

ADOPTING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY POLICY IN MILLINOCKET

Part I: Overview

Goal statement

Revitalizing Millinocket's economy is the central focus of the community. The goal is to diversify the local economy, build redundancy within the local food system, build economic and social capital, and encourage small start-ups through adopting a food sovereignty policy.

Rationale

The State of Maine has recently passed LD 725, which gives municipalities the authority to regulate their own local food production and sales. Adopting a food sovereignty policy in Millinocket would allow local producers to sell food products directly to consumers (with limitations on dairy, meat and poultry) without having to face the costly start-up expenses attributed to larger commercial facilities and its associated state licensing process. It's assumed that adopting this policy would encourage small-scale food production, which could ultimately become meaningful sources of income. Additionally, the community's goal of attaining food security for low-income residents would become more attainable via building redundancy within the food system while simultaneously building economic and social capital.

Plan (high-level)

The Town of Millinocket would adopt a food sovereignty policy that would detail the rights of local producers and proper sales methods. Educational materials regarding proper food handling techniques and processes will be made available to any interested producer. It will be up to the Council on whether permits, inspections, or other regulatory measures would be advantageous.

Anticipated partners/ stakeholders

- Town of Millinocket
- Maine Organic Food Growers Association (MOFGA)
- Millinocket Planning Board
- Our Katahdin
- State of Maine Health Department
- Sen. Troy Jackson, D-Allagash
- Rep. Craig Hickman D-Winthrop

Anticipated Constraints/ Barriers

- Educating the public on the policy
- Future changes in state law(s)
- Lack of quality farmland
- Concern for safety/health
- Public buy-in—potential rejection of the concept

Part II: Exploring Policy Options

A new Food Sovereignty policy could be as specific or broad as the Council sees fit. Some larger municipalities might have the resources to adopt and conduct their own health safety ordinances and inspections, while smaller municipalities might be more interested in adopting a general policy in support of local food production and its resulting sales. Below are some examples of nearby communities who have adopted their own policies.

Policy options that have been used in nearby communities:

- The Town of Sedgewick was the first town in Maine to adopt a food sovereignty policy. Only one court case relating to local food production has arisen since the enactment of the policy, and it was for a local producer improperly labeling milk. It was recommended that the state guidelines for food labeling be included in the policy. [1]
- The City of Auburn, which is made up of roughly 40% agricultural land, passed a food sovereignty policy last year. The policy, written by a former councilor who is a lawyer by vocation, steered away from creating ordinances and instead enacted a broad and general policy. While discussing the adoption of a food sovereignty policy in public meetings, the only opposition was from a few large industrial farms that felt that the policy was unnecessary. No lawsuits have been filed since adopting the policy. [2]
- Over forty five municipalities within Maine have passed local ordinances relating to food sovereignty. Concerns for food safety remains a concern for some, but the State of Wyoming passed a similar “Food Freedom” law several years ago that exempted farmers throughout the entire state (rather than having municipalities opt-in) and no major health issues have arisen since enactment. Additionally, as reported in the Bangor Daily News, “none of Maine's nearly 5,000 cases of foodborne illness could be attributed directly to a farm or dairy.” [3]

Part III: Planning / Action Plan

Creating an action plan is essential to the success of any new policy. The first step would be engaging with the community through public discussions and inviting anticipated stakeholders (referenced in Part I). Below are a list of steps for the Council to consider while considering adopting a Food Sovereignty policy.

- Holding public meetings with local residents, business owners and other stakeholders
- Crafting an educational component, including addressing necessary resources for producers and its accessibility to the general public
- Involving the local planning board throughout these discussions to ensure any proposed ideas would be acceptable within current ordinances, and if not, what might need to be

added or revised

- Reviewing ordinances passed by other municipalities to act as a template. The Town Council should make necessary revisions with public input, and ultimately pass a final policy. Below is a revised version of the City of Auburn's Food Sovereignty License Exemption, which is broad in nature and doesn't involve inspections, licenses, or other means of local regulation. Perhaps, however, the Town of Millinocket would consider requiring local producers to attain a Victualers permit in an effort to keep track of producers.

Order # _____ - Adopting FOOD SOVEREIGNTY LICENSE EXEMPTION

a. Intent and Purpose

The intent and purpose of Millinocket's Food Sovereignty Ordinance is to ensure that residents are provided unimpeded access to local food, to encourage the development of economic and social capital within the town, and to reduce governmental regulation of the local food system to the fullest extent permitted by home rule authority under Title 30-A M.R.S. § 3001, the Constitution of Maine, Article VIII, Part Second, and pursuant to 7-A M.R.S. §201, et. Seq.

b. Definitions

As used in this Ordinance, the following words and phrases shall have the meanings indicated:

“Consumer” means any individual who purchases or otherwise receives local food or food products from a producer, grower or processor.

“Grower” means any individual who grows local food or food products.

“Local food system” means a community food system within a municipality that integrates food production, processing, consumption, direct producer-to-consumer exchanges and other traditional foodways to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health and well-being of Millinocket and its residents.

“Local food or food products” means food, food products or drink grown, produced and processed by individuals within Millinocket who sell or provide directly to consumers.

“Processor” means any individual who processes or prepares local food or food products.

“Producer” means any individual who produces local food or food products.

c. Exemption

Producers, growers, and processors of local food or food products in the Town of Millinocket are exempt from licensure and inspection with respect to their provision or sale of local food and food products to consumers within the local food system of the Town of Millinocket. To the extent this Section conflicts with any portion of the Code of Ordinances of the Town of Millinocket, this Section shall prevail and, as it pertains to this Section, that portion of Code shall be inapplicable.

Part IV: Conclusion

Food Sovereignty is important to consumers, producers and to a community's economic and social health. By passing a policy aimed at reducing governmental regulation, local residents may enjoy new rights (and therefore experiences) in food production and consumption while building a stronger and redundant local food system.

References:

[1] Grindle, Barbara. Selectman's Assistant. "Interview with City of Auburn Representative." Telephone interview by author. November 20, 2018.

[2] Cousens, Eric. Deputy Director of Economic & Community Development. "Interview with City of Auburn Representative." Telephone interview by author. November 21, 2018.

[3] Baylen. "Maine's Food Sovereignty Law Is a Hit." Maine's Food Sovereignty Law Is a Hit. December 01, 2018. Accessed December 04, 2018.
<https://reason.com/archives/2018/12/01/maines-food-sovereignty-law-is-a-hit>.