

Taste Buds

Fall is Here...

The leaves are changing, and so is the Food RIG at CUHI



Although many of us are still mourning the end of summer (or dreading the winter!), the Food Research Interest Group (RIG) at the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives is “ploughing” forward! We welcome our new director, Fiona Yeudall, and wish Sarah Wakefield the best as she pursues other noble projects. We must

also bid adieu to Joy Harewood who has tirelessly coordinated many projects at the Food RIG including the very popular Food For Talk series. We welcome Kim Critchon-Struthers who has taken over for Joy.

The Food RIG wishes you a wonderful fall. Bon appétit!

IN THIS ISSUE

We meet the new Food RIG director, Fiona Yeudall.



Lauren Baker, a recent graduate and foodie dishes about her work.



Wally Seccomb mixes bio-diesel with community action.



Josée Johnston shares her thoughts on the challenges facing food studies.

THE FOOD RESEARCH INTEREST GROUP (RIG) IS A PART OF THE CENTRE FOR URBAN HEALTH INITIATIVES. WE FOCUS PRIMARILY ON HOW FOOD POLICY AND PROGRAMS SHAPE THE HEALTH OF URBAN RESIDENTS.



FOCUSES INCLUDE URBAN FOOD SECURITY, COMMUNITY GARDENING, CONTAMINATION, PESTICIDE USE, SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AROUND FOOD & THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FOOD SYSTEMS, & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY.

Introducing Fiona Yeudall

Incoming Food RIG Director

I am very excited to attempt to fill the shoes of our previous RIG Director, Dr Sarah Wakefield, with whom I have had the pleasure of working with since 2002. By way of background, I am an assistant professor in the School of Nutrition and a faculty associate in the Centre for Studies in Food Security at Ryerson University, where I teach lifecycle nutrition, nutritional assessment and professional practice. My research focuses on assessing food and nutritional security status of vulnerable groups, with a particular interest in urban agriculture. I am currently involved in interdisciplinary research programs examining benefits and risks associated with urban agriculture in Nakuru, Kenya and Toronto, Canada and

have previously conducted research in Kampala, Uganda and Mangochi, Malawi. I received my



undergraduate in human nutrition from the University of Guelph, and completed a dietetic internship in Ottawa following graduation. Prior to completing my PhD in human nutrition at the University of Otago in New Zealand, I worked as a community dietitian in various levels of health

services within Ontario including a local community health centre, municipal health department and federal department of health. I am a member of several organizations, including the Ontario Public Health Association Food Security Workgroup (www.opha.on.ca/foodnet/) and serve on the executive of the Dietitians of Canada Food Security Network (www.dietitians.ca) and the Canadian Association for Food Studies (www.foodstudies.ca). I look forward to continuing the work of the RIG, and hearing your ideas, in particular in regards to providing support for students with an interest in food related issues and providing opportunities for students to engage with 'food' workers/activists (in the broadest sense of the word).

Our Fall "Foodie" Student

Lauren Baker

This summer I was a regular at the Riverdale Farmer's Market. The experience of meeting friends, eating dinner provided by the market vendors, and shopping for my weekly groceries connects me, an urban dweller, to the agricultural economy surrounding the city. I have a passion for fresh, local food and savor the great variety of fruit and vegetables that are available throughout the season. I love connecting with farmers, however briefly, and the sense of community that comes from a vibrant public space such as Riverdale Park. In my own backyard garden I delight at the few raspberries my son picks each day, the broccoli he planted from seed and is so proud of, and the heritage tomato plants that reap just enough for a tasty salad each day.

I have extended this passion for food into doctoral studies through the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. While working for FoodShare as the Urban Agriculture Coordinator for five years, I realized I wanted to study food and agriculture - to delve more deeply into the



Lauren and her son Samuel researching corn diversity in Mexico

issues. Staying in Toronto to pursue my degree enabled me to stay connected to the vibrant community of activists, professionals and scholars who make it their business to understand food and agriculture and directly address the deeply rooted problems that affect our health, environment and economy.

