Changing Food Culture for Food Wellbeing

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Abstract

This study investigates what people, in an urban and a rural setting in England, value about their local and home-grown food culture and how this shapes food choices which contribute to a broad definition of Food Wellbeing. Qualitative, ethnographic methods were used to uncover aspects of food relationships which are positive for the environment, communities and personal health. The connections provided by direct contact with local fresh food are explored. Communities such as those featured in this research, with high levels of food expertise, can contribute towards improving food cultures to attain better health outcomes for the planet, for people and for the individual.

KEYWORDS: CULTURE, VALUES, LOCAL FOOD, NUTRITION, CONNECTION.

Background and rationale

Recent decades have seen a rise in concern about unsustainable food systems (Government Office for Science, 2011), and nutritionally inadequate diets (World Health Organisation, 2015), throughout Europe and the UK. Levels of obesity in the UK amongst children and adults are a major public health concern, with 58% of women and 65% of men overweight or obese and one in three children (year 6) overweight or obese (National Health Service, 2016). In England, 3.8 million people suffer from diabetes (90% type 2), with levels estimated to rise to 4.9 million by 2035 (Public Health England, 2016). An industrial food system, promoting the convenience and affordability of highly processed food, has contributed to an obesogenic environment and poor health outcomes (Swinburn et al., 2011; Winson, 2014; Lang & Barling, 2013).

Impacts of the industrial food system include loss of connection with food sources and disruption of food cultures (Pretty, 2002), and a current prevailing food culture which does not normalise health and sustainable eating (Food Foundation, 2016). UK citizens have lost food skills and knowledge (WRAP, 2014) and children lack exposure to fresh foods (Bevan et al., 2016). Many children and adults are not eating the recommended (at least 5-A-Day) amounts of fruit and vegetables (National Centre for Social Research, 2018).

Local food networks and home growing (in many forms) represent ways of re-connecting people with food, with closer food connections potentially creating wellbeing (O'Kane, 2016; Gillespie & Smith, 2008). Growing and choosing local food may enable people to make choices favourable to their own health, for example, in consuming more fruit and vegetables. (Litt et al., 2011; Bos & Kneafsey,

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2014). Understanding the experiences of people who create their own positive food environments presents insights which might be used to create widespread cultural and positive health changes.

Study Aim

The aim of this study is to explore and describe the values, motivations, skills and behaviours of people who are deeply connected with their food through growing and supporting local food, and how this relates to personal wellbeing. Food values relating to environment and community are well known but their relationship to nutritional health and wellbeing has not been extensively explored.

Methods

In a broad culture where cheapness and convenience drive many food choices, the study sought participants who had created or supported a local food environment. Cultural immersion enabled purposive sampling.

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were adopted to explore the values, beliefs, motivations and skills prevalent amongst local food growers and supporters of local food (Bisogni, Jastran, Seligson, & Thompson, 2012), based on an ethnographic approach (O'Reilly, 2012). Observations included both field notes and photographs in a range of settings related to growing or buying food. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lee, 2006).

Sample and Setting

The study was conducted on two sites in South West England, one urban and one rural, to capture contrasting environments, including the more traditional urban home growing and community food growing, with the contemporary, re-emerging, small farm-based systems (O'Kane, 2016). Study participants grew their own food, valued local food and did not conform to a mainstream food culture. In the urban setting, access to fresh, local food was restricted, whereas the rural setting had a well-developed local food culture based on small farms, local markets and locally owned shops.

Study participants were selected for an interest in growing food and selecting local food, to ensure experiences related to research aims. Urban participants were recruited from four community gardens and one council allotment. Rural participants were recruited from a variety of sources, based on a local growers' network, using purposive snowball sampling. The criteria for interview selection were: growing food at home or in a community garden or allotment. Some rural participants were growing commercially and others were involved in selling local food. Seventeen women and eight men were interviewed. Eleven interview participants had children living at home and three were partially or fully responsible for grandchildren. Participants were aged between 19 and 82 years.

