

COMMUNITY NUTRITION EDUCATION SERVICES, INC.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN URBAN LOS ANGELES

The public education efforts related to the concept of agricultural sustainability appear to be disjointed or even non-existent at this time, especially for urban dwellers. As a food and nutrition educator working in the public sector, I have the opportunity to impact the knowledge of individual clients, consumers, and the community at large. The challenge that Community Nutrition Education Services, Inc. has undertaken is to concentrate efforts on creating a broad public understanding of the interrelated and important roles of personal health, public health, and environmental conservation in the growth and evolution of a more diversified, healthier, and environmentally sustainable food system.

My familys historical perspective informs my unique view of the food system. I was born and reared in a rural area of Arkansas. My maternal grandfather was a small farmer who produced food for the extended family. I have happy memories of walking behind the mules and the plow with him as the rows of white potatoes were unveiled. The spring-time memories are still very vivid with the wonderful sights and smells of the pink and white blossoms of the fruit trees, the sounds of the honeybees, and the beautifulness of the butterflies.

The chance to reconnect with my agricultural roots occurred again when I was encouraged to apply for a fellowship with the Roots of Change (roc.fund.org) in 2007. The fellowship was a collaboration of community, nonprofit, philanthropic, government, and business organizations. The Roots of Change provides resources to a diverse alliance of leaders and their institutions that are unified by strategy and collaborate in pursuit of a sustainable food system in California by 2030. The fellowship brought into clearer focus my rural roots and the disconnect from these roots. I began to realize that I had spent years moving through the urban areas educating clients and working with my peers in public health with little organized effort to explain /include education about food sustainability. The definition of sustainability excerpted from ROC documents that I

found to be very informative is to, “Conduct farming, ranching, and fishing activities so that water, air, forests, and soil resources are enhanced and biodiversity and wildlife habitat are increased so that food production continues in perpetuity.

The problem in promoting sustainable food systems with many urban dwellers is the basic lack of knowledge of the concept of agriculture. The task that I now see ahead for CNESINC.org is deciding how to best relay the concept of sustainable agriculture and its importance to urban consumers.

The implementation of the approach has begun with clients, the consumers served by other community based organizations, and professional peers.

- In 2007, we began to provide nutrition education classes in conjunction with a community based organization with a garden. The concept of the ‘food web was developed for and implemented with middle school-aged students as a method of explaining the interconnections between the environment and foods that they grew in the gardens. This concept is now serving as the bases for the development of a ‘tool kit to be used to teach middle school- aged children about the “food web.
- I personally volunteered at the “Ask the Registered Dietitian booth at the 3 local Farmers Markets located in the underserved areas of Los Angeles County during 2007. The effort was to use fresh fruits and vegetables grown by the farmer to provide food demonstrations that actually showed the link between the farm and the family table. The markets were conducted under the auspices of the County of Los Angeles and were a great way to work on the knowledge transfer to urban consumers. This effort continues during 2008.
- In 2008, the transfer of knowledge regarding agricultural sustainability included a panel presentation at the annual meeting of the California Dietetic Association to food and nutrition professionals. The topic of the discussion was the “California Sustainable Food System: The Broad View. The panel included 2 other Roots of Change Fellows: Eric Cardenas, Environmental Health Specialist

www.edcnet.org) and Larry Bain, an Entrepreneur/ food procurement reformer (www.letsbefrankdogs.com).

CNESINC.org invites others involved in this vast and encompassing topic of agricultural sustainability to begin to exit their 'silos and move forward with the transfer of knowledge of this vital information to all consumers who will listen.

Mable Everette, DrPH, Registered Dietitian