

Seikatsu Consumer Coop: Scaling up food system transformation?

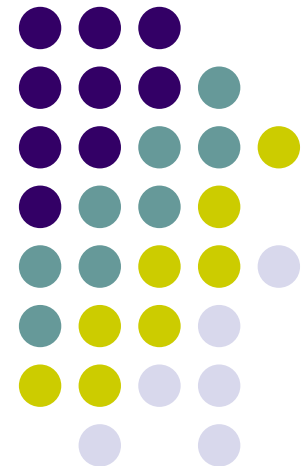
Sean Connelly, PhD

Post-doc Fellow

BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance

Presentation for Cooperatives and Local Food Infrastructure,
Edmonton

November 26th, 2009



Outline



- > Context and Rationale
- > Seikatsu Consumer Coop
- > Preliminary Conclusions
- > Relevance for BC and Alberta Food System Transformation?



CONTEXT AND RATIONALE



- > Sustainable Community Development (SCD), Social Economy (SE)
 - > Diversity in approaches
 - > Strong vs. weak, Deep vs. shallow,
 - > Criticized for lack of social justice, lack of scale, and sector-based approaches

Weakest of the Weak: Hybrid Warship Saves 1 Million Gallons of Fuel



CONTEXT AND RATIONALE



- > Sustainable Community Development (SCD), Social Economy (SE)
 - > Diversity in approaches
 - > Weak vs. strong, shallow vs. deep
 - > Criticized for lack of social justice, lack of scale, and sector-based approaches

Context and Rationale



> Convergence

- > Strong sustainability and deep social economy

- > Values of reciprocity, trust, participation, equity, democratic control

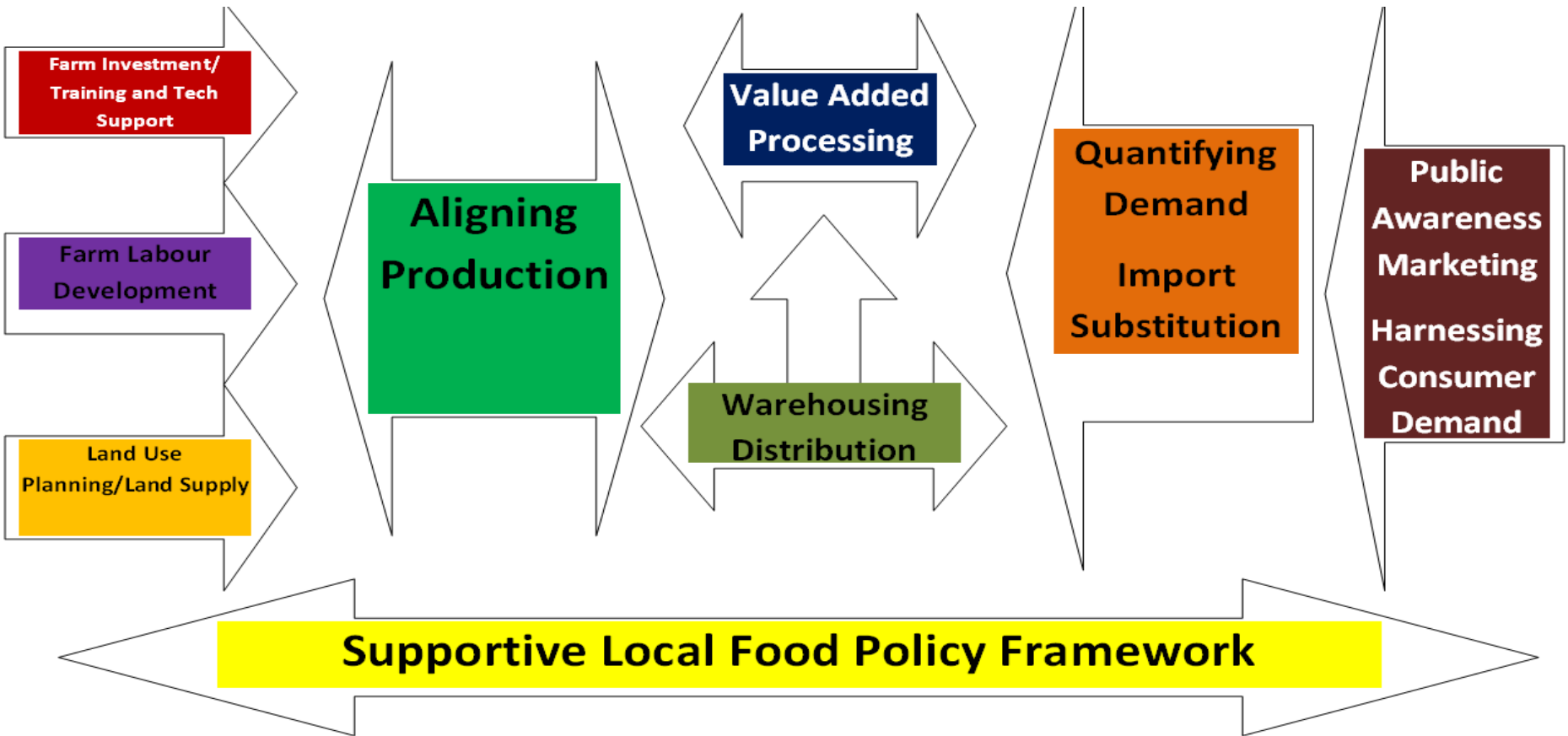
> What about Local Food?

