

alPHa

Association of Local
PUBLIC HEALTH
Agencies

Food for Thought

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Welcoming Remarks

SPEAKERS

Linda Stewart
Executive Director
Association of Local Public Health Agencies

Charles Gardner
President
Association of Local Public Health Agencies

Linda Stewart welcomed participants to the conference. She described new measures taken to make the conference more environmentally friendly. She also said that instead of speaker gifts, a donation is being made in their name to the Ontario Farmland Trust.

Charles Gardner said food is often a hot topic in the media, especially when it comes to large-scale outbreaks of bacteria. But beyond the front page, there are more chronic issues like childhood obesity, trans fats, food insecurity for low-income families, dwindling international grain reserves, climate change, bio fuels, and increasing meat consumption.

Plenary: Overview of Food Production and Sustainability

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Dr. Robert Lawrence
Professor and Director, Center for a Livable Future
Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health

SLIDE DECK: www.alphaweb.org/docs/lib_011452607.pdf

Dr. Robert Lawrence commended the conference organizers for their innovative approach to public health and food sustainability. He said he wished the United States were as far along in considering the relationship between food systems and the well-being of populations.

As food production has become progressively industrialized, it has altered diets and degraded the environment, Lawrence said. Added to these effects are population growth, equity and security issues around the world, and the relatively new threat of climate change.

Lawrence cited a report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that suggests that as much as 18% of global greenhouse gas production is related to raising animals for human consumption. He said it takes 700 kilograms of grain to produce 100 kilograms of beef, and therefore feeding grain to cattle for meat production is inefficient. Aside

from grain, water scarcity is also a growing concern. At 1,000 tons of water to produce one ton of grain, it takes about 7,000 tons of water to produce each ton of beef.

The Amazon rainforest has about 1% of the Earth's population but receives 16% of the hydrologic cycle, Lawrence said. Asia, though, has 60% of the world's population and only 40% of the hydrologic cycle. This has profound impacts on the world's water tables and promotes globalized trade in meat, feed, and water.

From a public health perspective, animal-based foods provide 65% of our protein, which contributes to saturated fat and cardiovascular disease. Tons of pesticides are also part of high-input industrialized agriculture. High-speed meat production and food contamination also have far reaching effects with distribution systems that spread across the country.

The average US male consumes 154% of the recommended daily allowance of protein, and women about 127%. Meanwhile, Lawrence said, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 230 million low-income children around the world remain stunted from inadequate protein intake.

He said consumption of red meat and poultry in the United States is beginning to plateau at around 222 pounds or 100 kilograms per capita per year. But China's meat consumption will rise from 16 million metric tons to 85 million metric tons by 2020. Other low-income countries are projected to go from 50 million metric tons of meat consumption up to 188 million metric tons.

To illustrate the kind of diets the Earth is capable of supporting for the global population, Lawrence showed participants a graph indicating that an American-style diet high in animal protein in 1990 could have fed 2.5 billion people, while the global population sat at 5.2 billion. A plant-based diet based on existing global supplies could have supported 6.2 billion. Projecting this trend ahead to 2025, it is estimated that animal protein-based diet would sustain 3.5–4 billion people when the global population will be close to 8 billion, while grain-based diets could feed 9.5–10 billion. Lawrence pointed out that proper distribution systems and a move away from these animal-protein based diets could end starvation and maintain global food surpluses despite rapid population growth.

A carnivorous lifestyle comes with enormous costs that are not captured in the prices we pay at the grocery store, Lawrence said. They are paid for by the general public, through lost ecosystems, and pollution of air and water; in other words, those costs are externalized.

A relatively new concern surrounding industrial meat production is the use of antibiotics and the subsequent development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The intense concentration of production centres and the high-density living arrangements of the animals have contributed to this development.

From 1949 to 1991, the number of poultry facilities across North America shrank dramatically, packing more animals into fewer locations. This increases the risk to public health.

In swine barns, each hog produces about five times the solid waste of a human, making one swine barn containing 30,000 animals the equivalent of a city of 150,000 people. All that waste goes into an open lagoon, which produces huge amounts of hydrogen sulphide and ammonia, which is then spread on agricultural areas. In North Carolina, 23 of the 26 river systems are polluted from this waste, Lawrence said.

Lawrence showed delegates a list of anti-microbials that are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that are used on these farms but also have wide human applications. The Union of Concerned Scientists claims that 26 million pounds of these drugs are used on animals every year. By comparison, only 4.5 million pounds are used on humans. This wide use of antibiotics to deal with poor infection control, crowding, and terrible hygiene is a main contributor to antibiotic-resistant bacteria, Lawrence said.