My dissertation research took me beyond Toronto and Ontario where my previous work has been based. In Mexico I examined how local markets are being developed to conserve the incredible diversity of corn landraces. These landraces evolved out of the dynamic interrelationship between the many indigenous groups in Mexico and the diverse ecological niches they farmed. The ancient varieties are threatened by increased trade with the United State and by contamination from genetically modified corn. The response of small, impoverished farmers in Mexico to these threats has been to fiercely defend and articulate the cultural importance of corn.

The story of corn in Mexico illustrates the tension between rural development and conservation strategies. New biotechnologies and globalizing trade relations impact the most marginalized sectors of society and have resulted, in some instances, in creative strategies to mitigate these impacts. The case studies I explore of two local food projects in Mexico provide examples of the challenges faced by and the potential of initiatives around the world that strive to connect farmers and consumers more directly.

Biodiesel Co-op Project at Everdale

Wally Seccombe



In 1898 at the Exhibition Fair in Paris, Rudolph Diesel astounded the world when he unveiled a working model of one of the first combustion engines. It ran on peanut oil.

Diesel hoped that by using readily available biomass fuel sources, farmers and “common folk” could compete with the big oil companies that monopolized energy production. Diesel engines used vegetable oil until the 1920s.

Producing our own bio-diesel is a ‘natural’ for Everdale. In managing our organic farm, we are always looking for ways to lighten our environmental impact. We’ve made it our educational mission to develop small scale demonstration models of alternative energy systems.

Our modus operandi is simple. We do some research, find an expert (preferably local) and invite him or her to lead a workshop at Everdale

where interested members of the public can come and build the system, test it out and learn how to operate it. We’ve done this with straw bale cabins, solar water heaters, a wind turbine, a grey water system, bio-intensive gardens, solar photovoltaic panels, and several other installations here at Everdale. These models are then used to educate the visiting public and to interest people in investigating practical ways to live more lightly on this earth. ‘Hands-on

learning in sustainable living' is our object.

Our bee-keeper and board member, Jay Mowat, did the initial research on this project and convinced us to 'go bioD'. His proposition made eminent sense: all our farm vehicles run on diesel fuel and they won't need to be retrofitted to burn biodiesel; we can grow the fuel we'll need for a year from a 10 acre field of sunflowers; bio-D's greenhouse gas impact is net zero and it's a relatively benign fuel to burn (see box); the first use of the oil we produce will be for cooking so we won't compete with the food-stream at source by subtracting farmland from food production; and the reactors needed to make diesel fuel from used cooking oil are small scale and inexpensive. If you build them on a DIY basis, they cost less than \$2000 each.

Jay found our local expert in the person of Joe Street (see his website for more information: <http://www.nonprofitfuel.ca/>) and we held a workshop in July. The participants built two reactors that will enable us to produce 130-160 litres of biodiesel within a 48 hour period. We're presently producing test-batches and learning how to do so safely and well. By the spring of 2007, we plan to feed our tractors a uniform, good-quality fuel.

Once we are proficient producers and have our diesel tested for quality, we intend to build a small co-op of nearby farmers. They would supply oilseeds; we would have

them refined in bulk as cooking oils, rent them to restaurants, and take them back after their use to make fuel in Everdale's reactors and then redistribute to the co-op's members. If we manage to generate a surplus, we can sign up consuming members from nearby towns. We think a co-op makes sense because not all farmers who are growing oil-seed will want to build their own reactors. In distributing fuel to its members, a co-op also avoids the need to sell to the public at large; consequently, we will not be required to meet the regulatory requirements of the companies that operate chains of gas stations, which would be impossible.

Alas, biodiesel is no panacea; it will play a small part in solving the world's fossil fuel/climate change crisis. Conservation and vehicular efficiency is where the big gains must be made. All the gains in fuel efficiency of the past two decades have been squandered in the mad rush to make SUVs the family vehicle of choice! But bio-D, as a renewable resource, is far preferable to the petroleum product and it's especially well suited to farm communities.

The co-op will enable farmers to be more self-reliant by 'growing their own fuel' and it will certainly help them lighten their farms' environmental footprint. But until the price of fossil fuels fully incorporates the long-term environmental effects of their use, producing cleaner fuels will make very few people rich. Our mission is to

help spread small-scale, locally viable, alternatives through research, experimentation and practical hands-on education. That's what we're going to do with bio-D.