Data collection

The methods of data collection used in the study were:

- *Participant observation* at formal and informal meetings and growing events and visits to food production sites; observations and photographs were taken at four community gardens and one allotment site and on two small farms. Multiple visits were made to a market, two community meetings, a community orchard and multiple visits to six home gardens (both urban and rural). Thirty days were spent in observation in an urban setting and approximately 40 days in the rural setting. A field diary included observation notes, reflections and photographs as aide-memoirs.

- *One-to-one interviews*: Fifteen urban interviews were conducted (10W/5M). Ten rural interviews were carried out (7W/3M). Interviews in both the urban and rural settings were conducted in participants' homes, or at convenient locations outside the home. These were recorded and transcribed within 48 hours.

- *Four focus groups* were convened, with 36 individuals (28W/8M) involved in local food; growers, traders, advocates, customers and volunteer food workers on local projects. Participants were recruited by advertising locally with meetings held in public buildings.

Ethics

The study was approved by Bournemouth University Research Ethics Committee. Written consent was obtained from each participant. Pseudonyms are used for participants.

Data analysis

Data from individual interviews, focus groups, observations and the field diary were analysed, using inductive thematic analysis. Sub-themes were identified and merged as appropriate to create three major themes (Lee, 2006). All leads were explored in interviews until saturation was reached in terms of major themes. Transcripts were analysed separately, and results combined by two researchers (IS, JW) to achieve agreement on major themes and sub-themes. Photos were used as an aide-memoir in analysis, alongside notes made during observations and in the field diary, to enable the depth and richness of the spoken and written data to be recalled. Scripts were returned to participants for confirmation of accuracy prior to analysis. Focus group recordings were peer-checked by an independent researcher (LH). During the focus group sessions, points were summarized regularly and fed back to the group to check the accuracy of interpretation.

Results

Growing food and understanding and caring about the origins of food, combined with trust in food sources, was associated with judgements about food enabling food choices which were positive for personal health. This knowledge of food sources underpinned food choices when shopping for food, and helped participants to make informed compromises when choices were not ideal. There was a demonstrated connection to *planetary health*, *community health*, and *personal health*, all of which were facets of a holistic sense of Food Wellbeing. Participants were motivated to grow food and source food produced ethically, despite the challenges involved.

Planetary Health

Participants' growing activities were strongly linked to planetary health. Growers were trying to work "with nature" rather than struggling against it, which led them to consider issues listed in Table 1. Growing with nature was explained in various ways, including:

> We couldn't use slug pellets here, they would kill the birds and hedgehogs. They are going to build a hedgehog box. (Andrew)

> We choose to grow things that don't need constant watering. (Brett)

> I don't use weed killer and I let certain areas grow for the wildlife. (Alison)

This connection to the natural world was felt and reinforced through direct involvement with nature. One gardener was observed moving small frogs carefully from a patch to be cultivated to a nearby pond. Later she described how this action, rather than the digging and planting of seedlings that had been her original priority, had become the highlight of that afternoon.

A range of levels of knowledge underpinned an individual's actions. In some cases, but by no means all, strict organic or permaculture principles were followed. Even participants who were new to gardening described/demonstrated a connection with nature. Priorities placed on aspects of their relationship with nature varied. Barbara explained:

> I like the nature side of it, the fact that it's organic is not top priority. I wouldn't use chemicals and that fits with liking nature and giving wildlife a place … there is soil, micro-flora, birds … I can't put a value on that.

Working with nature was also important to commercial growers, who showed a great sense of responsibility and connection to their land, animals and the wider environment. Chris explained:

> When we first came we ate the food, it connects to the land and has that energy, you eat steak from degraded land and you are eating degraded food. (Chris)

