

The emergence and framing of farm-to-school initiatives: civic engagement, health and local agriculture

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Abstract Interest in and initiation of farm-to-school (FTS) programs have increased in recent years, spurred on by converging public concerns about child obesity trends and risks associated with industrialization and distancing in the modern food system. A civic agriculture framework that more specifically considers civic engagement and problem solving offers insights about variations in the development and prospects for FTS programs. Drawing on comparative case studies of two emerging FTS initiatives in Pennsylvania—one in a rural setting and one in an urban setting—this article examines the role of internal and external “champions” in launching FTS programs and fostering civic engagement. Farm-to-school community stakeholders across the two cases framed FTS in broadly similar terms of (1) redressing poor food environments; (2) improving student nutrition, health and well-being; and (3) revitalizing rural community through support of local agriculture. However, specific concerns and emphases differed across the rural and urban cases, illustrating the significance of local context for such programs. The article concludes by discussing the importance of frame bridging and frame extension as strategies for expanding the FTS movement, and also ensuring programs that correspond to

the specific circumstances and possibilities of their social and geographic settings.

Keywords Child nutrition · Civic agriculture · Farm-to-school programs · Food environments · Rural community revitalization

Introduction

Public interest in farm-to-school (FTS) programs in the United States has grown dramatically in recent years, with more than 1,000 programs now active in some fashion in 34 states (Kalb 2008). FTS programs are often organized as “farm to cafeteria” initiatives where food services develop purchasing relations with local farmers to incorporate fresh, regionally-sourced foods, particularly fruits and vegetables, into school menus. However, the scope of FTS programs may extend beyond food sourcing, per se. Many programs include or even focus on experiential and educational activities, such as farm field trips, school gardens or classroom lessons to increase knowledge about nutrition and the food system (Winne 2005).

Present enthusiasm for developing FTS in many school districts arises from two converging areas of public concern. The first centers on child health and the threat posed by what has been described as a worsening “epidemic” of obesity (Satcher 2001). While rising obesity rates have been observed across the U.S. population, increasing rates of child obesity have prompted particular concern, in part because of the rapid increases in incidence, and the extent to which childhood obesity serves to predict adult obesity and eventual adulthood obesity-related health problems (Hedley et al. 2004; Lavizzo-Mourey 2007; Olshansky et al. 2005).

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These trends have stimulated both state and federal legislatures to mandate that public schools develop and implement wellness policies. The Local School Wellness Policy Act of the expanded *Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004* mandated schools to establish a Wellness Policy by the 2006–2007 school year. At a minimum, schools are required to set nutrition education goals, establish nutrition guidelines for all foods available on the school campus, ensure that the school district's reimbursable meal program guidelines are not stricter than USDA guidelines, establish a plan for measuring implementation of the Wellness Policy, and involve a diverse group of community members in the process of writing the Wellness Policy, including parents, teachers, school administrators and the general public. These mandates have dovetailed with the sustainable agriculture movement's ongoing interest in developing institutional markets and with national-level FTS advocacy work by the National Farm to School Network, the Community Food Security Coalition and other groups.

The second area of public concern focuses on the increasing industrialization of the modern food system and the social distancing this creates between food production and consumption.¹ Recent media attention to food scares such as *E. coli* contamination of spinach, uncertainties about bovine spongiform encephalopathy (so-called “mad cow disease”), and debates about the social, environmental and ethical implications of transgenic foods have only stoked widening public perception of an industrialized and globally extended food system gone awry. These food fears and anxieties have made many consumers more interested than ever in knowing where their food originates and how it is produced (Blay-Palmer 2008).

In broad terms, FTS initiatives build on and link these two areas of concern. Their appeal at the local level turns more specifically on their promise of connecting local farmers with schools, providing benefits to each (Vallianatos et al. 2004; Vogt and Kaiser 2006). For producers, schools may represent a new potential market for their products, especially if “local” is perceived as a value-added quality signifying fresher, tastier foods, the purchase of which benefits local economies, helps to preserve farmland and maintain livelihoods for farming families. For schools, sourcing more produce from local farmers may fit well with local wellness policy actions, and educational activities about food and nutrition may also address new curricular foci and standards.

¹ This has been reflected in the popular press with a number of recent publications addressing the broad social, health and environmental implications of a more industrialized and corporation-controlled food system. See, e.g. Nestle (2002), Patel (2007), Pollan (2006), and Schlosser (2001).

Given such openings for the development of FTS programs, the National Farm to School Network, launched in 2007, now seeks “to coordinate, promote and expand this movement” (Kalb 2008, p. 1). Working through eight regional agencies, the Network's efforts center on training and technical assistance to FTS stakeholders, networking, public information about FTS, and policy reform and development to support FTS. Such efforts to “expand the movement” can benefit from examining how actual FTS programs are emerging and developing in different settings. Diversity in circumstance, capacity and need of schools and communities shapes the possibilities for FTS. Building on Thomas Lyson's (2004) concept of “civic agriculture,” we examine the emergence and framing of two specific FTS programs in Pennsylvania.

The recent rise of FTS can be seen as one expression of civic agriculture, which Lyson (2004, p. 2) defines as “the emergence and growth of community-based agriculture and food production activities that not only meet consumer demands for fresh, safe and locally produced food but create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship, and strengthen community identity.” However, Lyson offers only beginning suggestions about the social processes, such as civic engagement, through which civic agriculture emerges and develops. For example, Lyson describes community problem-solving as a notable feature of civic agriculture, but gives few empirical details as to how such problem-solving works.