The days of peak oil will soon be upon us, if they are not already here. The economic rationality of a long-distance food system based on cash-crop specialization for mass export is colliding head on with sky-high petroleum prices and the urgent need (world-wide, but especially here in North America) to cut back on fossil fuel consumption. We're going to have to figure out a myriad of ways to relocalize the economy, reconnect our cities with their surrounding countryside, and to become more regionally self-sufficient. At Everdale, we believe that a co-op for bio-D production is a small-scale step in the right direction.

Conventional Diesel Fuel VS. Biodiesel

Zero net greenhouse gas emissions

47% less particulate matter

80% less PAH (Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons) - Cancer causing compounds.

90% less nPAH - Cancer causing compounds.

50% less ozone potential (damage to ozone)

67% less unburnt hydrocarbons

48% less carbon monoxide

NO sulfates

Challenges for CAFS & Food Studies

Josée Johnston

The following is a reprint of Josée's plenary 'talk' given at the 2006 CAFS meeting at York University.

"I approach the topic of food studies not as somebody with years of experience, but as a relative neophyte – particularly when compared to the wealth of experience represented on this panel. But there is one advantage to being a freshly minted PhD: and that is that my newness makes me acutely aware of the institutional challenges facing up-and-coming food scholars – as well as up-and-coming food associations. While my own research has a theoretical bent, I would like to focus my comments on two of the institutional challenges facing the CAFS, and offer two ideas for how we might proceed.

CHALLENGE #1. INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Most of us practice and all of us work in institutions that This is an issue with particular academics and graduate students, so subtle) cues to work and disciplinary boundaries. As we all food system requires

Seeing food from multiple to connect the economics of sociological issues of gender and Interdisciplinarity also allows us geographies, and understand how ethnic inequalities, and creates

Finally, interdisciplinarity is justice issues of hunger and food of sustainability – this red-green academics and food activists, but future of this association. We

be made, however, we need to recognize how departments and disciplines react to institutional insecurity by policing their boundaries (and their employees).

For scholars who have less freedom to work across disciplines, a multi-disciplinary approach to food studies might be more realistic – working within a singular discipline, but using our collective meetings and journals as an opportunity to discover other perspectives.

CHALLENGE #2. BOWLING ALONE

The phrase, 'bowling alone', is of course, not my invention but is borrowed from Robert Putnam's work, *Bowling Alone* which describes the crisis of sociality in the US. Putnam evokes a world where people increasingly bowl alone, instead of forming friendships and communities through the act of bowling together in bowling leagues. This term, 'bowling alone', was recently taken up in debates in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* on the 'crisis' of Canadian sociology – particularly by Jean-Phillipe Warren and Neil McLaughlin.



"For scholars who have less freedom to work across disciplines, a multi-disciplinary approach to food studies might be more realistic – working within a singular discipline, but using our collective meetings and journals as an opportunity to discover other perspectives."

preach interdisciplinarity. Yet not support interdisciplinary research. relevance for un-tenured who may receive subtle (and not publish within traditional know, making connections in the interdisciplinarity.

disciplinary perspectives allows us globalized commodity chains, to social reproduction. to connect food politics to food food culture reproduces class and nationalist social imaginaries.

essential to connecting the food insecurity, to the ecological issues connection is difficult both for yet I believe it is critical to the know these connections need to

While some observers don't believe that Canadian sociology is in crisis, between 1993 and 2002, membership in the CSAA fell in half. Unfortunately, this problem is not unique to sociology. The 1990s was cataclysmic for academic and professional associations across the board. While association membership rates fell, interdisciplinarity and academic specialization simultaneously lead to a proliferation of associations. There are now 67 academic associations associated with the Social Science and Humanities Research Centre of Canada.

What is particularly worrisome for us here, today, is that membership declines of the 1990s were more severe for specialized groups and interdisciplinary associations (e.g., Canadian Women's Studies Association, Society for Socialist Studies) which fared worse than traditional disciplines.



**WHY DO PEOPLE SEEMING TO
INCREASINGLY BOWL
(AND RESEARCH)
ALONE?**

**WHY ARE THESE
ASSOCIATIONS IN CRISIS?**



In part, it seems we have developed a culture of multiple affiliations and multi-tasking, where people don't always have the time or energy to help build academic communities. This is not simply because people are simply lazier, or less generous with their time. Instead, I would suggest that a neo-liberal culture of productivity has infiltrated our lifeworld, and the organizational culture of the university. This means that the non-instrumental goal of creating intellectual community often falls by the wayside.

