

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

What it is

- A rights-based ordinance, 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 is scale-dependent. It applies to products of the home economy. If you want to sell to restaurants or retail distributors like grocery stores, all other food production regulations can apply.
- It is compliant with federal constitutional law, state constitutional law, and state statutes in Maine. It is a targeted application of the Home Rule law giving municipalities and counties the right 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 reduces the regulatory burden for the small (or new) farmer. It would allow small-scale farmers to begin operating without the need to install costly commercial equipment or facilities for each separate operation. It lowers the barrier to entry into the marketplace and allows new farmers easier access to direct-sales markets. This has tangible economic benefits by circulating money in the local economy.
- 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 and independence and eliminating barriers to trade can appeal to libertarians and conservatives.
- Localized food systems are resilient against economic, environmental, and other stressors. We don’t know what our climate, economy, or society will look like in 20 or 50 years, and we should build systems and structures (not just related to food) 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 town. It will incentivize the growth of food-related business. It will reinforce your town’s position as a leader in local food culture.
- We need more farmers and more food producers. The food economy forms the bedrock foundation of any economy. Without food, no one works. This ordinance would set the conditions for a much more resilient food system in Maine 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. Again, it is a scale-dependent idea.
- It does not exempt the municipality as a whole from state and federal food regulations. It only exempts small-scale growers making direct-to-patron transactions.
- 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 risks to food safety are overblown by fear mongering, especially given the food pathogen outbreaks already common to our globalized, industrial food commodity system that can poison large numbers of people.

Please reach out and pass one in your town!

Further reading:

Templates and organizing resources for creating food sovereignty ordinances in your town
<http://localfoodrules.org/>

Deep back story of food sovereignty

https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Via_Campesina#Food_Sovereignty

<http://localfoodrules.org/> || <http://midcoastpermaculture.com/category/articles/>