Table 1   Themes and Sub-themes; Indicative Examples

Theme	Sub-theme Issues	Sub-theme Attitudes and Feelings
Planet	• Caring for habitat (e.g. Not using pesticides to protect habitat and other plants) • Caring for animals (e.g. Creating habitat) • Protecting/enhancing soil (e.g. Careful use of manure and choice of plants) • Using water sparingly (e.g. Careful choice of plants) • Not wasting resources (e.g. Free materials on the community gardens) • Not using unnecessary fuel (e.g. Considered use of vehicles, alternative fuels)	• Feeling part of nature • Learning from nature – observation and experience • Caring for things which can't care for themselves • Conserving • Trusting natural processes • Education/knowledge and skills • Pride/sense of achievement • Sense of responsibility
People and community	• Caring for people in this community (e.g. Broadening access to local food) • Caring for people in wider community (e.g. Wanting to know working conditions in food choice) • Opportunities to connect (e.g. Volunteering on local farm days) • Opportunities to share knowledge (e.g. Seed share days, school garden) • Sharing food (e.g. Sharing harvest at community gardens) • Supporting local growers (e.g. Choosing local even if it costs more) • Trusting local growers (e.g. Knowing their ethics and hard work)	• Pride in local community • Feeling that we belong – to community, garden, allotment • Need to give back • Need to learn and to share learning with others • Wanting a better community • Being creative • Wanting a better future for children
Person and personal health	• Health includes physical, emotional and spiritual (i.e., A holistic view of health) • Fresh food is alive and contributes (e.g. Local food ensures this) • The ability to know what is good (e.g. How it looks, where it comes from) • Encouraging others to eat better (e.g. Community gardens/education) • Quality of fresh food (e.g. Knowing enough about fresh food to make judgements) • Modelling/encouraging good food choices for children (e.g. Letting children eat harvest straight from the plant)	• Understanding health • Confidence in food and how to judge healthiness • Eating "differently" from most people • Pride in food skills, cooking from scratch • Wish to share food skills • Wanting children to eat well • Needing more choice

Several visits to Chris's farm revealed his strict environmental principles, as illustrated in the field-diary entry shown below:

Ethical Farming in Action

Notes taken on three visits to this farm describe how all farm vehicles were run on recycled food oil. During one visit Chris was working on a farm vehicle cleaning valves blocked with food oil. A sick lamb was being nursed intensively and with considerable effort, to overcome an infection, even though this is a seemingly low-value animal. Time and energy is required to operate in ways considered ethical.

Some growers felt a spiritual connection to the land through their growing:

There is something more going on than I can know, call it water, air or whatever: if I am willing to be guided I will be supported. (Carole)

Planetary concerns were also important for people when making their food purchasing choices. The specific issues around food choice are listed in below:

- Animal welfare (production)

- Human welfare (production)

- Degree of packaging (take and disposal)

- Locality / distance travelled (emissions, storage)

- Natural resources used (water, soil, air, plants, and animals)

- Seasonality

and summed up by Danielle:

> I think it's [food is] something that everyone can connect with. We eat three times a day and there is potential to make impact. In my experience, even intelligent people don't make that connection and I don't know why. (Danielle)

In town, the availability of food that facilitated such a connection was problematic. For example, whilst animal welfare was a consideration in choosing food, most participants could not afford meat with welfare guarantees. Some found opportunities through contact with local farms and using their cooking skills, however not all participants possessed such resources:

> I get a lamb (from a local farm where welfare is known) and it has two hearts, two livers; they are free, no one else wants them. (Eve)

In the rural location with a thriving local food culture, participants could be confident about where local produce had come from and how it was produced; this trust is valued. Animal welfare was a consideration for producers and food purchasers. A sheep farmer always goes with his animals to slaughter, to be assured of their welfare until death. Having a local abattoir was essential to this and the loss of such facilities was highlighted as a difficulty for small producers who wish to operate ethically.

The desirability of using seasonal food was frequently discussed, with growers expressing confidence that they knew what was in season. Choices were made based on this rather than the type of vegetable. For example, cabbage would be bought in preference to imported beans. Where buying seasonal food was not possible, particularly for urban participants, other planetary considerations came into play, for example, the food's country of origin:

> We just look at the label and see how far it travelled; if it's Kenya then I rather not buy it. (Francis)

The fact that country of origin labelling is not universal was a barrier to decision making.