This article attempts to ground and elaborate civic agriculture by drawing on two case studies of emerging FTS initiatives in Pennsylvania, one in a rural setting and one in an urban setting. Through these case studies, we consider the role of civic engagement in initiating FTS programs and the similarities and differences in how school community stakeholders in these two settings frame the rationale for and anticipated benefits of FTS. Building on these insights about civic engagement and community problem-solving, we conclude by discussing options and strategies for strengthening new and existing FTS initiatives, in short, for “expanding the movement.”

Civic agriculture, civic engagement, and problem-solving

Lyson's (2000, 2004, 2005) concept of civic agriculture represents a marrying of largely American social science scholarship on civic engagement to scholarship on the sociology of agriculture and food systems. In one of his final intellectual projects, Lyson sought to conceptualize and guide a more community-derived and directed model of agricultural development than what he observed in an industrialized and globalized food system increasingly

controlled by transnational capital. In light of our discussion of FTS, we first elaborate the notion of civic engagement as it relates to the food and agricultural system, and then suggest how Lyson's preliminary notion of "problem-solving," as a component of civic agriculture, can be usefully extended using framing theory.

Brint and Levy (1999, p. 164) note that "civic engagement" carries both a primary and a secondary meaning. "Civic" first refers simply to the activities of citizens, and their rights and duties related to this status; this sense does not necessarily imply absence of partisanship or self-interest. However, "civic" also tends to a broader, more normative meaning, which emphasizes orientation of citizen efforts toward the needs and concerns of the wider polity or community. This second sense corresponds more closely to Lyson's use, as where he writes, "the civic community is one in which residents are bound to a place by a plethora of local institutions and organizations. Business enterprises are embedded in institutional and organizational networks. And the community, not the corporation, is the source of personal identity, the topic of social discourse, and the foundation for social cohesion" (Lyson 2004, p. 69). This emphasis on collective norms, social cohesion and community animates Lyson's use of "civic." And yet the other meaning of civic engagement, which permits (even if it doesn't invite) self-interest, remains relevant, seeding some of the potential tensions and the challenges in community problem-solving.

The term "engagement" refers most obviously to what citizens do and how they do it: they participate in facets of civic life. "Engagement" further presumes involvement that is more than perfunctory or coincidental; it implies thoughtfulness, deliberation and reasoned decision making, frequently aimed towards action, and most often in the context of formal organized groups. As Skocpol (1999) points out, recent debates have focused on whether civic engagement in the United States is, in fact, declining, given diminished citizen membership and involvement in the broad based, voluntary, and often federated associations of the past, or whether it is simply reinventing itself through new forms of more localized and perhaps looser association. Scholarly and practical justifications for paying attention to civic engagement stem from a presumed link between civic engagement and a healthy democracy.

Much of Lyson's writing on civic agriculture exhibits a strong structural basis, emphasizing the conditions and characteristics of new (or renewed) more localized institutional forms, especially initiatives such as community supported agriculture, farmers' markets, roadside farms, community food processors and the like (Lyson 2004; Lyson and Guptill 2004). Such work emerges from Lyson's longstanding concern about the social implications of agricultural restructuring, which has resulted in dominance

by large scale, production centered commodity agriculture. In secondary data analysis, Lyson et al. (2001) found that indicators of a civically engaged economically independent middle class helped to mediate the relationship between scale of farm operations and community well-being. Although Lyson alludes frequently to social processes that might create and sustain new structures of civic agriculture, his completed empirical work tends to rely on proxy measures of civic engagement.²

Thus, Lyson offers limited empirical findings on the actual perceptions, practices and social interactions within groups and communities that might foster civic agriculture. Overall, Lyson recognizes civic agriculture primarily in terms of the presence of associations and initiatives. His completed writings offer only beginning insights about the texture and evolution of civic practice in interactional terms. Similarly, although Lyson highlights and celebrates the problem-solving orientation of civic agriculture, his account remains preliminary, more prescriptive than descriptive of actual empirical circumstances.

Some researchers and advocates have further pressed to extend civic agriculture beyond Lyson's initial formulation of the concept. DeLind (2002) promotes an understanding of civic agriculture that moves beyond its early focus on alternative market development to prioritize issues of identity, place and community purpose. Bagdonis (2007) suggests that civic agriculture should enlarge its consideration of consumption from mere food purchasing by consumers to how the dietary choices of eaters link to nutritional outcomes with significant implications for human health. Here we are less concerned with whether the concept overly privileges the market or production, and instead seek to understand how local food and agriculture initiatives enact the "civic" in civic agriculture.

Frame analysis offers one useful approach for extending Lyson's work on civic agriculture and especially his discussion of problem-solving regarding the food and agricultural system. The concept of framing involves establishing "definitions of a situation that are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events...and our subjective involvement in them (Goffman 1974, pp. 10–11). Oliver and Johnston (2000, p. 42) draw attention to the distinction between "the *structure* of cognitive frames, and framing *processes* which capture the emergent, contested, and socially constructed quality of cognitive frames as they are molded in interaction." This distinction is important because it suggests that through the

² Indicators of civic engagement used in one study were the percentage of population that belongs to a church and the percentage of population that voted in the most recent U.S. presidential election (Lyson et al. 2001).

process of framing, individuals can influence the meanings that others attach to the physical and material world, producing outcomes with consequences for policy or program formation (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988).