He gave one further illustration of the indirect cost of high-density farms. He showed a photo of vultures collected on hydro lines near these farms, feeding on the bodies of dead pigs. Workers were installing special protectors to prevent the vultures' excrement from shorting out the electrical systems. These costs are then passed on to consumers.

Discussion

Asked about the organic food movement, Lawrence said there is a strong need to support sustainable food production. Only 18% of what the population of New York State consumes is produced in that state. He said there are compelling arguments for thinking more carefully about land use, including increasing production capacity through organic farming.

A participant asked whether anyone has done any research into what the real cost of food at the grocery store would be if all externalized costs were included. Lawrence replied that a group at the University of Vermont, Ecological Economists, has come as close as anyone. He said it is an emerging area with much work to be done, but there are people working on it.

In response to a question about where the dairy industry fits in this model, Lawrence said that there are now dairy farms with 15,000 animals that never see pastures and that walk into the milking station twice a day. They contribute enormous amounts of air pollution, and particulate matter from feces is creating significant health problems in those areas. He said about half of the hamburger meat in fast food restaurants comes from dairy cows.

A participant asked what can be done on the individual level. Lawrence told participants about Toronto's ugly carrot project, where unattractive vegetables were collected from grocery stores to make vegetable soups for food banks. He said people must advocate for better uses of food

and to build social will, which becomes political will, which turns into policy. He also promoted banning the use of antibiotics as growth promoters.

Another participant asked what effect cap and trade initiatives have on industrial agriculture and whether any investment opportunities might be taken advantage of to fix the system. Lawrence said a carbon tax would quickly eliminate incentives for high-input animal production. For investments, he recommended supporting local and regional food webs and encouraging city planners to include green belts for community farms and recreational areas.

Panel Presentations

MODERATOR

Dr. David McKeown
Medical Officer of Health
Toronto Public Health

PANELISTS

Dr. Wayne Caldwell
Professor, Rural Planning and Development
University of Guelph

SLIDE DECK: www.alphaweb.org/docs/lib_011475113.ppt

Ellen Desjardins
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Geography and Environmental Studies
Wilfred Laurier University

SLIDE DECK: www.alphaweb.org/docs/lib_011481546.pdf

Food systems are the processes through which our food is grown, produced, processed, distributed, and celebrated, said **Dr. David McKeown**. People in Toronto spend approximately \$7 billion per year on food. The average food item sold in Toronto has traveled about 4,500 kilometres, and food prices are low, although most minimum-wage earners and recipients of social assistance cannot afford a basic healthy diet.

McKeown said poor nutrition is a key preventable risk factor for chronic disease. He compared poor food choices to earlier battles with tobacco and marketing. By itself, education about the health impacts of tobacco use did not work. Discussions about social life, unattractiveness, and how much money smoking costs were much more effective. However, that education paved the way for effective public policy on taxation, advertising bans, and prohibitions on smoking in public space. Now efforts with food education need to be similarly shifted, McKeown said. He made reference to the continuing work on the Toronto Food Strategy and to an upcoming campaign to urge the provincial government to “put food in the budget”.

Dr. Wayne Caldwell told participants that as a planner the major lesson he learned was that in any plan, the people living in the community must be taken into account. In his industry, he said, it is becoming increasingly important to build sustainable food production into communities.

Caldwell listed several ways that agriculture today is different than it was a generation or two ago:

- Growth in size and scale of farms
- Part-time farming is a new norm
- Capitalization and industrialization
- A shift from animal to diesel power
- Specialized farming instead of mixed farming
- Global markets
- Stricter government regulations
- Conversion to corn for bio-fuel

Caldwell noted that the price paid to farmers for a bushel of corn has not changed much since 1973, while the cost of living has gone way up. This makes farms seem less and less viable from a producer perspective, and that needs to be reversed for local food production to take hold.

Local food production is linked directly to health, Caldwell said. It reduces pollution. It helps to preserve local farmland. It provides local economic stimulus, and it tastes better. From a planner's perspective, it is also part of a holistic approach to sustainable communities and relates to land use, health, employment, climate change, and greenhouse gas production.

