
Promoting smart, fair food policy for New York

**Beyond Bloomberg: What is the Role for Food Policy Advocacy in the Next Mayoral Administration?**

**Forum Notes**

**Nancy Romer**, Co-Founder and member of the Governance Board of Brooklyn Food Coalition

* It is critical to identify the link between grassroots organizing and policy and advocacy.
* As activists, we go through long periods where “lose.” But the new, incoming administration is a moment for us to speak as a unified voice – but not necessarily a homogenized voice.
* It is so important to come up with creative forums that will work especially b/c of all the competing forums and voices that will be
	+ The July 17th, 2013 Mayoral Candidate Forum on the Future of Food in NYC is a good example.
* We need to present food policy as a way to solve a number of problems. How can food policy help create good jobs, boost economic development and increase sustainability?
* School food addresses a number of issues – for example, kids need to be well fed to excel in school.
	+ Recommended Reading: New York Times piece on Dasani, a young girl residing in the NYC shelter system
	+ Comment from Jan Poppendieck: There is currently a “means test” to qualify for free lunch – this creates a stigma attached to receiving free lunch. Universal free lunch is the solution to this problem.
		- There is teasing and stigma, but a *lot* of people in NYC are poor.
	+ Universal school food can bring about more jobs, unionized jobs.
	+ We need to bring back menu flexibility and parental feedback about menu options.
	+ We need to address disparities in the public school system – universal school food is a start.
		- Consider the Brownsville neighborhood in Brooklyn: The rate of gun violence, rate of stop and frisk – these things keep children INDOORS. Parents are focused on keeping kids alive, not “what is the best school for their learning style” etc.
* We need to provide a food primer for new mayor, potentially in the form of an NYC food forum.
* NYC Council Resolution 1313-2013: Use institutional food as a basis for changing the food system.
	+ Progressively use money to improve the food system
	+ Expanding small scale efforts like “garden to café” and move them towards a scale appropriate for institutional food.
* There is a need for more transparency in food – for example, even if chicken is antibiotic free and better, the organization’s labor practices may be unsavory (until recently, Murray’s, for example).
* This is an opportunity to engage people and help them raise their voices. We must create an informed and empowered public. Food is not rocket science – this is something we encounter on a daily basis.

**Questions from Nicholas Freudenberg, Co-Director of the NYC Food Policy Center**: School food “cuts across a lot of sectors” – how do we recognize the fact that we have many specialized interests on the ground, but that we also need to stand together?

* NR: Every movement faces this problem of having a variety of voices
	+ Example: Hunger advocates don’t dislike quality but will often pick quantity, over quality, which can create tension between these advocates and health advocates (who usually defer to quality).
* NF: But how specifically do we reconcile this?
* NR: It will have be handled case by case. But there MUST be trust amongst all stakeholders (i.e. between hunger and health advocates, for example).
* NF: What are the important issues other than school food?
* NR: We need to “go for the whole enchilada.” We need an overarching plan. For example, the issue of buying power – it is a huge issue, but it is not always addressed in a thoughtful way that advances the economic interests of the city, state and region. We HAVE to work with NYS – increasing local sourcing that grows good jobs and addresses economic depression in the state.

**Kim Kessler**, Director of Policy and Special Programs at the Resnick Program for Food Law and Policy at the UCLA School of Law

* NYC has a number of successful food policy strategies under its belt:
	+ The use of Federal benefits (SNAP) at farmers markets – in 2012 NYC doubled this program and also equipped green carts wit EBT machines.
	+ NYC recently made the permitting process for farmers less onerous and costly.
	+ More than half of NYC farmers markets are in high or very high poverty areas
	+ Municipal land: There has been an inventory of usable land for urban agriculture and this information can and has been utilized to expand the Green Thumb program.
	+ NYC was the first city to adopt nutrition requirements for city institutional food (in 2008).
* Working with city agencies to work with agencies about procurement is critical – these agencies have massive purchasing power, and they can leverage this when approaching the industry about change (reformulating of food offerings, etc.).
* From an advocacy perspective, there are certain things we can’t do at a city level by ourselves?
	+ We can’t address the Farm Bill in its entirety but we can focus our efforts on how to create a healthy urban Farm Bill, and on NOT cutting SNAP.
* What is the role of advocates in moving forward? They will serve as sources of expertise and instigators of change.
* Moving forward as a unified voice/coalition, it is important to identify specifically “what do you bring to the table?”
	+ We need more than ideas – we need “how” you can do it and “why.” This will make us more competitive.
		- Arm your advocates with this information so they can be competitive when approaching the municipal government.
	+ Major issue when forming a coalition: Topics in food are so diverse.
	+ Expertise: USE IT - help others understand complex topics and/or policy climates.
	+ Teamwork: What can you do specifically around community mobilization?
		- The one acre farm at Red Hook Houses, run by Added Value is a prime example of teamwork.
* A big piece of future success is understanding what is happening in city government.
* Metrics report: The report expanded on what is required by law, and is an excellent resource for advocates.

**Audience questions:**

* What are your thoughts on the necessity of reforming the larger food industry, and waging a war against Walmart?
* What additional metrics do we want to see in the NYC metrics report?
* How do we more adequately use the issue of jobs to advance these food policy issues?
* There is a slippage between rhetoric about jobs and economic development and metrics for actually ensuring good jobs – how do we reconcile this?
* **KK**: A major objective is to develop goals for our food policy fight that we can and want to measure. Some metrics will be more programmatic.
* **NR**: It is important to stand up against bad jobs and retail markets that HARM our people. We need to consider the de-industrialization of upstate – like Milk not Jails - and move towards more agricultural jobs. We also need to really think about where our economy is going.
* **Questions from NF**: How to we better measure progress towards equity? For example, there is measurement at national level of marketing of unhealthy food to children but not at city level. There may be unequal exposure by demographic and we need to explore this. And how do we strengthen the public sector presence of food? How can institutional food partner with private corporations in different parts of country? How can we incorporate a social mission into these partnerships? Lastly, what are your thoughts about a food policy council for NYC?
* **Additional questions from the audience:**
* It is becoming more common for physicians to write prescriptions for food – do we have data on this and how are we using with this data?
* We need to focus on the issue of immigration in food jobs. We also need to address the foodshed (and Hunts Point redevelopment as a part of the foodshed) – how can we do this?
* Will our unified voice but lots of diverse goals be confusing for the new administration?
* **KK**: There is definitional work to do, regarding good jobs, but the crux is a living wage. We must create a mantra around food policy goals and economic development. Regarding a food policy council – what is done is currently is part of our city work. Making a separate department or agency would not be helpful and would be difficult. Currently, there is a sort of “virtual” food policy council through dialog, activism and involvement in NYC.
* **NR**: There is no need for a formal NYC Department of Food, BUT one can never have enough advice. If the NYC Food Forum had a more formal role, it could be better organized and could involve more people. Regarding the foodshed and Hunts Point – this needs to be a focal point for new administration. Regarding immigration - better employers WANT to see a pathway to citizenship. What can and should the city do to facilitate this?
* **NF**: Recent conversation with cities that have food policy councils, caution about council becoming a static entity where disputes happen instead of action. How do we address this (especially given the diversity of our stakeholders)? In the Bloomberg administration, there was not enough “two way conversation” about food and health issues. The solution to NYC’s food problems is more democracy, more participation from New Yorkers.