

it easier for producers to connect with and sell their products not just to individual consumers, but also institutional ones (such as restaurants, camps, schools, hospitals, and prisons). There are added benefits - in the process, a food hub can create jobs, provide educational and job training opportunities, enable farmers to share their knowledge, and knit a community more closely together. (For more information about food hubs, see <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/foodhubs>)

Cindy Matthews of Wayne County Human Services led the discussion, ably assisted by Bob Muller, District Manager of the Wayne County Conservation District (who also works with the Agriculture Subcommittee of Wayne Tomorrow). Other panelists included Andrea Whyte of Wayne County Area Agency on Aging, Tom Eccles of Farmer in the Dale, LLC, Michele Sands of SEEDS, and Ant-hill Farm's Sky Ballentine.

Wayne County Commissioner Brian Smith also

appeared later in the program, speaking eloquently and encouragingly about the need for the kind of increased cooperation that a food hub makes possible.

Cindy started off by describing the basic elements of the food hub concept, and reviewed some of the possible benefits.

Bob Muller reminded us that back in the day, Grange halls performed many of the same functions - helping buyers meet with sellers, and enabling farmers to get together and share ideas. Nowadays, people want more than ever to know where their food comes from, and that their food supply is safe and reliable. Food hubs, like farmers' markets and CSAs, help the public make better, more personal connections with food producers.

Michele noted that local food production and distribution, where it is possible, has many advantages for a community - not only in terms of things like energy efficiency and lower transportation costs, but also community preparedness and food security. Every food dollar spent locally circulates many times throughout a community.

Tom Eccles talked about

how getting connected with a institutional buyer - in this case, the Wayne County Area Agency on Aging - helped him to expand his business, add new products, and reach out to more new customers.

There are challenges ahead, to be sure, to get a local food hub up and running. Tom pointed out that farmers need to know more about food safety procedures and regulations before they can market to many institutional buyers, and those regulations need to be made more rational, more comprehensible, and easier to implement.

Sky Ballentine of Ant-hill Farm talked about a recently-formed regional initiative called the Lackawaxen Farm Company (www.lfcfresh.com), that enables consumers to order produce, meat, and other foods from a number of small local producers through one website.

The food hub system focuses more on cooperation and distribution, but it is not intended to be a replacement for, or even a challenge to, the traditional capitalist food distribution systems of large warehouse and competing grocery

store chains. But it can make local food and local farmers more successful and more sustainable - and we can all profit from that.

Maria Montenegro from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Scranton was also there. She brought along copies of the SBDC's handy "BUY FRESH, BUY LOCAL" guide (available at www.scrantonsbdc.com/bfbl), as well as one to share:

Roasted Chicken and Veggies

(from recipe.com)

1 lemon

1 whole chicken (about 3-4 pounds)

2 cloves garlic, minced

6 sprigs fresh tarragon

1 lb asparagus, ends trimmed, cut into 2-in lengths

3 leeks, cleaned and sliced

1 tsp salt

½ tsp black pepper

2 Tbsp olive oil

12 oz baby potatoes, quartered

non-stick cooking spray

1. Heat oven to 400° F.
2. Grate lemon peel and set zest aside; cut lemon into quarters. Separate skin from breasts of chicken. Under skin, spread lemon zest, garlic and two of the tarragon sprigs. Season