

Key Barriers and Strategies to the Implementation of Food Security Policy

Project Summary for the 3rd National Food Security Assembly

Centre for Urban Health Initiatives Research Interest Group Seed Grant

September 2005

In September 2004 several community, public sector and academic organizations came together with a common commitment to exploring food security policy in relation to the health (broadly defined) of Torontonians. Partners included FoodShare, the Toronto Board of Health, the Centre for Studies in Food Security (Ryerson University) and the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives (CUHI, University of Toronto). We used a community-based research process, and took advantage of opportunities for broad consultation with key informants at several meetings in 2004 including the Winnipeg Food Security Assembly and 'Seeking partnerships for the next generation of alternative agriculture and food system work' organized by York University and the Toronto Food Policy Council.

Our central research question focused on two main issues:

- What can people involved in the food security movement learn from policy-making successes and challenges?
- How can research assist the development of more effective policy relating to food security?

For our study, we interviewed 23 key stakeholders (including activists, writers, community leaders, farmers, medical professionals and academics), and through interviews, had them identify successes and barriers and gaps in knowledge that limit food policy implementation and innovation. Results clustered around broad categories of successful strategies, barriers, issues and controversies, key players, and potential new research projects.

Food Security Policy and the Food Movement

The food movement can be understood as the mobilization of disparate social actors in resistance to various aspects of the dominant corporate-industrial food system. Rising from the grassroots, it is as complex as the food system itself. A major challenge has been the disconnect between actors when viewed through a food policy lens as the bulk of existing food policy has been developed in ad hoc process. Often identified issues stemming from food insecurity (hunger, poor nutrition, unsustainable farming practices) are addressed through the initiation of projects in order to impact a specific community.

The next step toward development of food security policy would move these programs beyond a local community. This is the locus where the majority of barriers exist, and where we have identified a great diversity of strategies being used to create food security policy. Many of our survey's respondents

identified one of the greatest challenges in bridging community-based food programs and policy being that there is no clearly defined place for "food policy" (although many have ideas about where that place should be).

Key Successes Identified

- Food policy councils and Food charters
- Food security priority program in Public Health Act (British Columbia)
- Food security issue in Diabetes Strategy (Manitoba)
- Formal Government support for Food Security (Nova Scotia)
- Poverty law 112 includes food security (Quebec)

Key Barriers Identified

- The globalized food system where food is viewed primarily as a commodity
- The complexity of food security doesn't interface well with policy making structure
- An intense disconnect between sectors that impact food security
- A lack of political leadership on food issues
- Changes around food issues are typically seen as individual responsibility

Key Strategies Identified

- Increased and coherent coalition building
- Find/build political champions and support them
- Communicate in a language relevant to those you are trying to persuade (e.g. economics, health impacts)
- Speak with a common voice, common/consistent message

The lack of consensus of what food security policy is and where it is made, has the potential to be both a strength and a weakness for the food movement.

Next Steps

The information collected through these interviews will be used to develop an agenda for formal consultative workshops to identify partners, common research interests and potential resources for research examining the role of food security in the health of Toronto residents. The overall goal of this study is to form new research partnerships and the inspire proposals for future research projects.

The Food Security Working Group at CUHI is interested in building on our study in a number of directions. One major strand will be to continue to ask the question "How is successful food security

policy made?" Our work aims to contribute to the growing interest in identifying praxis in the food movement as it interacts with and creates policy and social change with community, public sector, decision maker and academic audiences. CUHI will work to connect community, government and academic partners to promote research in relation to urban health that has an impact in the real world and respects and benefits all members of the research partnership.

