be some food distribution network, but said that it doesn't have to be on the global scale it is now.

She also said that pulling the plug on subsidies as they are now would be detrimental to some communities. We have to help them transition off the subsidies toward sustainability.

Questions and Comments

Heather asked about CHC's approach to biodiesel. Mary said they promote the biointensive program at Washington State University but they do not promote biodiesel as it is now - coming from genetically modified crops. Biodiesel, she said, is a tool, not the answer. Corn is hard on the soil and uses a lot of chemicals, and while biodiesel could limit the overall consumption of certain types of energy, we don't know the consequences of GMOs.

Margaret commented that Mary 'S ORG is up against the markup in the food industry and the prestige that, for example, come with having Italian almonds instead of Californian almonds. Mary said she has taken courses on media literacy and is trying to learn how to message these issues. She is watching how the media targets children and how pervasive the marketing is. Tim added that companies aren't looking for people with MBAs to sell products; they're looking for fine artists who know how to *package* products. The good news is many are heading toward wellness - offering low sodium, high fiber, whole grain foods. Farmers markets and organics are growing in popularity. Tim suggested googling "media that matters" for more information.

Tim Crosby spoke about the Farm to Cafeteria Project. There are 350 such projects nationally and 40 in Washington, in which kids learn about nutrition and how food gets from the ground to their tables.

He noted that several challenges exist when working with public schools, including a complex reimbursement process, various regulatory bodies to deal with and the many amendments made to the National School Lunch Program. However, there are opportunities for an increased focus on nutrition and health while simultaneously educating students and other consumers about issues such as obesity, climate change, trade and economic development.

Other sectors, such as restaurants, corporations and hospitals, have shown interest in the Farm to Cafeteria program. The menu features local, hormone-free, organic and fair-trade foods, and the program also includes waste reduction and composting. Hospitals that participate in the program also serve as locations for the drop-off of Community-Supported Agriculture boxes or for farmers' markets. Tim said Children's Hospital in Seattle is considering hosting a farmers' market as well.

There are many benefits of hosting a farmers market at a workplace, he explained. These include providing fresh produce to staff, visitors and patients, supporting healthy habits, generating community goodwill, supporting a local economy and the possibility of accepting food stamps and WIC coupons.

Having a Farm to Cafeteria program in house is good for public relations, Tim said. It can engage marketing departments as they promote the positive community connections their hospital has. Other departments that can be involved include culinary services, dietary services and nutrition, human resources and maintenance. Through food waste recycling and composting, solid waste costs are reduced. Tim cited the example of Fletcher Allen Healthcare in Vermont, which is saving \$1,500 a month and diverting 1,500 tons from a landfill.

Seattle-area health care facilities that are interested in the Farm to Cafeteria program include Children's Hospital, Swedish Medical Center, Harborview Medical Center, Skagit Valley Hospital, Providence Everett Medical Center (a CSA drop spot) and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

Tim thanked the group for having him and pointed out online and paper resources to learn more about the projects.

- Health Care Without Harm - www.noharm.org/food/issue
- Hospitals for a Healthy Environment - www.h2e-online.org
- Green Guide for Healthcare - www.gghc.org

Questions and Comments

Gail Sandlin again mentioned that healthy foods aren't necessarily economically accessible to everyone. Tim explained that this is true because of the subsidies given to support certain crops. That is, the market is artificially affected by government price controls.

Margaret asked Tim about what data he has about the availability of organic food at a given local supermarket and whether it has been broken down along the lines of "industrial organic" and sustainable, local organic. Mary said she could find some information on tilth.org, but they don't have it at the moment.

Mary added a comment about the pricing of food, saying that consumers really aren't paying the true price of food when we get it so cheaply. To say low-income people can't afford organics is true in a sense, but not in another. Because of the long distances food has to travel, there's a lot of waste. Farmer's markets are a better choice because this waste is greatly reduced, and the food is fresher and of higher quality. One drawback that they are working on is the fact that most farmers markets can't accept the new EBT (food stamp) cards unless they have a telephone land line.

Closing

Elise thanked all three presenters for sharing their information. She acknowledged the importance of creating an ecological view of health including nutrition, gene expression, toxics, etc., adding that we must think about these issues in a broader framework and understand it is all interconnected.

Elise invited everyone attending to suggest other topics for presentations at these meetings. One thought was to focus on climate change and invite Roger Rosenblatt and colleagues from UW to speak.

Other suggestions for future topics included:

- Introducing topics related to legislature
- Talking about air quality, specifically related to the Port of Seattle's diesel emissions reduction project
- A talk on King County's Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality and Health (LUTAQH) study with Larry Frank

Kate Davies said she will be organizing a workshop on how to promote social change in any domain, to be held during the first half of 2007. She advised attendees to watch for announcements about it on the listserv.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, January 4, 2007 from 2:00-5:00pm at Antioch University in Seattle.