Caldwell showed participants a table of all the factors that affect planning and agriculture, including protection of natural areas, livestock facilities, rules on farm diversification, farmers markets, roadside stands, farmland preservation, farm size and severances, rural land uses, urban agriculture, and transportation planning. He stressed the importance of incorporating each of these ideas into all planning activities to bring political will around to incorporating them into community zoning and bylaws.

He also noted the importance of preserving agricultural land for food production, food security, and local economies and for promoting stewardship of the countryside.

Ellen Desjardins said the mission for healthy, sustainable food systems is difficult. The current food system has strategies in place to keep it viable. It is a multi-billion dollar, multinational industry that depends on intense agricultural production and monocropping, the consolidation of food retail outlets, coordinated and expedited global transportation networks, a high degree of food processing, the hydrogenation of oils, and preservatives to increase shelf life. Together

these factors have created a low priority for perishable foods like fruits and vegetables. The result is that the current food distribution system is insufficient to feed Americans according to their food guide even if they wanted to eat that way.

Food is produced according to demand, not need, Desjardins said. On the consumer side, the system depends on consumers being familiar with, and loving, sweet and fatty foods and convenience foods, having reduced food preparation skills, and not knowing where food comes from.

Rather than stand after stand of fast food outlets, Desjardins said, we need more people who can walk to their small local food stores. We need to eat good food, mostly plants, and not too much, she said.

The current food system model moves from the primary level, production, through the secondary level, processing and distribution, to the tertiary level, retail. Desjardins said she would like to bypass the secondary stage. Traditionally, public health has focused on consumers by advising them on their food habits at the point of purchase, with advertising in schools and some stores.

Desjardins said farmers and retailers are often suspicious of public health because they think of health inspectors shutting down stores or preventing farmers from setting up roadside stands. Gaining rapport and trust in those sectors is therefore important for making progress.

Desjardins said the role of public health can be broken down into four key areas: secondary data collection, primary data collection, community organization and facilitation, and making the case for policy change.

Secondary data collection should focus on collecting pertinent reports and research already published about food issues that are relevant to communities. Studies have drawn links between the availability of high-fructose corn syrup and obesity, and have shown the detrimental effect of trans fats on the human body.

The role of public health, Desjardins said, can be to support laws that restrict or prohibit the sale of foods with trans fats, prohibit the sale of soft drinks in public schools, or place a moratorium on the opening of new fast food outlets in low-income neighbourhoods.

Desjardins said primary data collection should expand on secondary data collection by addressing community-specific issues. A growing food and economy study, for example, shows the disconnect between what is being produced locally and what is being imported anyway. This can also serve to build trust and rapport with local farmers, for whom this information can be useful.

Public health can also help build a healthy local food infrastructure through food services at universities, colleges, workplaces, daycares, and retirement homes. Helping to set up neighbourhood markets has also proven to be popular.

Public health can advocate for bylaws to protect the agricultural land base and prevent urban sprawl, promote small and medium-sized food retail outlets in new housing developments, increase viability of farms to sell to local markets, and increase local processing capacity.

Desjardins suggested that round tables could bring together producers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers to educate each other about the intricacies of each other's work. The key to it all, she said, is collaboration.

Discussion

A participant said that 20 years ago, there were 10 or 12 slaughterhouses in his community that killed animals and sold them locally. Now there is only one store that sells frozen steaks from a box. Deregulating that system would put a lot of people back to work, he said.

Caldwell said that is an interesting challenge relating to the unintended consequences of the regulations that are in place, which do need to be looked at. Desjardins added that some small farms are now being saved thanks to local food movements, and there are some success stories from which to draw hope, but more work is needed.

A participant asked the speakers what a perfect system working properly would look like.

Lawrence said that all true costs would be internalized, and with environmental and human costs reflected in the sticker price, small and specialty farmers would have a level playing field. Desjardins said people would get involved and make small changes at the local level to develop their own community-appropriate systems and solutions. Caldwell said all costs would be internalized, and agriculture should ideally have as little impact on the surrounding environment as possible. We could learn something about sustainable working environments from communities designed 80 or 100 years ago, he said. McKeown said broader approaches should be taken to dealing with the unintended consequences of regulation; regulation should be redesigned to be all-encompassing and more holistic.

A participant said food preparation needs to be built into the education system again. Desjardins agreed and said that being able to show evidence of what happens to health when people know how to prepare their own food could be another way to move forward. She also said she wished to add physical education back into the school curriculum. Lawrence added that children should be given the opportunity to gain a deeper appreciation of the outdoors and physical activity.