In their review of framing and social movements, Benford and Snow (2000) highlight the main features and processes associated with frame development. They outline three “core tasks of framing” that serve to engage actors for mobilization around a particular issue: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing and motivational framing. By facilitating agreement and mobilization, each of these tasks contributes to the definition of a social group or movement.

Diagnostic framing refers to the task of identifying and defining a problem, and then directing blame or responsibility for the problem. Prognostic framing involves articulation of an approach for addressing the problematic situation. Motivational framing, the final core task of framing, provides the rationale for action that will remedy the defined social problem. Part of this task includes defining an appropriate vocabulary of motive that will help recruit or motivate others to join the movement (Mills 1940; Benford 1993). Gillespie and Gillespie (2000, p. 2), for example, attempt to define a “common understanding of the core concepts” of community food systems, which include food system, community, community food system, food security, family, and family food decision-making. As the diversity and number of people who are interested in food system issues continues to increase, developing a common vocabulary around the concept of community food systems is important because it helps individuals to “work across disciplinary boundaries” and provides a “common ground for discussion” (Gillespie and Gillespie 2000, p. 1).

Understanding the features and strategies of framing helps to illuminate how groups construct meaning in reaction to situations perceived as problematic. Benford and Snow (2000, p. 628) emphasize that the framing process “does not occur in a structural or cultural vacuum” and suggest that the ecological context in which social groups are embedded can result in varying collective action outcomes. Furthermore, groups comprised of diverse stakeholders may be working within multiple and possibly contradictory motivational frames, as found in Wright et al.’s (2007) study of a collaborative group charged with addressing regional agricultural development and renewal in Michigan. In this respect, framing analysis can shed light on the social construction of problems—and possible solutions. After describing our study sites and methods, we turn specifically towards understanding how FTS is constructed as a solution to particular problems and to how the logic of supporting and participating in FTS is motivated.

Study sites and methods

Using a purposive case comparison approach (Yin 2003), we studied farm-to-school initiatives taking place in differing community contexts. Extending more than 300 miles east to west, the state of Pennsylvania is book-ended by the cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, the sixth and twenty-second largest metropolitan areas in the United States. Despite this, nearly one-third of Pennsylvania residents live in rural areas, representing the largest non-urban population of any state in the country (US Census Bureau 2001). The evidence for higher rates of child obesity in rural areas (Center for Rural Pennsylvania 2005; Schafft et al. 2009) coupled with anecdotal evidence that FTS programming is presently more developed in Pennsylvania’s urban, rather than rural schools (Snyder 2005) prompted us to use urban–rural location as a key dimension for case study selection.

We first identified Pennsylvania schools implementing any FTS programming, whether as local food sourcing only, experiential learning activities only, or some combination of both. As no comprehensive list of FTS programs in Pennsylvania exists, we gathered information about farm-to-school activities in Pennsylvania from community nutrition electronic mailing lists and by speaking with representatives of state-level organizations now involved in K-12 wellness education and sustainable agriculture. Using criteria established by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania³ to classify school districts as rural or urban, we chose one FTS program in a rural school district and one FTS program in an urban school district as the cases.

FTS programming in the rural school district occurs district-wide and includes an emphasis on cafeteria (school lunch) changes. In contrast, FTS programming in the urban school district occurs in one specific school within the district, as a pilot classroom-based initiative. District vs. school-level organization of FTS thus emerged at the outset as an organizational characteristic of FTS with possible implications for civic engagement associated with these programs.

The rural FTS initiative takes place in a school district located in central Pennsylvania in an area characterized by a history of natural resource extraction and some continued mixed farming. In the 2005–2006 academic year, nearly 2,200 students were enrolled in the district’s four elementary schools and one junior–senior high school.

³ The Center for Rural Pennsylvania utilizes a definition of “rural” and “urban” based on population density. A school district is rural when the number of persons per square mile is fewer than 274, which is the mean number of persons per square mile in Pennsylvania based on 2000 Census data.

Approximately one-third of the student population, which is 99% White, is considered low-income, or eligible to receive free or reduced school lunch. The school district hosting these FTS activities covers more than 300 square miles, and has a population per square mile of approximately 40.

In contrast, the urban FTS initiative focuses on one elementary school located in an eastern Pennsylvania school district. In the 2005–2006 academic year, nearly 400 students were enrolled in the school, which serves kindergarten through fifth grade. Approximately 95% of the student population is considered low-income. Because of the high number of low-income children in the district, all children attending school in the district receive breakfast and lunch at no cost. Additionally, more than 70% of students attending the study school come from across the city, while less than 30% of the students reside in the community in which the school building is located. The population per square mile in the district is approximately 60,000. The student population is 99% African-American.

The comparative qualitative case study research included semi-structured field interviews, field observations, and document review conducted over the four-month period from March to June 2006, with follow-up contact through February, 2008. In each setting, interviews were conducted with as diverse a range of school community stakeholders as possible whose occupational roles or personal interests within the school community demonstrated active or potential links to the practice or goals of FTS. These included school administrators, teachers, nurses, parents, school food service staff, farmers and community-based or NGO facilitators. Most field interviews lasted less than an hour. In total, we interviewed 29 people in 28 separate interviews, with 15 interviews conducted at the rural case site and 13 at the urban case site. Formal interviews with students were not possible. However, observation of FTS-relevant school activities took place, with school administration approval. For the rural case, these opportunities included touring school buildings and facilities, and attending lunch periods, wellness committee meetings, and a milk taste testing by students. For the urban case, the opportunities included a walking tour of the school building, observing lunch periods and classroom cooking demonstrations, and participating in school field trips to farms providing produce to the program.

