

October 29, 2009

Artisan Cheese Taste of Place Meeting, Intro. Session #1

Location: The Center for an Agricultural Economy, Hardwick, VT

Led by: Helen Labun Jordan
VT Agency of Agriculture

Introduction: Agency of Ag, UVM-Center for Rural Studies and Food Systems Collaborative partnering to conduct a feasibility study on Taste of Place

Present:

- Neil Urie-sheep dairy and cheesemaker
- Paul Lisai-future milk producer
- Mark Dunbar-dairy farm-ship to St Albans coop-working some with Sterling college on education programs
- John Clark-organic dairy and meats, plus educational side to farm-future of value added product with milk
- John Mandeville-Incubator Without Walls with Lyndon State and VtSBDC-
- Paula Masse-Marcel and Paula own and operate goat dairy in Craftsbury, ship to Websterville Exclusive to their farm with their milk
- Mateo Kehler-Jasper Hill Farm and Cellars at Jasper Hill-particularly interested in Place based marketing and opting out of commodity milk-supporting the transition of farms in this area to cheese
- Marissa Mauro-small creamery in Albany
- Monty Fischer-Executive Director of the CAE
- Elena Gustavson-Education and Outreach for the CAE-Main contact for meeting information or additional materials
- Helen Labun Jordan-Food Policy Administrator-broad array of work (e-commerce, conventional outlets to ag. outreach) involves expanding farmer opportunities into new markets that haven't necessarily been tapped into-i.e. Matchmaker or business to business sales

Taste of Place Definition-Rather loose translation of French term *Terroir*

- Recognizing and developing foods that are not just of high quality, but unique to Vermont
- Reflects in some way the natural environment in its flavor profile
- Traditional Methods-ie cider makers, maple syrup
- Reflecting the community it's from-ie in France: chestnut in France that is inedible unless you know the traditional prep:reflection of the community's culinary traditions

“Geographical Indications” or “Protected Designation of Origin” or “AOC” are all systems of identifying and labeling foods that reflect some level of *terroir*.

Why?

- Want to celebrate what VT has to offer as well as a way to market your product
 - example: Champagne-commands premium and successful economic driver for that region
- Way to create a premium for small scale producer
- Can also protect product from future competition
 - example: "Artisan Cheese" Wheat Thins by Kraft
- Establishes and communicates to the customer an authenticity

The birth of this particular Taste of Place initiative:

Roger Allbee took tour of Champagne region of France and learned about PDO (“protected designation of origin”) products

- The VT Agency of Ag recongnizes that several folks in VT are very familiar with this style of marketing
 - example: Amy Trubek author and expert in North East on Taste of Place, cheesemakers who have traveled to Europe to study their system
- Brought together policy makers, producers, counterparts from France and Quebec at an initial conference / working day in November 2008

French System, developed in the 1930's, is most complicated and extensive model out there.

- Some differences: VT is a state and France has federal support; France built its system on a longstanding cultural tradition of *terroir* that Vermont doesn't have
 - still relevant because we can set up the French model as an “for example” and use it to decide what are the returns,
 - what will it take and what are the resources
 - Do producers want it and what is the business return-greater than say...beefing up the VT brand

Areas of Taste of Place Initiative:

1. Studies of whether we can measure / verify aspects of *terroir* that influence taste. For example:

1. Thistle Hill and Spring Brook Farms - same process + different locations = different cheese
2. Effect of different soil types on maple syrup taste
 - preliminary research on business systems
 - potential to get a consumer base and money to farmers
2. Working with UVM -Center for Rural Studies on basic study of consumer interest.
3. A Working Day in June will be specifically focusing on the business aspects of geographical indications
4. Some work is more general, related to geographical indications but not exactly the same, for example place based marketing to use foods to introduce visitors to VT through culinary tourism.

Notes from Discussion:

- Many states do basic versions of place based marketing – like “Buy Wisconsin Cheese” – but these are more branding, not related to authentic links to place or traditions. There are very few exceptions – wine in Napa Valley is one.
- There is some assumption of “collective” involved – geographical indications extend beyond the product of a single cheesemaker / farmer (again, it’s not a brand).
- The Vermont Seal of Quality is similar in that it represents standards developed by a Vermont maple sugarmakers – but again it’s a quality seal, not a *unique* quality, “Vermont” in the seal is used like a brand name – not because we can prove the syrup tastes different or represents different traditions than what you’d find in NH.

Protected designation of Origin-One model is called AOC

- AOC is the French geographical indication system. It is a cooperative of producers, researchers, and government regulators. A group of farmers comes to the regulators with a petition to be recognized, and the government works with them to develop standards, enforcement, and a part in the AOC system. It originates with the producer.

There are three basic components of these types of systems that we’ll look at in Hardwick

Component One:

Environment

For example:

- Soil to the sugar bush, to the chemistry of the sap that produces maple syrup with a distinct flavor profile
- Soil to native grasses to a certain breed of cow to milk stored and made into cheese that is aged in a cave with particular molds, etc.

- geo chemists who are flavor profile experts-highly versed in the science of how this works out.-no need for the producer to know to ask and answer these questions

Component Two:

Community and Cultural Factor

- maple syrup is obvious example-longstanding tradition and part of our heritage
- how do modern practices affect the quality of the product? If a new practice doesn't change the flavor profile it could be allowed – if it does affect the character of a food, it isn't allowed.

Component Three:

Idea of collective knowledge and business

- -not necessarily a cooperative structure--more about a product that is going to last through the generations
- -ie blue cheese that is solely Mateo's will die with Mateo
- needs to be a product that can be made 100 years from now because many people hold the key to making the cheese

Next Info Session: will be more detailed discussion of the French system with Amy Trubek

Outline:

General Objectives:

- Funded by the USDA, this is a feasibility study to look at Place Based marketing
- Will help us set up for more resources and strategic projects in the future

Variety of payoffs during the process:

- Learning models working for producers in other areas of the world – learn how can apply to current practices.
- Make connections with UVM professors to answer questions / identify what would be helpful in future research.
- Form partnerships with other farmers in region for cooperative marketing
- Give input on how Vermont might pursue stronger place-based marketing
- Give input into resources needed for farmers for place-based marketing
- Develop model for working with groups in other regions of the state.

Notes for Discussion:

- There are obviously big differences between Vermont and France – cultural history of cheesemaking very different, producers don't work as collectives to make a common product.
- The business form is going to be a big question – a group of farmers making the same product? A group of farmers who have one product in their line the same? A segmented system where some people do milk, some cheesemaking, some marketing, etc.? An identification of common traits existing in the region and marketing on those?
- Producers are taking more control of their product / marketing their product. For example, any regulatory system for a label is set up to assist producers in maintaining standards that they've described for their product.
- Controlling scale is an issue – small scale producers are the primary target, also we see the price / premium decrease for AOC products when production gets too big (eg Champagne)
- This project focused on cheese, but foresee it happening with maple, cider, spirits and heirloom veggies, etc.