- > Similar spectrum for local food – alternative vs. conventional

- > Great potential → value based and system wide transformation



Local Food Systems





Seikatsu Consumers Coop

- > 1965 → 60 women concerned about access to healthy milk – “better milk at better prices”
- > 2009 → value-based consumer coop with over 320,000 members ~\$800M in sales, 90% food
- > Proactive, ethical consumption as approach to changing food system



Photo: Yvon Poirier

Seikatsu Consumer Coop



- > Rapid growth – oil crisis of 1970s – bulk buying was only way to access goods, steady growth since
- > Han system → neighbourhood organizing, local management
 - > Community-based active citizenship
 - > Self-management = considerable savings
 - > Consumer intervention in market
 - > Producer / Consumer relationships

Seikatsu Consumer Coop



- > How does it work?
 - > Dual membership coop – SCC union and ~30 local SCC
 - > \$60 membership fee for each + voluntary monthly payment of \$11 until investment of \$3500 is reached
 - > Pre-order monthly purchases average \$300
 - > SCC owns depots, trucks for distribution, 160 staff
 - > SCC joint owners of 3 milk factories, 1 poultry farm



Photo: Yvon Poirier

Seikatsu Consumer Coop



- > Self-management
 - > Han System, autonomous local coops, SCC union
 - > Various committees
- > Uniform and limited products
 - > Supermarket sells 300,000 goods, SCC offers 150-200 items per month
 - > Maximize buying power
- > Limited number of producers
 - > Personal relationships with SCC union

Evolution of SCC



- > Changes to society
 - > Membership in Hans system declining
- > Reconciling SCC values and local food
 - > New desire for personal relationships with farmers, involving farmers in SCC union
- > SCC available beyond middle-class, beyond food
 - > Workers cooperatives, wind power investments, elderly care, health coops, redevelopment of depots for housing



Preliminary Lessons?

- > Clear catalyst / motivation for transformation
 - > Preservation of Japanese heritage food products
- > Place-based organizing
 - > Thick version of community
- > Citizen-based consumption



Relevance for Vancouver and Edmonton?



- > Local Food First – network of organizations in Vancouver committed to just and sustainable local food system
 - > Local food hub and precincts visioning
- > Edmonton Good Food Box CSA
 - > Pilot project oversubscribed,
- > How do these initiatives engage in value-based food system transformation?





Sean Connelly, PhD

SFU Centre for Sustainable Community Development

swconnel@sfu.ca