Plenary: **Food and Beverage Advertising for Children**

SPEAKERS

Dr. Susan Linn
Associate Director, Media Center of
the Judge Baker Children's Center
Instructor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

SLIDE DECK: www.alphaweb.org/docs/lib_011501659.pdf

Dr. Brian Cook
Research Consultant
Healthy Living, Disease Prevention
Toronto Public Health

SLIDE DECK: www.alphaweb.org/docs/lib_011464621.ppt

Jeanette Longfield
Co-ordinator
Sustain

Ève Bédard
Coordinator
Quebec Coalition on Healthy Weights

SLIDE DECK: www.alphaweb.org/docs/lib_011490525.ppt

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

The problem of advertising to children is “thorny and challenging,” said **Dr. Susan Linn**. The advertising and marketing that children experience today is not like what today's adults knew as children. “It's like comparing a BB gun to a smart bomb,” she said. Today's advertising is honed by psychologists and brought to us by billions of dollars and sophisticated technology.

In 1983, companies spent US\$100 million annually targeting children with marketing in the United States. Two years ago, they spent \$17 billion, and that number is likely higher today. That translates into a 170-fold increase over 25 years.

Marketers are now looking beyond commercials to insinuate brands into every aspect of children's lives. Product placements are inserted into the content of television programs and websites. In the United States, product placement revenue grew 33% in 2007 to \$2.9 billion, and it is expected to grow exponentially.

Marketing has become much more pervasive. In addition to television, today's parents have to worry about marketing on the Internet, through product placement, on cell phones, in video games, on MP3 players. Research shows that children in the United States spend 40 hours per week of their after-school time consuming electronic media.

A key point that must be considered is that children are much more vulnerable to advertising than adults, Linn said. “Children are not adults in teeny tiny bodies.”

According to studies, very young children cannot distinguish between television programs and commercials, Linn said. In one episode of *American Idol* in 2008, there were 4,151 product placements; a majority of those were for Coca-Cola. This makes it almost impossible for children to make a distinction between an advertisement and a television program.

More specifically, research shows that until the age of eight, children are less developed cognitively and cannot understand persuasive intent. Therefore they do not understand the fundamental basis of advertising. Linn noted that marketers are adept at bypassing cognition so that children do not think about their advertising. Instead, marketers target children’s emotions. She stressed that even teens are incredibly vulnerable to advertising, hormones, and peer pressure.

Advertising factors into many health and social problems today, including childhood obesity, eating disorders, precocious sexual activity in teens, and youth violence. It also factors into family stress, and underage alcohol and tobacco use. In addition, advertising erodes children’s creative play skills, which are the foundation of learning, critical thinking, and the ability to self-regulate.

Linn focused on the issue of brand licensing—i.e., when a character or logo is taken from a media product and sold to other companies to sell other products. She said brand licensing is a large factor in food marketing.

Marketers claim that parents should be able regulate their children’s behaviour, Linn said, but it is difficult to say no to a child who is “mad for junk food.” It is naïve and disingenuous to think that parents can cope with a \$17-billion market force on their own, she said. They need help from the public health community and government to promote a different way for advertisers to market to children.

Linn looked at the branding of *SpongeBob SquarePants* as a tool to sell products to children. In 2006, revenues generated by the character reached US\$3.5 billion for Nickelodeon. As this year is the character’s tenth anniversary, it will be bringing in even more revenues.

One major SpongeBob marketing effort was selling limited-edition food products as part of the movie promotion. Before the movie, SpongeBob was already marketing food and was the top-selling macaroni and cheese. Linn recounted that a five-year-old told her father it tasted better than any other macaroni and cheese.

Other studies have shown that five-year-old children tasting two identical products in different wrappers—one plain, one McDonald’s—said overwhelmingly that the food in the McDonald’s wrapper tasted better.

“How can you argue with a five-year-old about taste?” Linn asked. With children, “branding actually trumps the senses.”

The success of *SpongeBob* movie marketing has since driven a trend for limited-edition food with many blockbuster movies. For example, M&M’s created a “dark side” candy promotion with the release of the last Star Wars film.

Linn described her work with the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. The committee looks at advertising and marketing as an issue of rights and freedom. That means the right for children to grow and the freedom for parents to raise them without being undermined by commercial interests or greed.

Given that advertising and marketing is proving to be a major factor in many problems facing children, Linn said, she fully supports the idea of prohibiting junk food advertising to children and praised the progressive efforts of the Quebec government in banning advertising to children under age 18.

