Seikatsu Consumer Coop: Scaling up food system transformation?

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November 23rd, 2009
Context and Rationale

SE, SCD and Local Food

Seikatsu Consumer Coop

Preliminary Conclusions

Relevance for Local Food First (Vancouver) and Good Food Box CSA (Edmonton)?
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

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Context and Rationale

> Convergence
  > Strong sustainability and deep social economy
  > Values of reciprocity, trust, participation, equity, democratic control (Soots and Gismondi, 2009)

> What about Local Food?
  > Similar spectrum for local food – alternative vs. conventional
  > Criticisms – “local trap”, sector-based
  > Great potential → value based and system wide transformation (Marsden and Murdoch, 2006)
Local Food Systems

Supportive Local Food Policy Framework

- Farm Investment/Training and Tech Support
- Farm Labour Development
- Land Use Planning/Land Supply
- Aligning Production
- Value Added Processing
- Warehousing Distribution
- Quantifying Demand Import Substitution
- Public Awareness Marketing Harnessing Consumer Demand
Seikatsu Consumers Coop

> 1965 → 60 women concerned about access to healthy milk – “better milk at lower 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?