



Food Hub presentation draws a crowd

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Written by Tom Quinn · 02/20/2015 · 1:56 am

“Building a Sustainable Worcester: Taking a Regional Food Hub from Vision to Reality” was a hit, as a panel discussion of sustainable, healthy and locally-sourced food drew a crowd at the Hanover Theatre on Feb. 19. The Worcester Chamber of

Commerce and the Regional Environmental Council hosted the talk, which laid out a roadmap for getting more regionally-grown food on the plates of Worcester residents.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Thomas Kelly, the founding director of the University of New Hampshire's Sustainability Institute. Most of Kelly's talk focused on Food Solutions New England, a collaborative network based around sustainable farming and "food justice."

"It's really about culture, and how we want culture to feed our souls," Kelly said, noting the Hanover Theatre was the perfect place to hold a food hub discussion. "We've inherited a food system, but it's a human-made system, so we can change it."

Kelly noted that New England colleges spend an estimated \$1 million per day on food, but only 20 to 40 percent of that goes to locally-sourced ingredients. Turning Worcester into a food hub means getting more food from local farmers, which panel member Albert Maykel III, a co-owner and chef at EVO, said is something consumers are seeking out.

"The demand is there, people are looking for it," Maykel said. "It's not just a trend, it's the new wave."

The new wave of local food is visible in Worcester, which has

three competing farmer's markets courtesy of the Worcester Art Museum, Canal District and Regional Environmental Council, on Saturdays. Lynn Stromberg from Lettuce Be Local touched on the issue when talking about the farmers' side of the local food movement.

“There's an issue with too many farmer's markets,” Stromberg said, noting that farmers have to pay someone to go to each market rather than pay one person to go to a central location, among other problems. “This is really becoming detrimental to farmers.”

Chamber of Commerce head Tim Murray mentioned a recent \$161,000 planning grant awarded to help the city reach its fourfold achievement goal – universal access to healthy food, economic development, workforce development, and environmental impact. While the food hub can take different forms, farmer's markets were a hot topic during the presentation.

Jesse Rye from Farm Fresh Rhode Island said ultimately, getting people to buy food from farmer's markets comes down to the quality of the goods being offered.

“It tastes better, it's fresher,” Rye said. “You can get lost in the social aspect of why farmer's markets are important.”

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