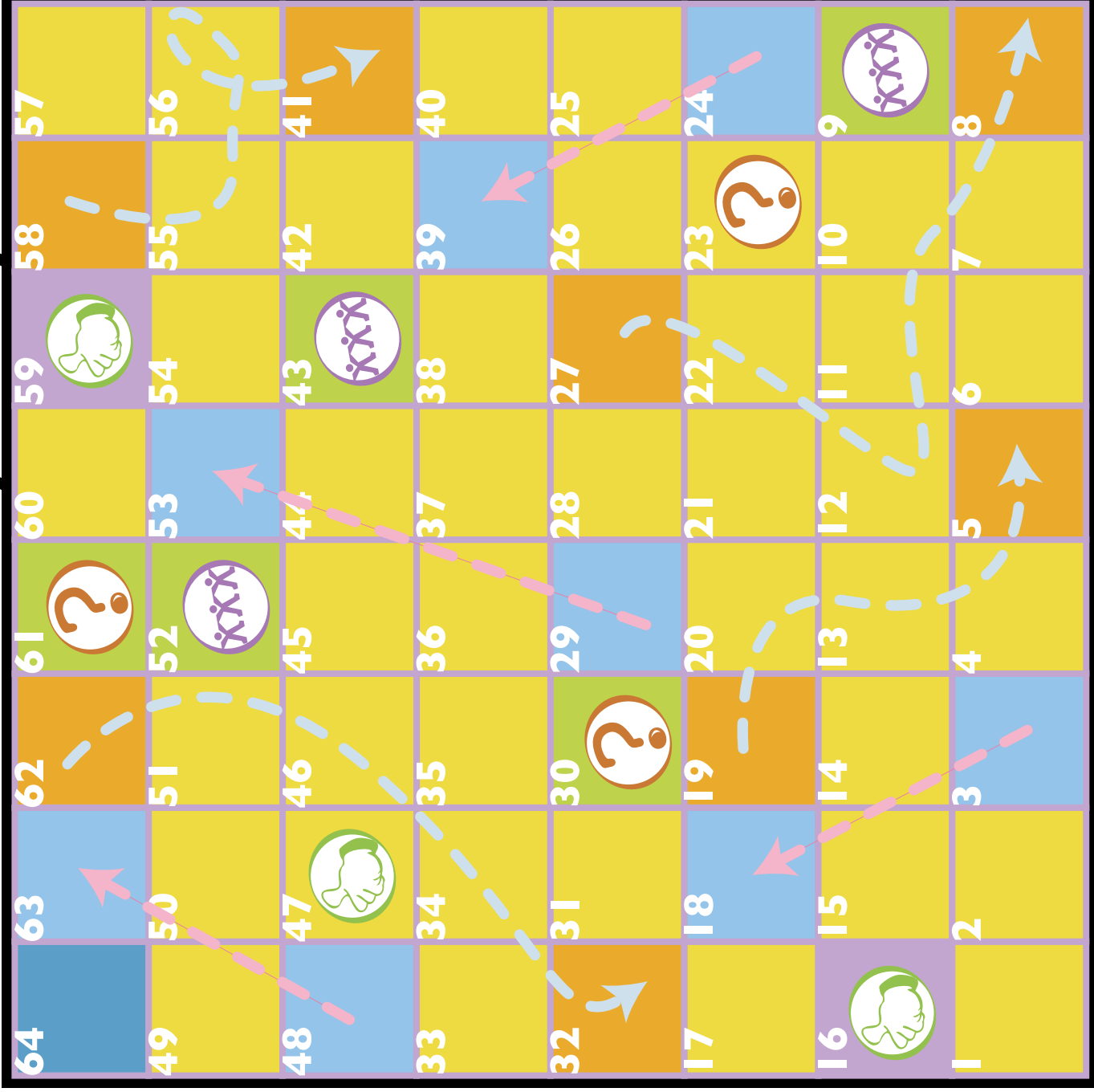
Take a minute to play our "Food Policy Game" and further explore our research results.



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The Food Security Policy Game



Instructions

Spin the wheel and move the number of spaces indicated.

If you landed...

- on a research square,
 - read the card and take another turn
 - on a partners square,
 - read the card and move forward one space
 - on a success story square,
 - read the card and move forward two spaces
 - on a blank square or an arrow,
 - take the first card from the strategies/barrier pile and read the card
 - on a blank square and turn over a strategies card,
 - take another turn
 - on a blank square and turn over a barrier card,
 - go back one square
 - at the bottom of the pink arrow and turn over a strategies card - go up the arrow
 - at the bottom of the pink arrow and turn over a barriers card, - move back one space and do not go up the arrow
 - at the top of the blue arrow and turn over a strategies card, - move forward one space and do not go down the arrow
 - at the top of the blue arrow and turn over a barriers card - go down the arrow
- The first player to square 64 is the winner.

The Food Security Policy Game Cards

STRATEGIES

- Build partnerships and coalitions: community, non governmental groups, politicians, public servants, policy makers, businesses, educators and researchers
- Find and support 'internal champions' – people inside the system who can help you get your message heard and acted on
- Frame/ talk about food security in different ways – in health terms, in economic terms
- Offer education experiences for decision makers – policy papers, eating on a social assistance budget for a week
- Lobby, lobby, lobby – make political noise
- Use the media – to get your message out, to rally support, to pressure decision makers, to make politicians look good
- Use research and evidence to back up your message
- Speak with a common voice/ message

BARRIERS

- Food is seen as a business commodity, not as a right
- The globalized food system
- Government ministry and disciplinary 'silos' are barriers to collaboration
- An emphasis on individual change as opposed to changing environments, structures, systems
- A general lack of understanding and the complexity of food security
- Lack of a comprehensive food policy
- Lack of consensus within the food movement
- Food security projects seen as one time instead of long term programs

RESEARCH

- Compile a comprehensive list of success stories/ best practices
- Community based participatory research projects linking researchers & communities
- Show consequences of food insecurity – cost benefit analysis
- Make research results accessible and disseminate them widely – engage in 'Knowledge Translation'
- Study the sociology of opinion and behaviour change
- Study Food as it relates to economic development
- Do basic descriptive work – what do we want?
- Identify partners & issues of interest

PARTNERS

- Provincial & federal government ministries: food, agriculture, health, education, corporations, environment, transportation
- Public opinion
- Municipal government
- Civil servants and bureaucrats
- Food industry
- University and other researchers
- International bodies such as the WTO
- Community organizations

SUCCESS STORIES

- Food policy councils
- Food charters
- British Columbia – Food security is a priority program in Public Health Act
- Manitoba – Food security identified as an issue in the Diabetes Strategy
- United Kingdom – Children's food bill
- Nova Scotia – formal declaration by government of support for food security
- Quebec – Poverty law 112 includes reference to food security