

## NESAWG 2015 *It Takes A Region* Conference

### What is the Food Movement? And what is your next move?

**Presenters:** Kathy Ruhf, Ali Berlow

Presentation on “Social Movements & The Food Movement”

Kathy Ruhf: Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group

“Thinking about putting move in the movement”: How to apply theoretical ideas in practice

#### **Kathy:**

What is a social movement?

And how do we fit the food movement into social movement definitions?

#### The “Food Movement” Orientation

- Inclusion: *get marginalized players in*; immigrant farmers, food access
- Reformation: *alter operating guidelines*; farmer market rules, fair trade, better farm leases, enabling more secure land tenure for farmers who don’t own their land
- Transformation: *establish qualitatively different paradigms*; food as a human right, land as commons

Think: What is the impact that you’re doing against these three orientations?

#### SOCIAL STRUCTURES:

##### Political opportunities

- Openings for change within political structures
- Interface with existing structures and strategic positioning
- Clean Water Act, USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach

##### Framing processes

- Shared meanings and definitions that describe the problem, causes and solutions
- The power of mobilizing capacity of a frame is how strongly it resonates and compels action
  - Credibility (testable, and significant to everyday life)
  - Resonance: corresponds to life experience and meaning
  - Something can be credible, but lack resonance

##### Mobilizing structures

- Forms and tactics that movements take
- Organizational capacity to mobilize; what is capacity (resources, expertise, tech)?
- Many groups – hard to coordinate; compete
- Many groups also means resilience, diversity, testing various tactics and experiments

#### Historically dominant frames in agri-food work:

- Environmental sustainability:
  - Historically “sustainable agriculture”; WQ/natural resources, GMO, land use
- Economic justice (for farmers):
  - Concentration, viability, tenure, markets
- Community food security:
  - Food access; food justice/rights, for consumers; local economies

-Health and food safety:

-Nutrition, diet, GMO-not necessarily tied to agriculture

Q: Can anyone think about other frameworks? How do you think about this in your own work?

Audience:

-Social inclusion – looking at supply chains around the entire network of food can be its own frame

-“Food is sometimes not the dominant product of farmers – I’m not sure all farmers and fishers consider themselves to be a part of this movement and I’d be interested to see what people think is included in the movement”

-“A food movement without seafood is not inclusive. How do we get that part more integrated into the food movement?”

### Master Frames

-Frames vary in their comprehensiveness

-*Master frame* is most inclusive

-A unifying message that brings together various sub-issues, orgs, networks within a social movement

-Civil rights – very effective master frame

-Sustainable Ag v. CFS – less effective

-Both extremely important movements

-Has the greatest potential to resonate and mobilize – need to figure out what that master frame is

What is our master frame?

Is there a BIGGER master frame? Maybe it’s not our tent – maybe we need to get under a bigger tent

-Sustainable community movement?

-Domestic economic disparities?

-UN Sustainable Development Goals?

“Substantial things” – justice, ecology, equity, democracy, diversity, opportunity

-The concepts need to be BIG. The “food movement” or whatever we want to call it needs to include all of this.

### Strategic Orientation

-How do you see your own work?

-How would you characterize your organization’s work?

-What is the optimal balance for you and your organization to achieve its goals?

### STRATEGIC ORIENTATION

#### Warrior work

Resistance = Change political & economic structures

-People who work on policies, fight Monsanto, keeping political ground on organic standards etc.

- Can be in the trenches: NSAC and the farm bill
- Defends the ground gained
- Effective to mobilize: public protest is highly visible

#### Builder work

Reconstruction = Create alternatives

- Entrepreneurial, precarious
- Food hubs, CSA, new generation coops, carbon credits, regionally focused supply chains
- Changes primarily in market sector

#### Weaver work

Connection = Linking to foster change

- Primarily in the civil sector
- Networks, coalitions; movement-building
- Intra-sectoral: within specific area (e.g., organizing produce coops)
- Inter-sectoral: different interests (e.g., food policy councils)
- Horizontal and vertical

Questions: What *is* our movement? What is *your* work? What do we need to do better? What should we analyze? How can we better understand and analyze our work to build the movement? What strategic connections need to happen to advance our movement? How does your individual work contribute to the movement?

Material is taken from Warrior, Builder and Weaver Work: Strategies for Changing the Food System, 2007

Q: (To Kathy) What is the one thing that describes your work that connects you to the most people at a heartfelt level? What did you do with your life and why?