She acknowledged that there are issues surrounding the definition of junk food, and she said marketers are adept at “getting around those.” An added challenge is that various media, such as toys and video, are merging and working together, making advertising much more pervasive. In response, Linn said, public health and government must broaden what they are calling for in their bans beyond junk food to include all advertising directed at children.

She stressed that exposure to media starts with babies. Many are requesting brands as soon as they can speak. The primary way marketers are reaching them is through brand licensing and baby products, including food, with characters on them. Babies fall in love with characters because they associate them with their homes, their rooms, and their mothers. For their part, parents are convinced that the character is important and then buy more of the products.

In the United States, 26% of babies under the age of one have a television in their bedroom, and 43% of three-month-old babies are regular viewers of television. Industry is also pushing children to get online at a younger age. There are now social networking sites for children as young as five.

There is also no evidence to support the idea that media targeted at babies—such as *Baby Einstein*—is educational. There is in fact no value in screen time for anyone under the age of two, Linn said.

Food companies too are promoting Web games, known as advergaming, to engage children with their products over longer periods of time. These are proving to be highly effective advertising vehicles.

The convergence of ubiquitous, miniaturized, sophisticated media and unfettered commercialism is disastrous for children, Linn concluded. Screen time is proven to correlate

with childhood obesity. This is not just about products that are sold to children through advertising, she said. It is also about values and behaviours that will affect children and their world for the rest of their lives.

Food Advertising to Children in Canada

Advertising to children undermines our focus on healthy, sustainable food systems, said **Dr. Brian Cook**. From a Canadian perspective, he said, it is a big issue.

Children today are exposed to a greater intensity and frequency of marketing messages than any previous generation. The use of multiple media has led to sophisticated, 360-degree marketing strategies. Cook cited the example of a Froot Loops advertisement on a cartoon network that linked viewers to a product with a UPC code to visit a website. Once there, the site offered games and other activities to engage children for half an hour at a time.

Little data is available on exposure to advertising, Cook said. Either the area is unmeasured, the information is proprietary, or the information is too expensive to access.

Cook showed participants a list of all the television food ads that ran on a typical Saturday morning on two of the most popular networks, YTV and Teletoon. He said these advertisements indicate the challenge in having an objective analysis of what constitutes “healthy food.” If Canada applied the British point system, in which only foods with a score of four or lower can advertise to children, only a few of those items would qualify, including the McDonald’s Happy Meal. Many of the foods shown scored in the double digits.

Cook outlined the various federal and provincial regulations relating to children’s advertising in Canada. While a number of acts, including the *Competition Act* and the *Food and Drugs Act*, address the issue of misleading advertising to children, for the most part the industry is self-regulated. Some regulations are geared to eliminating misleading ads, but there is very little in place to address the issue of health. In addition, a self-regulating system must rely on consumer complaints before a review is conducted. This means that codes “do not necessarily have a lot of teeth” and are not very effective unless complaints are filed.

The focus of public health organizations, Cook said, should be on children’s overall health, and the link should be made between sustainable food systems and health.

Cook reviewed industry-led improvements initiated by food corporations, marketers, and industry associations, along with the federal and provincial governments, other than Quebec. These initiatives have proven that a self-regulatory system is not working because it does little to support nutrition and health, nor does it address the cognitive limitations of children. Also, the focus is on traditional advertising media only and does not encompass new advertising media and strategies.

An additional challenge is that companies have developed their own definitions of healthy dietary choices based on their own “established scientific criteria.” Cook said the real question is not so much whether these are healthy foods, but whether they are really foods at all.

“We need to ask what they are and where they come from,” he said. “Food should have a social, cultural, and community role.” A key indicator of a healthy, sustainable food system is whether children understand how real food looks and tastes, how to grow and cook it, and where to buy it.

Industry-led improvements are not an option for Canada, Cook said, because the industry has been unwilling or not suitably informed to respond to concerns about advertising to children. In fact, advertising on children’s networks is a \$20-billion industry in Canada, and children are seen as a media tool through which advertisers can reach parents.

Cook said Canada’s first step should be to develop a definition of healthy versus unhealthy food. Health Canada has not yet done this, but much could be learned by looking at what the United Kingdom has done in listing nutrients and identifying ingredients that disqualify, such as trans fats.