Zoe's choice to buy *Wonky Veg* boxes from a supermarket showed multiple motivations: Cheapness and family health were important considerations but so too was the fact that these vegetables are not being wasted. She acknowledged that, in some ways, organic vegetables might be preferable but her family budget would not stretch to this.

Overall, therefore, planetary connections were important for participants, although the ease with which these could be enacted varied according to the availability of food that met individuals' ideals and the availability of information on the source of food. A lack of information about supermarket food contrasted with the known local food background, and the confidence created by local and personally grown food.

Connecting to People

In both urban and rural settings, connections within communities through food were important. In town, allotment holders were loosely connected with each other through shared resources, information and expertise. The ability to share produce on allotments with wider family and friends was valued. In the community gardens, there was a closer teamwork connection, sharing ideas, jobs, produce and responsibilities. Eating food grown communally was celebrated as a bonding exercise, and the gardens offered a sense of belonging:

> … the main thing we get is fruit, we share it…the social side is definitely the main thing, it's ace, brilliant, and you get the odd rhubarb and gooseberries too. (Don)

In the urban setting, participants saw growing their own as the only way of acquiring local food. Discussion around buying local food centered on its absence (although one local butcher was mentioned). One participant pointed out a parade of shops on her estate, which once featured both a greengrocer and butcher and now has no fresh food shops (now only empty shops, off-licence, takeaway and hairdresser). In contrast, in the rural setting, there was a variety of local food sources and connections, including locally owned high street shops, local markets, farm gate shops, a local food sales van, regular work days on small farms or community orchards and allotments, voluntary activities such as "seed share days" and social visits to farms. Being a part of the local food community and supporting local growers and traders was a commonly stated reason for enjoying eating local produce:

> This is a blessed area where people have a strong connection to food. (Greta)

Markets were central to the rural community, both as social opportunities, and for growers and traders:

> There's a nice buzz you know (in the market) it's not just about buying it's good to see who's there. (Hilary)

> I [grower] was desperate to have a community to work with; that is vital. I wouldn't still be here without that. I think by just offering it to the wider community those links came in. (Carole)

A consistent theme in the rural interviews and focus groups was the importance of supporting a community of trusted and respected commercial growers, traders and small shops, who were friends and neighbours, and whose activities added value to the town:

> You don't need to have inferior produce from God knows where, when you can have better and support your community. (Janet)

> Reasons to support local shops and the main thing is they are spoken to and become like part of the family. (Eddie)

Knowing and trusting people was a form of quality assurance or certification, even when producers were not certified organic (because of the cost of doing so) they were still recognized as ethical :

> The people we sell to know us … absolutely it is the best form of certification and without the feedback we would have flagged. (Chris)

Nonetheless, despite the value which participants placed on the local traders, there was a widespread awareness that they struggled to make a living:

> Even award-winning farmers are on the edge of desperation; everyone loves their food but it's a labour of love! (Frank)

> Look at my seedlings (on the window sill) that is not professional, I need a poly-tunnel and power but I don't know if I will be here next year, no security ... (Kathy)

For participants in both settings, an important part of being connected with the community was learning from one another. Hilary commented:

> There is a big grow your own culture here. I love meeting people and getting tips … it's community spirit.

John has worked his urban allotment for 44 years and is recognized by other gardeners as a source of valuable information. The following describes an observed example of this.

> Concern for people outside the community also influenced people's food choices, with some participants expressing that choosing food of unknown origin could affect others in terms of methods of food production, treatment of people involved in the food industry. Some highlighted that, while they cared about these issues, they often had insufficient information to make informed shopping choices.

Vegetable box schemes were chosen by some urban participants as a way of providing a degree of connection with the producers of fresh food:

> With [named an organic food boxing scheme, but not locally sourced] I like the interaction between the people who produce the food and the buyer and the user. I made marmalade from Seville oranges and labelled it with the farm they come from. (Lauren)

Community was placed ahead of wider environmental concerns by some, leading them to choose locally produced boxes rather than those from larger scale operators, despite these not being certified organic. Complexity of decision making (in a less than ideal environment) was described by Val:

> I am ethical first and then local and seasonal [in my food choices].

