

GARY CUNEEN

Archdiocese of Chicago Food Service Thinking Seven Generations Ahead



In a culture where obesity has reached epidemic proportions and where most children know more about fast food than where their food comes from has emerged a new collaboration between Food Service Professionals (FSP), serving Archdiocese of Chicago schools, and Chicago-area non-profit organization Seven Generations Ahead (SGA). The collaboration will focus on ways to increase the **procurement** of fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy lunch foods for Archdiocese of Chicago students with the complementary goal of supporting local family farmers through the facilitation of procurement linkages between local farms, food service, and distributors.

Seven Generations Ahead, recipient of USDA Community Food Project funding that supports the *Fresh from the Farm* initiative, borrows its name from the Great Law of the Iroquois, stating that "...in every deliberation we must consider the impact on the seventh generation." SGA works in the Chicago area to educate municipal, business, and community leaders about ecologically sustainable best practices, and catalyzes the development of initiatives which are economically viable, meet community needs, and promote a healthy environment.

SGA's *Fresh from the Farm* is one of a growing number of "farm-to-school" programs across the country reconnecting children to healthy eating and the source of their food. The program offers curricular and other learning activities designed to educate students about healthy food choices and the rationale for supporting local family farmers who are raising food in ecologically responsible ways. The broad goals of *Fresh from the Farm* include increasing healthy eating among students, making the connection between healthy eating, nutrition and the growing of food, and supporting local farmers raising food in ecologically responsible ways.

To date, SGA is working with FSP on the procurement side of the program, but hopes to expand its *Fresh from the Farm* curricular activities into Archdiocese schools. SGA Founder/Executive Director, Gary Cuneen, a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, has partnered with the Archdiocese of Chicago on past sustainable food education projects, and is excited to be working with the schools on healthy lunches. "U.S. Catholic Bishops have long been leading advocates for farmers, farm workers, and ecologically responsible agricultural practices. This project offers the opportunity to take that advocacy and translate it into on-the-ground action that benefits local farmers, the environment, and the health of Archdiocese of Chicago school children."

Seven Generations Ahead (SGA) is working with Food Service Professionals (FSP) through their new Nutri Track and Farmers Market menus to incorporate healthy, locally raised food into school lunches. These specialty programs are good targets for locally and sustainably grown food because the quantities are manageable for piloting new producers, and schools requesting more nutritious offerings are interested in healthy, locally raised food. FSP can handle further processing that may be needed and the focus of the menus is on fresh and more nutritious.

While the project has just begun, potential local items for these menus include apples, baby carrots, cucumbers, lettuces, cabbage, broccoli, cherry tomatoes, green beans and snap peas. Local apples have high potential because of availability, storability and volume. Progress so far has evaluated the overall quantities of produce that FSP is purchasing and targeted specific menus and items where locally grown could be a fit. In addition, FSP has indicated willingness to do some processing of locally grown products, thereby reducing the amount of investment by farmers. Lastly, FSP is willing

to adjust payment schedules on locally grown food to help farmers cash flow. This is actually a critical element since many local farmers manage business on cash basis through CSA's and Farmers' Markets.

The project's next phase will be to explore with local farm partners specific products where it's possible to meet FSP's volume, quality and price requirements. John Koubek, Director of FSP, has long desired to bring his vision for ecological responsibility into the food service industry. "FSP's roots are as a school food authority. There is an obligation to not only feed children, but to provide them with nutritious meals and educate them about healthy eating. Part of FSP's mission is to be good stewards of the resources that God has provided us. Buying more local and sustainably raised food lets FSP be an example of good stewardship to students."

Warren King of WellSpring Management, Seven Generations Ahead's sub-contractor on the project, sums it up nicely. "The FSP/SGA partnership brings two organizations together that have similar missions as it relates to food. Being of like minds makes it easier for us to work together and look for opportunities to improve the food in schools and give local farmers access to new markets. It's about collaboration, and finding economically viable solutions that honor our children and the environment." ■

Seven Generations Ahead's comprehensive Fresh from the Farm program involving Chicago Archdiocese schools and Oak Park and Chicago public schools is funded by the USDA, The Chicago Community Trust, and Farm Aid. For more information on this project contact Seven Generations Ahead at 708 660-9909 or at act@sevengenerationsahead.org

FATHER EDWIN V. O'HARA AND THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE CONFERENCE

Father Edwin V. O'Hara, born September 6, 1881, was the spirit behind the founding of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference on November 11, 1923.

After a stint as Chaplain in World War I O'Hara was asked to conduct a study of rural Catholic education for the National Catholic Education Association. This study confirmed his belief that the Catholic Church was weak in rural areas. He found that the rural Church was under served in terms of priests, churches, hospitals and Catholic schools – part of a pattern of overall neglect in which Church authorities gave little attention to the social, economic or religious problems of rural Catholics. His research led to the founding of the Rural Life Bureau for the Catholic Bishops Conference.

By November, 1923, O'Hara had generated enough interest in Catholic rural life to call for the first Catholic Rural Life Conference. When the organization of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference came into being, he became its executive secretary and brought his energetic abilities with him.

Edwin V. O'Hara's life was one of creative leadership in doctrine, rural life, catechetics, liturgical renewal and the inclusion of the laity in ministry. His early work on the minimum wage, women in economic life, his outreach to non-Catholics, his concern for social justice and the liturgy mark his life as prophetic.

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Food Security Learning Center

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The Food Security Learning Center at the website of the World Hunger Year (WHY) – www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc – will provide you with an in-depth look at common hunger and poverty issues facing many U.S. communities. Topics cover community-supported agriculture, community gardens, farmers' markets, local and regional food systems, farm to cafeteria, community food assessment, and food policy councils.

WHY aims to make the Food Security Learning Center a bridge between the anti-hunger and community food security movements.

Inquiries can be addressed to fslc@worldhungeryear.org.