There are three possible outcomes to this approach:

- **Broad definition**—This involves consulting all people affected by the definition, including marketers, to come up with a definition. This is more or less what is in place today.
- **Narrower definition**—This would require a comprehensive list of nutrient standards with the intent to eliminate advertising for obviously unhealthy products.
- **Narrowest definition**—Only whole or minimally processed foods would be allowed. However, long and complex distribution chains would make it difficult to get products into stores.

It would be preferable to initiate a comprehensive ban on all children’s advertising at the federal level through amendments to the *Competition Act* and the *Food and Drugs Act*, Cook said.

Federal enforcement is the best option since the federal government already has the infrastructure and expertise to enforce violations to existing marketing practices. Cook also said that enforcement authorities can take action against companies doing business in Canada even if their server is based in the United States, and US companies could still be subject to an advertising ban. He said regulating online children’s ads would not be as difficult as regulating hate propaganda or pornography, since marketers are public and easy to find.

Cook made several points in conclusion:

- There is a need for coalitions that can work across provincial and national borders.
- An advertising ban is the only option that fully respects children’s cognitive

vulnerabilities.

- Infrastructure is needed to support “broad scope” thinking.
- Consumer education and literacy for nutritionists on the implications of children’s marketing are required.
- Work must be done on data collection and analysis.
- Advocates must work with local agencies and schools to influence policy changes, find reporters who are interested in supporting the cause, and identify spokespeople.
- The absence of perfect solutions is not an excuse for inaction.

Sustain

Jeanette Longfield described the UK organization Sustain’s approach to the issue of advertising bans and highlighted some of the campaign tactics it has used since its inception in 1993. She said the United Kingdom prohibits advertising junk food on television between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. and has implemented nutrition standards for meals in schools.

Longfield offered several best practices:

- Dig in for the long haul. Sustain’s campaign started in 1993 when the issue of controlling advertising was considered “way out there.”
- Be reasonable in your demands. Longfield said that if Sustain had proposed a ban on all food advertising, “people would think we were certifiable.”
- Get yourself a large and diverse gang. The UK children’s food campaign has 300 members including people involved in health, children’s organizations, trade unions, social justice groups, and more. “The bigger and more diverse the coalition, the better,” Longfield said.
- Be active. Maintaining a high level of activity is key to maintaining coalition member interest. Activity galvanizes support, creates energy, and keeps the momentum going.
- Be careful about language when framing your debate. Talk about issues such as protecting children and use language relating to rights, ethics, and responsibilities. Talking only about healthy food or bans conjures up imagery people do not want to hear.
- Take advantage of lucky situations. Sustain’s campaign happened to coincide with Jamie Oliver’s series on school nutrition. Leveraging that strengthened the organization’s messaging.

Longfield said the issue of advertising to children is gaining momentum also because obesity is a social issue that is highly visible to people. Referring to potential illnesses such as heart disease and cancer is not nearly as effective as talking about a social and health issue that people can see clearly. Evidence is important, but it will not drive policy, she added.

Attacking marketing is like squeezing a large balloon, Longfield said: squeeze one place and another problem pops up somewhere else, on the Web, through mobile devices, or in materials masquerading as education. This means a step-by-step process is needed “to win the big game.”

Longfield said Sustain’s next steps are to shift the focus from banning advertising for junk food only to banning advertising for all commercial foods, and to work on the issue of sustainable development.

Longfield said she would like to see schools teach food skills, including growing. Every school should have a garden, she said, and every child should have a chance to see a working farm. She said she hopes that farmers will come to the schools in order to help people reconnect with food.

Sustain is also looking beyond schools to all public sector procurement, including hospitals, home care facilities, army bases, and prisons. The organization is building a network of parents and other family members to apply pressure on elected representatives and companies.

Longfield said that while Sustain has been accused of being negative about commercialization and junk food in the past, “We are for good food, fruit and vegetables. This is not a hard story to tell or a hard sell to make. The only problem is that the fruit and vegetable people don’t have the money to tell it.” She said Sustain’s programs are funded in part by the European Union, but more money is needed.

Longfield said Quebec’s efforts prove that advertising bans can be done.

Advertising Targeting Children in Quebec: A Legal Framework and Public Health Policy

The Government of Quebec prohibits advertising to children under the age of 13, said **Ève Bédard**. Since 1980, the *Consumer Protection Act* has included legislation to protect children against advertising. She specifically referred to sections 248 and 249 of the Act, outlining exceptions and interpretations to provide a clearer sense of the nature of the advertising ban in Quebec.

