



1. Participants

This teleconference included approximately 26 participants from across Newfoundland and Labrador, with representation from regional dietitians, regional environmental centres/committees, government (Dept of Health and Community Services, Poverty Reduction Strategy, Dept of Innovation, Trade & Rural Development), the Nunatsiavut government, Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, local women's centres, community gardening initiatives, and various community groups.

Participants were from both rural and urban communities throughout the province, including:

Burin	Corner Brook	Gander
Holyrood	Labrador City	Norris Point
Rigolet	Stephenville	St. John's

2. Introduction

After a round of introductions of all on the line, Kristie Jameson of the Food Security Network provided some introductory comments on the priorities of the Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador, and noted the Food Security Working Groups that are currently operating in the province (located in Burin, Corner Brook, Goose Bay, Gros Morne, and Labrador City).

3. Key Presentation

Rebecca Schiff, Ph.D provided the keynote presentation on "Food Systems Working Groups and Policy Councils." Dr. Schiff writes, researches, and lectures on sustainable food policy as an Assistant Professor in Social Justice at the University of Regina and has worked as an active advocate in this area for over a decade. She currently serves as a steering committee member for Food Secure Canada, Food Secure Saskatchewan, and is a founding member of the MetroAg Alliance for Urban Agriculture.

Dr. Schiff gave a brief history of food policy councils, also known as food security councils, or food security working groups. Regardless of the synonyms used (councils, coalitions, working groups, etc.), such groups share an interest in the policies, programs, and networking involved in issues of food security, food sovereignty, and sustainability. Such groups seek to educate both their membership and the general public about the integrity of food systems.

Among the key points in Dr. Schiff's presentation were:

- **How to start a group:** This should begin with a **local assessment** of a community or region's understanding of and support for sustainable food systems. A **network** of interested parties should be created, as well as a committee that can undertake research on local food systems and draft a "**food charter**" (this recognizes everyone's right to a nutritious and sustainable food supply). It is important to be able to collect and present convincing food system data/evidence early on in order to effectively discuss issues with municipal and regional officials. Such efforts help build momentum for a community's food security initiatives. Groundwork can also be laid by **organizing public forums and conferences** and **securing funding** and other resource support. For example, it is essential to have some kind of staff support as the group tries to get off the ground.
- **Effective group structures:** Key to a group's success is effective structural and procedural guidelines to highlight and clarify the group's mandate and the responsibilities of individual members. It is crucial to **secure formal recognition** by, or association with, some level of government in order to more easily facilitate networking and contacts, to avail of resources, and to operate with some measure of credibility and authority. Having at least one part-time staff member, or optimally 2-3 staff members helps to **build political capital**, to engage other organizations with food systems issues, and to recruit members. The membership itself should be **diverse** so as to be representative of as many aspects of the food system as possible.
- **There are both internal and external challenges in building a food policy council/working group:** Internal challenges include **lack of funding** and **lack of clarity and focus** regarding the group's goals and activities and the roles of staff and members. External challenges include **changes in funding priorities** or government structure and **opposition** from other organizations
- **Success stories:** In the remaining time, Dr. Schiff highlighted success stories from Toronto and Vancouver.

4. Key Themes/Information from Following Discussion

Following Rebecca Schiff's presentation on "Food Systems Working Groups and Policy Councils", participants had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues important to them. Some key themes that emerged from this dialogue included the following:

- Praise for **food charters** as a significant step in creating **accountability** for sustainable food systems. Food charters recognize common values; if such charters are signed and ratified by various government officials, they can be a tool to leverage support for further food policy initiatives. A growing number of communities have drafted and adopted food charters, a few of which are available online, such as the [Vancouver Food Charter](#), the [Toronto Food Charter](#), and the [Manitoba Food Charter](#).
- **How are members selected for councils/working groups?** In some cases, organizations have specific guidelines about what interests should be represented, while others simply state the need for the group to be diverse. Sometimes members are appointed by government after an application process, while in other cases membership is open to all. One thing to be mindful of is that members should have a clear idea of their expectations of the group and what they group's expectations are of them.

- Working groups are an excellent way to tap into funding opportunities offered through the Department of Innovation, Trade, and Rural Development, such as the “**Capacity-Building Program**”.
- Investing in and supporting sustainable food systems can also be an **asset for the tourism industry** when tourists are interested in finding good quality local food.