Civic engagement and the role of champions in fostering farm-to-school initiatives

FTS programs are often envisioned as broad-based and shared community stakeholder efforts. Our two case

studies demonstrate that particular individual and organizational “champions” who initiate, inspire and direct these FTS activities play crucial roles not only on an operational level, but in setting the stage for ensuing forms of civic engagement. Such “champions” may bring to the table personal passions and commitments, or prior organizational agendas. The histories and motivations of “champions” inform their perceptions about the importance and possibilities of FTS. Their networks of contacts and resources and their styles of organizing are also key. In diffuse institutional environments such as public schools, these “champions” can play a pivotal role in linking other stakeholders and maintaining the energy, enthusiasm and forward momentum of local FTS efforts. Therefore, not only differences across community contexts, but differences between local champions may shape the emergence and character of FTS programs.

In the rural case, the recent need to organize and activate a District Wellness Committee provided a platform for institutionalizing aspects of FTS. Within this, however, the district food service director has played the pivotal role in initiating and coordinating actual FTS activity, in effect, becoming its internal “champion.” In the urban case, an outside non-governmental organization with a strong record of work in community food security and nutrition education developed and spearheaded the FTS activities at this particular school. Although the activities are structured to include some parent and teacher involvement, and many parents and teachers express considerable appreciation that their school now has this program, FTS here began in large part due to the efforts of its external organizational champion.

The rural school district food service director had assumed his position three years prior to the start of our research. He had not planned either to begin or lead an FTS initiative in his district. Rather, as he explains, “It just sorta happened. When I got here, they were buying apples from a local apple grower and I thought, I wonder what else I can do.” The food service director’s personal experience growing up on a family farm that no longer exists piqued his interest in how to expand procurement of local foods for school meals. Moving beyond relatively easy sourcing of local apples, he sought out local supplies of potatoes. The rural district has long had some tradition of educational activities focusing on agriculture. For example, the elementary schools hold farm fairs and junior high students take field trips to local farms. However, few rural FTS community stakeholders tend to see such educational and experiential activities as falling under the umbrella of “official” FTS activities now led by the food service director in the school district. They instead speak of FTS as something that “[the food service director] is working on.” Because of the food service director’s leadership skills and

his formal role within the district food service, rural community stakeholders tend to see FTS in terms of food supply and sourcing shifts that now appear “doable.”

Nonetheless, the impetus for any FTS activity in the rural school district has been reinforced by the recent federal wellness policy mandate, which structures a significant new expectation for civic engagement in school communities. In response to the mandate, the rural school district scheduled monthly meetings throughout the 2005–2006 academic year for a Health and Wellness Council composed of school administrators, teachers, parents and the general public to discuss and define their Local School Wellness Policy. At these regularly scheduled meetings of the Health and Wellness Council, the food service director found a forum where he could express his growing interest in FTS and float plans to organize and implement a more formal program for the school district. These discussions served to introduce several Health and Wellness Council members to the otherwise unfamiliar concept of FTS. Encouraged by the food service director, the Council collectively and reflexively considered the FTS idea. As a site for civic engagement, the Council could deliberate, alongside its other business, if and how FTS could be directed and developed to address broader health and wellness challenges also facing the school district.

Rural community FTS stakeholders who were not members of the Council and thus not part of these conversations tend to express less comprehensive or integrated understandings of the FTS idea or its possibilities. However, most community stakeholders still quickly attribute any successes incorporating locally sourced foods into the school district’s menu to the food service director. They reference him by name and see his efforts in positive terms. “Yeah, actually, there’s been a big change since [the new food service director] arrived,” says one of the school cooks. Similarly one teacher notes:

As far as the FTS stuff, [the food service director] is really the one who brought that up and brought it to light and said this is a great program that we really need to look into. We talked about building a greenhouse here on the grounds. So, he’s the one that’s really brought that to light, which it’s just good to have different people to help push it through.

This comment suggests that various community stakeholders are prepared to be inspired and to support the FTS initiative, but a demonstration of leadership—here, from within the school district—provides the critical and necessary catalyst.

In the urban school, the most active champions for FTS have arisen not from within the school system proper, but through an external non-governmental organization. The

school, however, had recently acted in ways creating an environment conducive to FTS, for example, by instituting a school ban on junk food, which prohibited students from bringing snacks such as candy, potato chips and soda to school. That policy change signaled the school’s receptivity to other new programming efforts, such as FTS, that might complement health and prevention efforts already in place.

The classroom-based FTS efforts at the urban school are organized and led by a nonprofit organization, whose mission is to provide city residents with adequate access to nutritious foods, while also supporting local farms and sustaining the environment. At the time of our research, the urban FTS program was in its first year. The organization’s goal for this FTS initiative is “to promote healthy communities by teaching young children and their parents about food, farms and nutrition.” The approach integrates nutrition education into traditional academic lessons, provides healthy snacks supplied by local farmers, organizes school field trips to farms, and holds classroom cooking demonstrations using local foods to teach healthy recipes. Parents are invited to participate in all aspects of the programming. In general, however, parents, teachers and school administrators at the time of field research played relatively minor roles in shaping the design or execution of FTS activities at the school, compared to staff with the implementing organization. The school has become target and beneficiary of an innovative service and educational delivery product from an external organization, for whom such work fits well within its current mission.