The legislation was adopted following numerous debates between health care, education, consumer affairs, and economic coalitions in the United States and Canada in the 1970s. At that time, the major opposition to the advertising bans came from the toy industry.

Bédard outlined criteria relating to the context, nature, and intended purpose of goods advertised, and the time and place advertising is shown.

Regarding the nature and intended purpose of goods advertised, the question is whether a product is directed exclusively at children and has a distinct appeal to them, such as toys, candy, or food. The act also includes products that are not exclusively directed at children but

do have a distinct appeal to them, such as fast food meals, junk food, and desserts. Other criteria that come under review are infantile presentations that use voices, sounds, colours, or animation that have a distinct appeal to children. Both the way an advertisement is presented and its general message have to be considered.

Bédard gave participants a comprehensive chart outlining the regulations governing time and place of advertising. For example, a product directed exclusively at children is never authorized if the audience is over 50% children. Exceptions included magazines directed at children sold every three months, storefront displays, containers, packaging, and labels. A message to announce a show targeting children is also allowed.

In addition, certain advertising is permitted as long as it respects ethical standards. Those standards prohibit exaggerating the nature, character, performance, or duration of goods and services and prohibit minimizing the degree of skill or dexterity required for the use of goods. Bédard said that Sweden and Norway have imposed similar prohibitions.

Bédard stressed that the act bans only commercial advertising; educational or public service advertising may be authorized under certain conditions or regulations. The Consumer Protection Bureau is in the process of writing another section that will take into account other media used by marketers, including the Internet.

Obesity has increased rapidly in the United States in the past 20 years, Bédard said. According to data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 10% to 14% of adults were considered obese in 1990. By the early 2000s, in some states more than 25% of adult residents were obese.

The mission of the Quebec Coalition on Healthy Weights is to deal with weight-related issues by working with groups in three strategic areas: the agri-food industry, the socio-cultural industry, and the environmental industry. The goal is to foster an environment for people to make healthy choices and deal with weight issues. Part of that is creating green and active neighbourhoods in Montreal to make it more possible for children to play outside. Efforts are also made to encourage children to walk to school, to implement speed calming measures in designated zones, and to restrict the placement of fast food restaurants near schools.

Changing the socio-cultural sector through advertising bans is “part of a big framework we need to work on,” Bédard said. One in five children is considered overweight, and 40% eat dinner while watching television, which is a contributing factor to obesity. A number of studies have proven a link between advertising and overeating, she said, and the more time children spend in front of televisions, the more likely they are to eat junk food.

The coalition’s most important project is working with the socio-cultural industry on advertising to children. While Quebec does have a law, it is not enforced as well as it should be,

Bédard said. To that end, the coalition has taken an active role in denouncing industries targeting children.

Since its inception in 2006, the Quebec Coalition on Healthy Weights has been successful in denouncing a number of illegal practices in the food industry. One was an ad campaign in Quebec daycares, in which snack cakes were distributed to 230 daycare centres in Quebec, along with posters showing a cartoon character, a music CD, and a rebate coupon for the product. Upon investigation by the Consumer Protection Bureau, 30 charges were filed. The company pleaded guilty and the issue did not go to trial.

There are also actions pending with General Mills Lucky Charms, Burger King, and McDonald's in the coming year for illegal advertising. In the case of Lucky Charms, the cereal box advertises a website with games and pop-up ads for a chocolate version of the cereal. There are 12 actions pending with Burger King relating to characters distributed with meals that are related to a popular children's television show. McDonald's is being pursued for displaying a graphic during the airing of the annual *Ciné-cadeau* show, which runs during two weeks that children are off school.

Bédard said studies have shown that 88% of parents in the province think it is necessary to control advertising targeted at children, and 91% think the *Consumer Protection Act* should be enforced.

Discussion

A representative from a public health department who had attended workshops on obesity prevention and promoting physical activity noted that attendees usually included representatives from the food industry as well as public health and government. The participant asked whether these potential "enemies" could work together, and whether their attitudes were changed.

Linn replied that, by law, US corporations are mandated to have making money for stockholders as their first priority. Therefore, they must not be left to set standards for public health. Linn said the public health community must take a strong stance to contain the corporate push to make money for stockholders—and contain it in a way that protects the well-being of children. People in marketing, advertising, or the food industry do not want make people obese, she said, but, more than anything else, they do want to sell product by any legal means possible. Therefore, if the goal is the health and well-being of children, the job for the public health community is to constrict what is legally possible.

