

Presented by The Calgary Foundation, in partnership with the Calgary Public Library, **Vital Conversations** create dynamic community forums for Calgarians to discuss local quality of life issues that build on the results of the *Calgary's Vital Signs Report*. Four events are planned for the 2011 Series. The 2<sup>nd</sup> event - '**The Fundamentals of Food**' was held Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup> at Memorial Park Library. Approximately 120 Calgarians participated in group discussions. The following overview provides a transcript of those conversations.

## **APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup> VITAL CONVERSATIONS AT MEMORIAL PARK LIBRARY THE FUNDAMENTALS OF FOOD – ACCESSIBLE? AFFORDABLE? ACCOUNTABLE?**

### What's happening?

What stories and experiences can you share about what's working well when it comes to the food system (accessible/accountable/affordable) in Calgary?

- Attendance tonight is a good indicator of how interested Calgarians are in this subject
- Creative projects like "fallen fruit" program
- 100+ community gardens provide diversity and options for selection of food; expanding rapidly (800% growth in the past year, more than 5000 people have become involved)
- Local groups are coming in to larger chain supermarkets – a lot of local activism and local solutions.
- Easily accessible inner city transit to find local/organic food
- Growing number of farmers markets (19 in Calgary now) – everything is available at a reasonable price, wider range of foods available
- Excellent knowledge available – strong spirit of inquiry, people want to meet their producers
- Active beekeeping community
- Growing permaculture movement
- Calgarians are generationally connected to the land – had parents or grandparents with a farm
- Resources such as Clean Calgary – list of good food producers near your house
- Workshops throughout the city – i.e. raw food cooking, Community Kitchen, Good Food Box, discussion groups with other concerned citizens
- Increased awareness of our food
- City is starting collection of compostables
- Start of LIFA
- Local restaurants more frequently are sourcing local food
- Calgarians are looking for places to garden
- Food banks and other distribution systems help with affordability of "good food", cutting the amount of waste
- Schools are beginning to reach out to include edibles in school programs
- Calgary Food Policy Council
- Calgary Urban Harvest (apple harvest)
- Spin Farming – sharing good with owners and selling rest at farmers markets
- Top down support with bottom up work
- Private organizations are donating land for community gardens
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) – many have sold out in the past year, feeling of connection to agriculture, appreciation of labour that goes into it, quality of food, better nutrition, seasonality
- Asking the right questions is becoming more important to Calgarians

What stories and experiences can you share about what's not working well?

- Lack of composting available to those without gardens
- High cost – local, organic is not realistic for many people, and “empty calorie” food is usually much cheaper than fresh produce
- Desire for out-of-season fruit/veg – lack of education
- Accessibility to grocery stores is lacking
- Abundance of food is often wasted
- Barriers include lack of education, sense of entitlement, laziness
- Chronic health problems associated with poor diets
- Food bank use is on the rise – a lot of poverty in the midst of plenty
- Erosion problems as a result of industrial agriculture
- A lot of development occurring – a balance needs to be found that doesn't involve jeopardizing agriculture
- City policy – a lot of land planted in grass instead of productive plans (lost opportunities)
- Agriculture is too focused on export crops, not enough on crops that can feed us. Low diversity is an unstable way to grow food
- Food systems work very well for corporations, not so well for farmers and consumers
- Not a lot of direct relationships between producers and consumers
- A lot of nutrients are going into the landfill
- Lack of produce available at food banks – can we better utilize locally grown produce?
- Many citizens are uninformed, unconcerned or unwilling to learn more about their food
- Subsidies make it cheaper to ship our local produce away and buy from overseas
- Lack of information about our food – why is the price the way it is?
- Distribution system for local food is fractured
- Food Security is an issue – the percentage of people being able to access healthy food without it being a financial stress is too low
- Loss of knowledge around food – how to grow, prepare, preserve nutrients
- Lack of funding for programs and the talent to run them
- Marketing and lobbying done by industrial food to promote processed food
- How do we know if we can trust the “organic” labels? Lack of government regulations on labeling
- The food waster as a society – wasted food, wasted packaging
- City of Calgary policies on food does not necessarily match community interest and demand
- Carbon footprint of food
- Land availability to grow community gardens
- Lack of social development in food industry (isolation)
- Corporate structures support lower costs – hard for local farmers, etc.
- More of a critical mass needed to support healthy, local food
- Calgary is young, busy and wealthy – issues like these require people to give of themselves

What's possible?