The initiation of FTS programs in the rural and urban setting provides insights about the emergence and nature of civic engagement within FTS and especially about the critical role of champions. While the ideal may be broad-based participation and collaboration by community stakeholders from the start, the practical reality of local and alternative food initiatives often depends on how alert and interested individuals and organizations engage with what they see as immediately possible with the resources they have available (Hassanein 2003). Civic engagement remains a useful concept for examining FTS initiatives, particularly those involving public schools. But civic engagement in FTS is socially textured and conditioned by local context. “Champions” either within or outside the school community may play important roles in moving FTS into actual practice (Trainor 2006). Following Lyson’s (2004, p. 71) pragmatist view of civic agriculture as “being guided by the question ‘what works?’”, it becomes important to recognize the different roles of champions, including the extent to which their work may open up or forestall broader forms of civic engagement as FTS programs evolve.

Stakeholder constructions of farm-to-school as a solution for community problems

Across the urban and rural case sites, school community stakeholders reveal several distinct, but potentially complementary framings of FTS initiatives. Foremost, they frame FTS as a possible solution to district or school community problems. Given the urgency of such problems, stakeholders also provide motivational frames centered on potential benefits of FTS that provide logic and rationale for supporting and developing such initiatives. Across both the rural and urban cases, school community stakeholders articulate three broad frames for understanding and supporting the farm-to-school initiatives: (1) redressing poor food environments; (2) fostering improved nutrition behaviors and health outcomes; and (3) revitalizing the rural community through support of local agriculture. The particular emphases and expressions of these frames varied across the rural and urban cases, demonstrating how local context influences how FTS is perceived and received in specific settings.

Framing I: redressing a poor food environment

Introducing and developing an FTS initiative first requires framing the problem it needs to address and can address. In both case study settings, community stakeholders speak of FTS as a timely and needed response to the problem of students living in poor food environments.

In the urban FTS case, school teachers and parents living in the neighboring community suggest that FTS can be particularly beneficial for struggling urban schools because the surrounding food environment presents children with little other than highly processed and commercial food options:

I would say that probably for the rural areas, this [FTS] is a little, I don't want to say normal, but they don't have McDonalds on every other corner, the Chinese food stores, the junk food stores. So, I feel like this really is more beneficial to us, because it exposes us. You know [rural residents] walk right out the door and they see the farms and crops right there. We don't see that when we walk right outside the door. So, this is for children like ours.

A school market takes place several times during the academic year (it is a related project introduced by the organization leading the FTS initiative); students are responsible for collecting orders, handling payments and sorting produce to be distributed to their parents or other purchasers. While some school market programs strongly emphasize teaching the students advanced entrepreneurial skills, this program equally emphasizes changing

students' perceptions about possible food environments, by demonstrating where healthy food is visible. One teacher describes changes that she has witnessed in students:

I think the program has really been a great benefit, especially to our children, because a lot of our children are not eating properly for one reason or another, especially in the morning as they walk up the street. I don't see as many kids coming to school with potato chips. You know, not just with potato chips, but actually eating them in the morning as they walk up the street.

Several urban school community stakeholders allude to the relative disadvantage in urban food environments, compared to rural. One parent suggests that, "The environment in which the kids are growing up in rural areas, like being nearby farms, makes it different. We [in this urban area] need FTS more, because our kids don't know as much about where their food comes from."

Although located in a more remote, less populated region of central Pennsylvania, the rural school district faces its own version of a poor food environment, in contrast to assumptions that many urban residents may have about rural places. The serene, picturesque landscape of pine trees and trim, modest houses is also home to convenience stores and fast food chains, with several located very near the rural district's school buildings. Indeed, fast food establishments, and the culture of snacking and convenience they encourage, have become rural, as well as urban fixtures. Thus, for many rural school community stakeholders, FTS deserves attention as one possible counterforce to an increasingly widespread and harmful fast food culture. The school nurse, for example, reflects on the patterns of social change that have squeezed people's time and made convenience paramount:

Part of it could be that we've become such a fast food society. Everyone is on the go now. Like, my mother really cooked meals when I was growing up. I tried my best with my kids. But, as you get busy with busier lifestyles, people don't cook and cook the balanced meals even. It's a lot of quick, microwave stuff or quick stuff that you buy that you can put in the oven, like the fish that is battered...Who knows what's in it? You read that stuff and it's, like [scrunches her face], yikes!

Several rural community FTS stakeholders say that by reintroducing students to healthier food traditions and practices from the past, FTS could help challenge the present food environment and culture premised on convenience.

Framing II: improving nutrition behaviors and student health and well-being

If poor food environments and cultures are a significant part of the problem addressed by FTS, a health frame centered on improving nutrition behaviors and student well-being offers a key motivation for supporting and developing FTS. Rural school community stakeholders see child obesity as an important problem in their school district, but they do not necessarily see it as more severe or urgent than other physical and mental health issues facing district students, such as poor hygiene, low self-esteem or eating disorders. Seeing an overall need to address health concerns, one rural parent remarks: “I think that part of what they need is general health education from everywhere. I think that’s part of what the wellness policy is going to do.” Consequently, in the rural case, FTS is seen as one element in solving general health problems among adolescents of which obesity is just one issue.

