

**Solano Local Food System Alliance
Minutes**

**August 4, 2022 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Mare Island Brewery, 850 Nimitz Avenue, Vallejo, CA**

Mission: Create an environmentally sustainable, economically viable, socially just and equitable local food system in Solano County.

In attendance:

Paula Schnese, Cultivate Community Food Co-op
Robin Cox, Solano Public Health
Aliya Khan, Department of Environmental Health
Rose Loveall, Morningsun Herb Farm
Lisa Núñez-Hancock, UR What U Eat
Kimber Smith
Ron Kane
Gabie Carne
Stephanie Oelsligle Jordan, Sustainable Solano
Elena Karoulina, Sustainable Solano
Allison Nagel, Sustainable Solano
Maggie Kolk, Sustainable Solano
Jack Kolk, Sustainable Solano

Meeting Topic: “Local Food Retail – Challenges & Opportunities”

Introduction

Sustainable Solano's Stephanie Oelsligle Jordan gave some background on the Alliance, starting with the [USDA grant and feasibility study](#) that led to the decision that a public understanding of the local food system was needed.

Now there appears to be strong retail interest in the county

Grocery Stores and Co-ops

Cultivate Community Food Co-op's Paula Schnese

Shared from Jon Steinman's [Grocery Story](#)

As part of starting a food cooperative, it's important to know about grocery store industry

- The power that the grocery stores have over our food system is astonishing
- Grocery stores are only a few generations old: self-service grocery stores led to labels, marketing, paying for positioning on shelves that have all informed the creation of supermarkets
- today: 4 companies [dominate the American market](#) (70%)

- These companies shape the food we eat. How it is produced, harvested and how it looks.
- “Sameness is becoming a global standard in the lab, the field and on the shelf”

What a co-op can offer:

- Co-ops are owned by many with voting rights, democratizing grocery stores
- Cultivate will be a consumer-owned cooperative, others are worker-owned
- Profits go back into the store
- Coops are more resilient (don't have a long distribution chain); rooted in the community they serve, more nimble

Cultivate Community Food Co-op

- Models in Benicia Bowl and Monterey Market
- Had nearly 500 members (hit the 500 mark after the meeting)
- Need 1200 owners to open the store – this level of ownership helps with financing and shows that the community is behind the co-op
- Need to find a few potential sites
- It can take up to 10 years for a store to open, so the process can be a long one

Discussion:

How do we ensure in the current retail environment that people are buying local food?

Food deserts are apparent in our communities. In Vallejo, after the closure of Raley's there are now 2 Safeways and 2 Grocery Outlets. Change in ownership at the Grocery Outlet has meant a change in focus, with less healthy food or good produce.

“Vallejo is in a massive grocery crisis”

People choose where to live based on where they can grocery shop. If they're driving to Berkeley to shop, that's not sustainable.

Safeway deed restrictions a few years ago (keeping other grocery stores from moving into or near closed stores) elevated the issue to the level of Sen. Bill Dodd's office when he was in the state Assembly. The problem required statewide legislation. [there will be follow-up to see where this stands. A brief review of deed restriction articles show that the issue remains a concern nationwide.]

Solano Public Health did 9 healthy store makeovers and is currently surveying those 9 stores and Grocery Outlet to see how those makeovers have held. These observational surveys look at the availability of produce and healthy snacks, and removal of ads for alcohol and tobacco.

There also needs to be consideration of public education about healthy food, while also considering equity – those who can't drive to another city to grocery shop.

Should the Alliance reconsider promoting spending 5% of food budgets on local food – from the direct consumer to agencies and corporations?

This is something that can be done now to support local producers before they disappear
This needs to take into consideration the education needed around seasonal produce and some of the barriers to programs like CSAs that may require pickup at a farm or drop-site or not allow selection of produce.

How do you keep it affordable while giving people choices that fit with their schedules (eg. A commuting public that relies heavily on fast food). How do you get healthy food to people who need it? How do you create the abundance to supply it?

Next steps:

- The Executive Committee will return to its talking points and white paper at the next meeting in preparation to take it to the board of supervisors
- This becomes a policy discussion: How and where to invest in the county, how to mitigate fees for growers, how to subsidize the supply of healthy local food, etc.
- Follow-up on Solano Grown label
- Setting topic for Nov. 3 meeting. Possibly land use speaker and representative from the county.