



Talking With Your Neighbors

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Here are a few ways to talk about food sovereignty with your neighbors.

What it is.

- A rights-based ordinance (RBO), using locally binding law to secure rights for residents. It is not regulatory, does not add to responsibilities and services of government and creates no bureaucracy. It has the force of law and goes beyond a municipal resolution or statement of support.
- It applies to products of the home economy in face-to-face, producer-to-consumer exchanges.
- It is compliant with federal constitutional law, state constitutional law, and state statutes in Maine. It is a surgical application of the Home Rule clause to exempt direct farm-to-consumer sales, roadside farm stands, farmers markets and community potlucks from regulations designed for industrial-scale producers.
- It is traditionalist. It protects our way of life, local culture, food sources, the right to grow and exchange food, and the right to a local food economy.

What it does.

- This eliminates the regulatory burden for the small (or new) farmer. It allows small-scale farmers to begin operating without the need to install costly commercial facilities and equipment. It lowers the barrier to entry into the marketplace and allows new farmers easier access to direct-sales markets.
- It places emphasis on responsibility of producers and patrons. It is a push-back against the bureaucratization of everyday life, and enshrines the legitimacy of handshake deals and direct “me-to-thee” relationships.
- “Me-to-thee” transactions are based on trust. The local food movement is reconstituting a culture of independence, self-reliance, freedom of choice, and responsibility. Producers are responsible for producing high quality safe food. Consumers are responsible for the choices they make.
- As an issue it can unite people across the political spectrum (after all, everyone has to eat!). The rhetoric of sustainability and resilience can appeal to liberals and leftists while the rhetoric of preserving tradition, independence and eliminating barriers to trade can appeal to libertarians and conservatives.
- Localized food systems are resilient against economic and environmental stresses. We don’t know the our future climate, economy, or society and we should build systems and structures that will lead to prosperity in a variety of futures, some of which may involve the weakening of national and global supply lines.
- A strong local food economy can attract people and new business to a town. It will incentivize the growth of food-related business in town. It will reinforce your town’s position as a leader in local food culture.
- We need more farmers and more food producers. Without food, no one works. This ordinance would set the conditions for a much more resilient food system in Maine with a quality of small-scale distributed production and peer-to-peer sales. This ordinance would set the conditions not only for a resilient food system, but also a more resilient localized economy.
- It improves access to locally grown food too, by the way.

What it does not do.

- This does not apply to producers who wish to sell to a retailer or distributor like a restaurant or grocery store.
- It does not exempt the municipality as a whole from state and federal food regulations.
- It is not without risks. We can’t protect people from everything. The preferred yardstick in the discussion of risk analysis is raw vs pasteurized milk. Your risk of being struck by lightning is greater than your risk of getting sick from raw milk. The risk you take every day driving in a car is greater. The fear mongering of food safety risks are overblown, especially given the food pathogen outbreaks already common to our globalized, industrial food commodity system that can poison large numbers of people.

Visit localfoodrules.org for additional information and resources.