Echoing this emphasis on a holistic approach to student health, one of the elementary school principals stresses that the role of the school is to create a “healthy lifestyle venue.” The FTS program, again, could serve as one component:

We need to have a strong curriculum that teaches things that aren’t being addressed at home. I think nutrition is one of those things that has gone by the wayside. [...] I think that we have to be leaders in this initiative. I really do. I think that’s why it’s good to have a Wellness Policy, but you can’t just do it in policy. You have to put all kinds of things into play, including such activities as FTS. And, I think that you need to have a way that you’re informing and educating parents, and not just kids.

Similarly, the director of elementary education emphasizes a broad understanding of the health-promoting role of schools, when she says that the role of the school is not only:

...to meet the needs of the children academically, but also socially and emotionally. Because, if you are not healthy, you are not happy. If you are not psychologically safe, you can’t learn.

In this manner, some rural community stakeholders see a fully realized, comprehensive FTS program as contributing to the promotion of mental health, as well as improved nutritional practices. One rural teacher describes how she envisions a science class incorporating hands-on lessons in a school garden or on a neighboring farm.

[Teachers could announce] wear your boots tomorrow. We’re going to do an activity. Get them outside

and get them out of this building for awhile. I think that’d be really beneficial for the students. They’re bottled up in this building all day. Is there something we can do to get them out? No wonder the kids get frustrated and mad with each other and the teachers. I think if I didn’t get to go outside, I’d probably be mean, too.

As an example of some of the ways that the school district might be able to integrate FTS lessons into broader health initiatives, the rural food and consumer sciences teacher observes that she could provide students with an opportunity to sample the “fantastic” taste of locally grown foods by using such foods in hands-on cooking lessons. While she has not incorporated local foods in her cooking demonstrations recently, she uses some FTS concepts in her lessons.

Not that I’m actually going to the farmer and doing it, but I have some materials that I use with my kids, especially with the ninth grade. The worksheet asks which of these foods in its current state has the least amount of processing. And, I have eggs, a loaf of bread, you know, so that they understand and know which of these is in its natural state right now and which had more processing and what kind of processing. There also might be bacon on there.

While a health framing for FTS, particularly as a way of addressing childhood obesity, or overnutrition, is common in many public accounts for why FTS is needed, rural community FTS stakeholders do not limit their concern to obesity, and instead frame health as a broad and ongoing rationale for developing their FTS program. In the urban school setting, a health framing is also evident, but here, it is strongly inflected by concern about food insecurity. Urban school community stakeholders suggest that FTS deserves support and development, because it potentially responds to both forms of malnutrition, both over- and under-nutrition. One urban teacher highlights a health rationale that frames FTS as a needed response to the food insecurity experienced by many of her students:

I think the problem is not getting enough vegetables. You know, needing to eat more vegetables. Yeah, not getting enough. I don’t think they eat it, because a lot of them don’t get a lot to eat.

Additionally, the school counselor remarks that she is “not certain that obesity is a problem in the school.” Rather, she says that a “lack of access to food—any kind of food” is the more urgent problem.

However, another teacher points to the problem of child obesity, in a way that suggests the intersection of

problematic food environments and interventions to counter them in the framing of FTS:

[This city] is like the cheesesteak place and the kids don't see any problems with it. You know, I have kids that are so out of breath going up the stairs that they need to stop and get some water. They're huffing and puffing and they're 11, and that's kind of sad. And I keep saying to them, I'm an overweight adult. I didn't do [these nutrition education activities] when I was your age, but if I did, while your body's still growing and your metabolism is changing, I wouldn't be where I'm at now. Do it now, because it's so much harder when you're an adult.

Parents, teachers and school administrators in the urban school recognize the importance of nutrition education and the presentation of healthy food options. They highlight FTS as an innovative approach that can address these very real health concerns. Although the FTS program began as an early intervention program to improve overall nutrition among urban youth, its growth coincided with the burgeoning local foods movement. In time, the procurement of local foods to support local farms also became an important element of the program. However, teaching nutrition education has been and continues to remain a priority for programming. A program administrator for the non-profit organization remarks that by "creating early memories of food," the program aims to provide children at an early age with background information necessary to make healthy food decisions later in life. In the urban case, virtually all school community stakeholders state the importance of exposing children to fresh fruits and vegetables. One teacher says:

It provides the vegetables. Eating it. Knowing what they look like – the color, shape, and how they taste. Because a lot of those foods are not popular here, I don't believe the kids get those kinds of vegetables. Some of them might, but not a lot of them. I believe [the FTS program] exposes the kids to them. It makes them more aware of the different kinds of vegetables out there. [...] So, now they're exposed to it so when they go to the market and they say, Oh, we had this. We had mushrooms. Or, we had that salad dressing on romaine or escarole lettuce. You know, we normally just have "lettuce."

The children's lack of exposure to fruits and vegetables results partly from the inability to access healthy food in urban neighborhoods. While school community stakeholders in both the rural and urban settings identify child obesity as a possible health problem in their areas, their motivational framings of FTS invoke broader concerns about student nutrition, health and well-being. Emerging

from local experiences and histories in these school communities, these variations in the framing of health motivations for FTS underscore the need for attention to context in designing and organizing FTS programs.

