

Munch ON THIS



Food Security

*By Marcia Rae
February 10, 2010*

As with farm and food, food security has many aspects and can mean different things to different folks and in different contexts.

Some people think of food security as having a storehouse of food and water in a secure building. The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.” Commonly, the concept of food security is defined as including both physical and economic access to food that meets people’s dietary needs as well as their food preferences.

For the one in five Oregonians receiving food aid of some kind, food security just means knowing where your next meal is coming from. In Brownsville we are grateful for Sharing Hands where anyone who is hungry can receive free food. And of course, there are WIC and Oregon Trail cards which are state and federal programs that provide coupons and bank cards to people who qualify.

When I think of food security, though, I think of it in terms of providing a sustainable supply of food for our community. With only a Dairy Mart for groceries, Brownsvillians are mostly required to use a car to access food which makes individuals and the community as a whole are reliant almost entirely on cars. Most communities have, at best, only three days of food available in the grocery store at any given time, so a disruption in the supply chain could have rather immediate results. Of course, many of us have stores of food on our pantry shelves, but is it enough? And what about those who are not prepared?

Our community food security is exacerbated by national and world food security. At the beginning of the 1800s Robert Malthus published his famous essays predicting that sooner or later population gets checked by famine, disease, and widespread mortality. “The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.” This was before the industrial and green revolutions when world population ballooned from 1.5 billion people to 6.9 billion and a projected 9 billion by 2050. Since his predictions have not come true YET, some think he was wrong.

However, the increase in the food supply which has resulted in not only a monumental increase in world population, but an increase in food per person, is mostly accomplished by using machines fueled by oil/gas, fertilizers made from natural gas, and chemical pesticides made from petroleum. Prior to the green revolution, farm products came about from inputs derived on the farm. With the mechanization of agriculture, farm products arise from the inputs from outside the farm in the form of oil and natural gas derivatives. But these outside inputs are not sustainable since we have reached peak oil and peak natural gas, both in the U.S. and in the world. Oil reserves peaked in 1980 when production first surpassed new discoveries.

According to Wikipedia, that means that “because supplies of oil and gas are essential to modern agriculture techniques, a fall in global oil supplies could cause spiking food prices and unprecedented famine in the coming decades. “ If this comes about, our community food security is threatened.

So, what to do? Easy. Grow food. Buy food at your local farmers market. Teach you children. Eat well. And consider attending a food assessment workshop, February 20 at Samaritan Lebanon Hospital. At this workshop we will, as a community, discuss food in East Linn County and derive a plan for our future. Your participation would be welcome. For more information or to pre-register, call me or contact Nancy Kirks at 541-451-6425.

Munch on this – How secure is your food supply?

Marcia Rae can be reached at marcia-rae@hotmail.com or 714-325-4213.