How is it possible to energize and engage the wider community to get more citizens involved in addressing these challenges and in supporting what's working?

- Make it fun! For instance, singles night at the community garden
- Make it about relationships and community building, not just about food
- Use broader venues to get the information out
- Set the example with rooftop gardening, community plots
- Elementary schools – educate on how to grow and cook their own food. Children need to know where the food comes from
- Create more direct links between producers and consumers
- Balance profit and greed
- Change public policy to reflect actual cost of things, redirect resources
- Re-engage wild food sources
- Establish local food procurement policies
- Create food production methods from waste streams – act! Invest energy wisely
- Label GMO's
- Free food events and opportunities for exposure
- A website for resources
- Make your views know to grocery store managers
- Share land with one another
- Engage the media
- Encourage the growth within the city of food production, community gardens, SPIN gardening, etc
- Guilt the big food companies to sponsor local food initiatives
- Policy changes – subsidies, incentives, zoning laws for fast food restaurants near schools
- Developers should include sustainability options in the design of their building (spaces for gardens, etc)
- Need to engage the community – library courses, need workshops
- How can we make food more accessible? Keep money in the local economy and support local farmers
- Encourage people to grow their own space, even in pots
- Vegetable garden tours (like the flower garden tours offered through the Horticultural Society)
- Spreading the word about positive effects of good food practices through social media and networking
- Respond to need – lactose, gluten, nut allergies
- Food should offer us an opportunity to be curious!
- Rethink our priorities – accept that food may cost more for better
- Encourage grocery stores to source local products / meats – what you buy may or may not change what's available
- Support CSA's

## What are the top three most inspiring ideas?

- Encouraging people to grow their own food – give them the resources and a place to start
- Bringing it to the schools – mandate good food, plant seeds, nutrition
- Public policy and regulated labeling
- Free food / community groups
- Tours to teach how and where to find local food
- Creation of central information hub
- Tax break for healthy eating
- Major initiatives occurring in Alberta to look at the food being served in schools
- Encourage more gardening – it is exciting to eat what you have grown
- Encourage library and other community organizations to have workshops on gardening
- Pressure politicians to support local farmers and small sustainable/ethical farms
- Green Roof initiative
- Budget online cookbook with season ingredients that is quick and easy to prepare
- Guerilla Gardening – food tags in grocery stores, seed bombs on city land
- Being connected to where our food comes from (education, community gardens)
- CSA's – Community Supported Agriculture

## Personal action:

What two key things might you do to promote a food system which delivers delicious, nutritious, affordable and sustainably-grown food to the citizens of Calgary?

- Go learn about your food (Aggie Days, livestock exhibition at the Stampede)
- Go to volunteer for these organizations, they need the manpower (Food Bank, Stampede)
- Teach people how to cook
- Prioritize what the best things are for you
- Take small personal actions like growing one edible plant at home
- Read nutritional labels and talk to store owners about the origin of the food they sell
- Cook and share items grown from your own gardens
- Encourage community members to grow something and food swaps
- Acknowledge and encourage soil health
- Reviving heirloom and ancient crops
- Get landshare up and running to try and grow food
- Buying food that supports ethical and sustainable growth
- Write letters and talk to MPs to ask for changes in policy
- Teach your children to garden
- No longer eat foods that use GMO products (i.e. restaurant, processed foods)
- Work with SPIN farmers
- Take responsibility for your actions and make informed purchasing decisions.
- Join in a policy or city budget conversation
- Put your investments in something that will contribute to a sustainable society
- Work with diverse communities no sustainable foods