Framing III: revitalizing rural community through support of local agriculture

Advocates and analysts often present FTS as a way to strengthen local and regional agriculture by creating new markets for farmers. Both rural and urban FTS community stakeholders articulate a motivational frame of such agricultural and rural community benefits from FTS, but generally subordinate this frame to the broad health and nutrition-related frame discussed above. Not surprisingly, rural and urban community FTS stakeholders construct a local agriculture frame differently.

Stakeholders in the rural community see rationale for FTS because of its possible contribution to resolving issues associated with rural community decline, as indicated by a weakening local economy, the disappearance of working family farms, and reduced social infrastructure. Stakeholders in the rural setting expect FTS to provide local farmers with increased revenues and see the region benefiting by having a stronger tax base. A school board member reflects on the possible community benefits:

It'd be good. It'd just be extra income for the farmers in the district and those individuals in the district. And any money that we can keep in the district, I'd like to see that. So, that is the benefit. The benefit is to support those people who are supporting the school by their taxes.

However, it is not clear how much FTS can extend economic benefits to the community. First, very few farms within the rural school district are actually able to supply sufficient quantities of the particular foods used in school meals. Many farms within the school district are now technically hobby farms or primarily produce livestock feed. Second, the extent to which FTS, relative to other markets, can provide a significant source of taxable income for farmers is unclear.

Despite these caveats about the potential economic contributions of FTS to rural revitalization, community stakeholders see FTS as helping to preserve agricultural landscape in their rural school district. This emphasis corresponds to a growing appreciation of non-production values in agricultural land, which offers open space and supports recreational, environmental, aesthetic and cultural priorities. One rural parent (who was also a part-time, very small-scale farmer) speaks of FTS in the context of her concern to preserve the local agricultural landscape and traditions:

A benefit is developing a connection to the grower. The grower becomes part of the community; like us, we're going to take part in the farm tour this fall. This is important because a lot of ground for farming is being lost to developers and that ground is never going to come back to farming. And, if you can make farming a viable and respectable occupation, then I think you are well on your way to saving that land.

Similarly, the junior–senior high school physical education teacher voices concern about even rural children losing touch with what is seen as the traditional agrarian landscape: “Kids are growing up seeing less and less farmland and yards.” She continues by speculating on how civic agriculture projects like FTS might preserve the agricultural landscape for future generations.

In contrast, some rural school administrators automatically link the “farm” in FTS to models of conventional farming, which they have come to see as a vocational option of now limited opportunity for their students. However, most rural community stakeholders retain positive views about agriculture and welcome greater attention to FTS by public schools because of possible social and economic benefits for the community. For example, one individual envisions how an expanded FTS program could “connect the school with other members of the community,” creating, in a sense, a firmer civic footprint. Showing similar reasoning, the high school's head cook does not think it would “be a big problem to get it [more FTS programming] passed through. You know, we're down to earth. We're kind of like a loyal community. I think everyone would be for it.” Likewise, the physical education teacher voices optimism that a FTS program can revitalize social relations in the community. She explains that some members in the community may have become insular due to living in a valley surrounded by a mountainous ridge:

Once you get over the mountain, few come in or leave. The community has become satisfied with mediocrity and this could be to blame for social issues. [This satisfaction with mediocrity] makes it hard for change because things are engrained in culture. But, a program like FTS could introduce a gradual shift in values, so that people are doing things together again.

By making civic engagement and collective endeavor the link between food production and consumption, local food projects, such as FTS, are here seen as small, but significant ways to revitalize rural communities. FTS could help reinvigorate a weakened local rural economy. At the same time, it could stimulate and renew community relationships

by creating new social contexts in which local food consumers and producers interact.

Though physically distant from rural settings, parents and teachers in the urban setting recognize and articulate in very general terms a motivational frame centered on revitalizing rural communities and local agriculture. Given the incorporation of farm visits in the urban FTS initiative, the urban parents had, through their children, some exposure to actual regional farmers. Thus, urban FTS community stakeholders voice concern about the livelihoods of farmers, but in a way somewhat tinged by idyllic assumptions about “rural life.” One urban teacher conveys this stance, “[The farmers] are trying to make a good living. They're not making a lot of money now and I think they need to be supported. Farm-to-school could do that.” The assistant principal at the urban school expresses a farmer-focused justification for more use of local foods:

We need to support our local farmers because, I mean, everything now is imported, you know. And, I think it's so much better to really support our local farmers, because it seems that farming is becoming the past, you know, it's just sliding away. Everything is so commercialized now and I really think that it's important to support the farmer because they're trying to make a living. They're trying to make a good living. They're not making a lot of money now and I think they need to be supported.

These particular statements of solidarity with farmers may grow from urban stakeholders' own knowledge about challenges of economic survival. However, urban FTS community stakeholders remain clear that protection of farmers' livelihoods is not the primary benefit of a FTS program. Rather, as the assistant principal clarifies, “The main thing is it helps the children to think about what is healthy and what's not.” The school nurse even voices some uncertainty about the details of benefit: “I'm sure it benefits the farmers, but I'm not sure how.” Another urban teacher reflects pragmatically on what must happen before FTS can really help the agricultural community:

Not until it [FTS] gets more common of a practice around here. Then it is going to help the farming community, because they have to get things to us and it helps keep their crops...give them supply and demand. But I think probably not for a couple more years, at least not around here because it's so new. And trying to get kids to eat broccoli who aren't used to it, it takes a while.