Connecting with the community was also discussed in terms of how to become more inclusive, and share local produce with people for whom it was currently inaccessible for financial, cultural or logistical reasons. This was extensively discussed in all focus groups. A discussion highlights this:

> This was the main purpose in a talk about pricing that took place between two growers, who disagreed on pricing; one wanting to make their food accessible to all, even if it removed profit from it, and the other seeing this as unsustainable. A local food group is aiming to help more local people to be involved, and discussion at one of their meetings focused on solutions such as extending local shopping hours. There was also recognition of a cultural barrier for some in enjoying local food. It was said that this way of eating was not "normal" for many people. There are many, active volunteer growing projects which are potentially a way to involve people in local food through school gardens, allotment and a community orchard. These growing projects have connections to the commercial growers.

Overall, food production and purchasing provided participants with a valued and mutually beneficial connection to their communities. This connection enabled them to have confidence in their food.

Personal health

Participants were asked if they believed that they (and their families) were eating healthily and about the contribution made by the homegrown and locally grown produce. Shopping choices were also discussed, including preferred places to shop and what drove food purchasing decisions. All participants were either the main household cook, and/or shopper, or contributed to that process.

What is meant by health

Participants indicated that growing food at home and choosing local food enhanced their personal health. However, the term "health" was sometimes interpreted more widely than in purely physical terms.

> Do you mean my physical health? Or emotional, spiritual … because they are all the same to me, I am not sure there is a difference … (Danielle)

> It makes us feel better, homegrown food, let's put it that way. It's wellbeing. There must be goodness in there because it's organic and they're not chemicals and it tastes better, there, it does taste better. (Alison)

Carole, who eats mostly from her own small farm, pointed out the freshness and aliveness of her produce and its contribution to her own health. She believed that others without this opportunity might be missing out on important food value:

> I am amazed when people say; "I eat a salad every day" … where did it come from? Who picked it and when? All those things go into the value.

The concept of what constituted healthy food was also broad, with freshness, taste and an "aliveness" all being a part of this. The factors described as important for "healthy food" are shown below. It was generally perceived that all local and fresh foods were "good for you". Knowing where a food came from, who grew it and how fresh it was were linked to healthiness.

Healthy food is:

- Able to be shared

- "Alive" and contributes to health in ways which cannot be explained
- Enjoyable/tastes great
- Exclusive of sugar, additives, sprays, chemicals
- Food with a known growing history
- Fresh
- Inclusive of lots of fruit and vegetables
- A source of important nutrients
- More than just nutrients

Eating well enough? A good or perfect diet.

Most participants believed that they ate healthily and that family members did too. Only one person, Tony, expressed that he didn't eat as well as he should, liking sweet foods and being overweight. In contrast, Hilary believed that being overweight was not a sign that she wasn't eating healthily; she was, as she said:

> Disgustingly healthy, but I must be eating too much of something as I am too heavy.

For some participants, the plethora of nutrition information available caused confusion. Lauren, who always cooked from scratch for her young family, including vegetables and fruit at all meals, and using no processed food, was uncertain about the healthiness of their diet as she had read conflicting information. However, commonsense judgements generally enabled her to see that her food choices were positive:

> The more I read the more uncertain I am that I am eating healthily; well I mean it's not rubbish, and the main thing is in moderation, stops me getting overweight.

Some participants held the view that they were "doing well enough" with eating healthily, and that not all foods needed to be healthy so long as fresh food, preferably of known origin, was the basis of the family diet.

Mandy, for example, who sources much of her food from her own allotment, felt that her own and her partner's diet was "good enough":

> I'd say 7/10 for a healthy diet, good variety, not too much meat, everything home cooked … but there is alcohol and we do have a few glasses of wine at weekends and we did recently try to stop eating sugar …

Danielle's view concurred with this, arriving at the interview with a pie and a coffee, she explained that this didn't matter in health terms (in fact she enjoyed it and it contributed to her health in that way) because the rest of her diet was fresh, locally grown food.