A: Tend to be a weaver, not a risky entrepreneur; Wear several hats, most time is taken up by a small non profit working on land access, so acts as a Builder; Done policy work through NESAWG

Q: What resonates for the rest of you?

A: At different times in life, I was a warrior. Find myself to be a weaver and a builder more as an Executive Director rather than a Campaigner. Need to get barriers straight every day

Q: Are you saying to have a more successful movement we need to be more in touch with ourselves and figure out which type we are?

A: It's one way to perceive your place in the movement, if it works for you. It's very useful for organizations to understand their place and their goals

#### **Ali:**

- Author of "The Food Activist Handbook": founder and former director of Island Grown Initiative, tells personal journey, co-publisher of Edible Vineyard
- Asked herself "What's worth doing?" – looked to her own community in Mass.; brought out 30 people to her home to talk about what could be done in terms of sustainability

- Grew a nonprofit and a mobile poultry slaughterhouse, started farm to school program, ethnic crops programs
- “If you don’t find the book that you want, then go write it.”
- “Collaborate, confront, conspire, and have fun”
- As our funding starts to shrink, we all start to fight with each other and compete – we need to get out of our own sector and create collaborations with organizations we’re not used to – faith based organizations, sports programs – wherever food and community intersect, these are places we can start to build connections, partnerships, networks
- Trying to bridge the gap between the food movement into more people becoming more active and more aware
- “Once you know, you can’t not know”
- Resario program
- Alice Randall – Soul Food Love
  - One way she marketed the books was going into beauty salons and churches because that was an intersection with community
  - How do we find community connections in different places?
- Intention in language: what is the intention that we bring to this? We need to understand each other and look through a historical lens
- Need to become aware of the history of language
- “I can only change what I can see” – if you can see it and start to understand the history, how can you engage more people? We need more people to really make the change happen
- We may not see the results of this struggle in our lifetimes.
- Harvest La Coseca – about migrant American children
- If we can engage in the local food movement with stripping away the judgment and without shaming people we can be successful
- Need to go into schools and work with young people
- Try to look at a 360-degree approach of how to get people involved in the food movement
- Using the arts is a great way to create empathy
- Witness to Hunger (out of Philly)

Questions:

How do we come up with a similar goal?

The primary needs of life are shelter and food – people that are looking for food you’re under incredible stress and you can’t think about the future or long-term goals – so when you try to grow the movement, it is an incredible challenge

With the civil rights movements they took great risks and put themselves out there and it work

Q-If there is a master frame to organize around, I’m not sure what it is. We’d need a lot of collective hearts and minds and work under that. If there isn’t a master frame then we need to figure out a strategy to coordinate more rather than make several separate movements

A-On one hand I can see the great value in organizing under one frame, but since everyone eats, it’s so vast and it really applies to everyone; there’s more value in looking at a less centralized approach; Mentioned move to change farm bill to food and farm bill; then address issues of equity that embody those different areas

NW Atlantic Marine Alliance – we tried to look at where we belong and we decided that we need to force this conversation – we need to look at the function of fishing in our food system – otherwise we are just killing fish and marine life for no reason; modeled Community Supported Fisheries and Boat to School after CSA's and Farm to School; part of moving under a big tent is sharing resources rather than trying to continuously create new models and spin your own wheels; How do we get organized without creating source of urgency that loses our control and legitimacy

Is accumulation and wealth really what is driving the other side?

Economist in the crowd: primary framework factors – resource scarcity, opportunity scarcity, and information scarcity. Who holds the power; who makes the decisions? Those questions all relate to those three factors. The majority of the people not knowing what's been going on have put them at a disadvantage. People resist ideas because they've never heard about them – they don't understand because obesity is such an issue in some places that people feel there IS enough food. It's fascinating to me that we're talking about a food movement, but it's such a big name. We're using food to represent our lives and the quality of accessing resource and opportunity and information.

When people with the power and opportunity and information start manipulating, people listen and they rarely ask why and how they got that information  
Yes there should be a framework; we just need to wait for the majority to figure out what is going on.

-Someone spoke on the importance of the Farm bill

“There are no non-radical solutions left.” – Naomi Klein

“We have to make some behavioral changes, yes, but we need to make some systemic changes”