Urban stakeholders' views about the benefits of FTS—emphasizing health benefits over agricultural gains—tend to correspond to the organizers' goals for the program in that the first goal of the program is to help children know

more about and choose healthier food and the second goal is to support local agriculture.

Conclusions

This study offers empirical accounting of how civic engagement ensues, on the ground, in two emerging FTS programs in Pennsylvania. Lyson's (2000, 2004) use of "civic" to characterize local alternatives in the food and agricultural system stresses the presence of viable community-based and -oriented associations. However, both the assigned and assumed roles of stakeholders and participants within such associations give contours to any "civic engagement" effect. As leaders and catalysts, champions shape organizational practices and program pathways. The catalyzing effect of "civic engagement" in initiatives, such as FTS, rests strongly on the role of these "champions"—either someone within the school setting, such as the food service director in our rural case (Hirshey 2007), or individuals or groups, external to the school setting, such as the NGO in our urban case (Trainor 2006). Recognized and appreciated by other stakeholders and participants in their programs, these FTS champions nonetheless offer different possibilities for prompting the civic engagement which will be necessary for sustaining FTS programs. As a school insider in charge of students' meals, the rural food service director uses his authority and credibility to introduce and gradually institutionalize FTS activities and thinking through the district's Health and Wellness Council. As outsiders to the school and experts in their field, staff for the urban FTS-related NGO deliver a multi-faceted and innovative program with evident positive impacts. Encouraging and facilitating the ongoing engagement of school and community stakeholders in the long term may be challenging, and will be especially critical for an FTS program initially driven from outside the school district.

If FTS emerges through variable patterns of civic engagement, we have further shown how stakeholders of emerging FTS programs frame both the problem FTS addresses and the solution it potentially represents in ways informed by local context. Our two cases underscore commonalities, but also divergences. In the current context of school wellness policy mandates and mounting publicity about child health problems, it is not surprising that stakeholders in both case settings dwell on health-related framings of what is wrong with school children's food experiences and how FTS can create needed changes worthy of support. While they see FTS as a way to source healthier foods for school meals and snacks, they also emphasize the learning and experiences that FTS can provide students, including exposure to unfamiliar, but

healthy foods and greater nutrition awareness. Allen and Guthman (2007) have questioned the neoliberal underpinnings of current FTS initiatives, and in particular the implications of constructing schoolchildren as consumers. Our two cases, however, with their emphasis on nutrition and food system education and wellness practices, offer examples of how FTS may instead align with "reforming public education in order to stop creating food consumers and to start fostering the emergence of 'food citizenship'" (Kloppenborg and Hassanein 2006, p. 421).

While Lyson (2004) and many FTS proponents see FTS as another type of local agrifood initiative and as a way to support local agriculture, local agriculture represents a secondary framing in both our case studies. Not surprisingly, a local agriculture framing was more evident and more multi-faceted in the rural, than in the urban case, given the rural area's farming legacy and some continuing farming activity. But general subordination of local agriculture framings to health framings in both cases is hardly surprising, especially when media messages and policy mandates reinforce the sense that children now face a "health crisis." Nonetheless, approaching FTS primarily as a solution to nutrition and health problems has implications. Establishing and maintaining viable supply relations with local or regional farmers remain challenging for public institutions, and especially for public K-12 schools (Vogt and Kaiser 2008). If student health becomes the dominant framing in FTS, program commitment to the hard work of finding, supporting and sourcing food from local and regional farmers may wane. Promoting more healthful diets could come to emphasize simply increasing intake of fruits and vegetables, regardless of where they come from. This would not necessarily harm students, but it does represent a more limited objective for initiatives seeking to improve students' food experiences in the most comprehensive way.

A return to the framing literature offers some insights. Frame alignment processes may be particularly important for expanding the FTS movement, by building on better recognition of how local contexts shape the possibilities for promoting and organizing FTS. Such frame alignment processes are "deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed" (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 624), permitting social groups to make strategic use of specific frames to achieve goals, such as recruiting new members. Frame bridging, for example, involves "linking two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem" (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 624). To develop broader support for and engagement with FTS, particularly at the policy level, it remains important to assert the connections between problems of child health and local agriculture.

Frame extension involves extending the reach of a movement beyond its primary or initial focus. Arguably, this is what has happened with FTS, which was initially seen as a way to identify local markets for small and medium scale local farmers, but has blossomed into an intervention for improved child nutrition and health. While this process of frame extension can be useful, it also has the potential to fragment a social movement. For example, if some FTS programs concentrate their energies solely on nutrition education, while others focus mostly on using school gardens to teach entrepreneurial skills, broader efforts to mobilize state and federal support to relocalize school food service programs may be undermined because of an absence of a unified, public agenda. On the other hand, however, the proliferation of frames and the uneasy alliances between some of them point to the diversity in emerging FTS programs, across rural and urban settings and from region to region. That diversity underscores the importance of recognizing that “what works” (Lyson 2004) may not be the same for different school communities interested in instituting FTS. We may need as yet unimagined relationships, institutions and policies to enable FTS to emerge and thrive across the widest possible range of school communities. As efforts to “expand the FTS movement” pay attention to local context, the likelihood of fruitful outcomes may be more assured.

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