Our institutions prioritize self-promotion mechanisms – producing papers, research grants, and other documentable career achievements that are dutifully plotted on a histogram every year. Academic associations may have suffered because they are not seen to directly boost productivity. Going to a colleague's talk or reading through a paper doesn't directly deliver research dollars, or create a line on a CV. Institutions certainly expect us to 'network', but don't provide the encouragement or time it takes to build academic communities – to address the crisis of sociality that impacts us professionally and personally.

This is not to say that a new, interdisciplinary association like the CAFS is doomed. I have hope for Canadian Food Studies, and I have two specific ideas for moving forward.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Recognize the Crisis of Sociality head on, and address the problem of bowling alone, or in our case, eating alone. If we recognize the problem of diminishing academic sociality, then we can compensate with commensality. In other words, we can use what food is famous for, bringing people together to eat and share ideas.

Practically, this means making the CAFS meetings a place for people to share delicious meals and, and maybe even visit local food projects and production sites. We can learn from the US food studies conferences (the ASFS / AFHVS conferences) which host an amazing selection of hands-on, food related tours, and almost always involve an incredible eating experience.

Perhaps this means not tying CAFS meetings to Congress meetings, but holding them in a small number of Canadian cities that would encourage maximum attendance.

RECOMMENDATION #2

The CAFS should embrace public intellectualism. It is vital to have a professional association that encourages high-quality scholarship, and a rigorous exchange of ideas with an academic peer review process. However, we should not let our professionalism prevent us from engaging in public intellectualism, by which I mean speaking out in favor of a more just, and sustainable food system.

In my field of sociology, many academics believe that our discipline would be taken more seriously and would be more vital if we were less political, and more professional. I believe the opposite is true. I believe that by staying focused on the ecological and social crises that persist in the food system – we can keep this association vital, vibrant, and relevant to its members.

Practically, this could mean things like submitting association editorials to newspapers, making policy recommendations, and taking stances on critical food issues (much like the American Sociological Association took a stance on the war on Iraq). At a time when universities seem obsessed with credentialism and revenue streams, a politicized CAFS would embrace public intellectualism, and address the shameful degree of hunger, waste, and ecological devastation in the food system.

To stay politicized, food academics must draw strength, and inspiration from the vibrant food activist community that exists across Canada. Knowledge is not simply created in our academic towers, but is created in dialogue with the people fighting the battles in the trenches of the food system – the FoodShares, the Food Policy Councils, the Food Banks, and the farmers associations.

The problem, as always, is the gap between the IS and the OUGHT.

When I teach about the globalization of the food system, my students seem to intuitively know how they eat is wrong – that it is unsustainable, unjust, and based on exploited labour across the commodity chain. Yet students tell me time and time again that they feel there is no alternative, and for that reason, they are deeply cynical about the possibility for social change.

The CAFS must certainly critique the IS of the food system, but scholars must work with activists to point the way towards alternative ways of growing, transporting, and eating – ways that celebrate commensality, and hopefully, guide us toward a diverse academic menu, rather than the meat and potatoes of isolated disciplines and intellectual mono-cropping.”



Contributors

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contacted at fyeudall@ryerson.ca.

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LAUREN BAKER



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Food For Talk Series

Stay tuned for a full list of events coming soon!

Slow Food: Local Ingredients, Global Diversity. A report-back from participants in the Terra Madre Slow Food meeting in Turin Italy. Featuring Harriet Friedmann, Debbie Field, and others! Friday November 17, 2006, 2:00 - 4:00 pm Location: York University, HNES

Food Policy Councils: Challenges and Successes.

Featuring Wendy Mendes, Doreen Ojala, and Janice Etter. Friday December 8, 2006
Location: Ryerson University, Heaslip House (297 Victoria, 7th floor)



For information, contact foodfortalk@utoronto.ca

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Contact Us

Ideas? Feedback?
Wish to contribute?

Please contact Tara McMullen at tara.mcmullen@utoronto.ca

CUHI

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