Supporting health and well-being requires vigilance, Longfield said. Even after 15 years of campaigning, there are still some within the sector who say they want to engage in partnerships, which she described as the "suppression of mutual loathing in pursuit of cash.

Scratch beneath surface, it's always there. While they would like to engage in dialogue, they just want to waste our time."

A participant asked Bédard whether Quebec has been tracking the effectiveness of its advertising ban and whether there is too much infiltration of advertising from the Internet.

Bédard said the law must be enforced, but the Consumer Protection Bureau's mandate lacks effective means and financial resources. She said that is where organizations like the Quebec Coalition on Healthy Weights have a role to play, since they can denounce illegal advertising and raise awareness.

In response to a question about obesity rates in children in Quebec, Bédard said she could not confirm whether the advertising ban has had an impact on obesity rates.

Cook said that while some argue obesity rates have gone up, it is possible those numbers would have been double without the advertising ban. He added that the same arguments were put forward when advertising bans were introduced on tobacco.

Longfield noted that while there is no way to directly link the advertising ban to obesity numbers, a comparison of the United States-Quebec border regions shows that obesity is higher on the US side. However, the industry "is bound to contest it," she said. A far stronger ground for argument is the ethics or morality of targeting children.

Linn agreed, asking whether the advertising ban is a tool to keep children healthy or whether it is a question of children's rights. Effectiveness is important, but it is a separate issue.

A participant asked whether milk marketing boards and similar organizations would be exempt from advertising bans.

Cook replied that even with a total ban on commercial ads targeting children in Ontario, there can still be non-branded health promotion advertising for children. He said the Quebec model includes the use of text but not logos in commercials, for example, advertising milk for children. As another example, he said advertisers in the United States can advertise the safe use of bicycle helmets but not a particular brand of helmet.

A participant asked what happens when a child cannot afford to meet the nutrition standards in school.

In the United Kingdom, affordability can be addressed in several ways, Longfield replied. One way is to look at free meal plans for students. There is an ongoing debate about whether school gates should be closed to ensure that children remain in the school environment and are not "out on the streets eating chips," she said.

Another participant asked about advertising on Saturday morning television. If there is a complete ban on advertising and branding to children under the age of 13, how do the networks pay for these programs?

Cook said that argument was raised in Quebec. Some advertisements are placed with television programs, but they are for products that do not concern children, such as shampoo and insurance.

Linn added that in the United States, advertising revenues from adult programs can be used to support ad-free children's programming. Taxes on advertising dollars can also be used. Another issue in the United States is that media companies received digital spectrum licenses free of charge. Had they had to pay for those licenses, that would have generated dollars for children's programming.

One participant said that public health bodies in Ontario have partnered with industry for research funding. On the one hand, research would not happen if the dollars were not there to support it. On the other hand, there are funding organizations such as Shoppers Drug Mart that used to carry cigarettes and now devote significant retail space to junk food. The participant asked the speakers whether they think there is room to manoeuvre there, or whether it is a slippery slope.

Linn replied that it is a slippery slope, noting that there are numerous studies that show that the source of funding does affect the outcome of the research. If public health and educational organizations take funds from corporations, it is harder to get researchers to take a stand against what corporations are doing, she said. For example, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry accepted \$1 million from Coca-Cola and then softened its stance on sugar.

Longfield added that a true test of a potential funding partner's sincerity in promoting independent research is to see if the corporation will agree to put the money into a foundation that it cannot control or put its name on.

A participant commented that many characters on cereal boxes are also reflected in children's books and asked whether anything can be done about that.

This goes back to the problem of branding, Linn said. Every children's television program is about branding and all the things those characters are about. *Sesame Street* as a program is one thing, but people have to ask how good it really is for children if it is sponsored by McDonald's or if it makes money from toys that do not promote creative play. SpongeBob books may help children learn to read, but the brand is also getting the message across that junk food is good.

To conclude, Cook summarized some key points of the session:

- When it comes to advertising in the United States and Canada, the intensity and frequency are greater than ever before.

- Children are not little adults and are more vulnerable to advertising.
- The way advertising is regulated is ineffective and out of date.
- We cannot rely on industry to be leaders in this area.
- In building a coalition, you must be very clear about what you want and get everyone engaged and involved frequently.
- Messaging and getting the language right is extremely important.
- This is not the end of the line, and marketing will not go away.
- Canada needs an advertising ban similar to Quebec's model.
- Proper enforcement is essential to the success of any ban.