In the town setting, the produce grown was key to the belief that people were eating well, although additional produce was bought. The amount that homegrown contributed was more on the allotments and less at the community gardens, however, some community gardeners were also growing at home. When choosing produce to buy compromises were made but these were based on knowledge of seasons, growing methods, the need to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables as well as doing the best possible within limited budgets. Fruit and vegetables were prioritised even when budgets were tight. Shopping around for cheap produce (such as the Wonky Veg boxes) was described by many of the urban participants.

The rural setting, provided more opportunity to supplement homegrown with local fresh produce from markets and farm shops. The contribution of homegrown was close to 100% only for two commercial growers and one home grower (this varied seasonally) but the values around home growing entered into food purchase decisions.

Eating Differently?

Home cooked food was said to be nicer, more nutritious, fresher and better quality. Cooking and knowing how to prepare food was seen as a necessary, and often an enjoyable skill. All participants

could and did prepare meals from fresh ingredients most days. Concern was expressed over the number of people who are lacking these skills. Most participants recalled learning to cook from a family member and considered it important for children to learn these skills. Having food skills was an important part of eating differently.

Differences from how others eat were discussed in relation to observed eating habits of strangers. Eve said:

> I see them with their big takeaway cups on the way to work, they may have 20 teaspoons of sugar in those massive drinks ... then they wonder why they are so fat.

> When I look at what they bring [to work] there is not fruit or vegetables, one person, it looks just like a child's lunch box [contains foods such as crisps and biscuits]. (Pam)

Or comparisons with wider family and friends, for example, Zoe:

> My sister in law; I call it "ping" food what she gives her kids because you buy it and just ping it in the microwave.

She also explained that fresh fruit and vegetables were missing from this family diet.

In the rural setting, the discussion of "how I eat/how others eat" extended often into a discussion of how to encourage others to make use of the local food. This was thought to be desirable for the health of other families. Kathy explained:

> I want to keep the prices down so people can afford it at the Spar shop…but it won't make any profit for me and some other growers … (have disagreed with this approach).

Participants recognised a positive difference in the way they eat compared with other observed eating habits. For example, eating more produce, especially known and homegrown, and less processed food, less takeaway food and spending more time on cooking and food preparation and understanding more about food.

Children and Food

Participants with children felt that they ate well, would eat most things and ate the same as the adults in the house. This was not always a case of having a perfect diet, just "good enough" with the less desirable foods being eaten infrequently.

Eve (a grandparent) said:

> I wouldn't let them have those cereals [sweetened] but I can't say much about that.

Growing food (which children observed) was thought to help them to accept fresh food to eat.

> Yeah, I grew things I wanted to eat that was pretty much anything but the satisfaction is enormous and the taste is amazing, and I was particularly keen on giving my daughter really healthy, you know, vegetables … (Francis)

> He'll eat certain food from here [allotment] that he won't eat if you buy it from the shops, like corn, it's sweeter. (Nina)

All felt that seeing food growing was important for children; it would increase their connection and understanding. Many referred back to their own childhood and talked of the example of a parent or grandparent growing food. Lauren's children were allowed to pick things from the garden and eat them, she viewed this as a good educational opportunity.

Observations of children in all the community gardens indicated a lot of "playing around" and joining in occasional tasks (picking, watering) and informal shared knowledge:

> What is this? [A purple potato] Is this a weed? Do worms grow again when you cut them in half? Hold it by the leaves, not the roots … Why?

Food habits described by all interview participants and observed in meal situations throughout the research are shown below.

Habits which Create Food Wellbeing

- Cooking from scratch (fresh food as the basis for all meals)

- Using homegrown and locally grown fruit and vegetables, making seasonal choices

- Choosing local meat of known origin, eating less or in some cases, no meat

- Choosing whole-meal bread (and making bread at home)

- Not wasting anything

- Encouraging children to eat fruit and vegetables

- Letting children sample plants in the garden

- Not buying highly processed foods

- Eating together at table for most meals

In summary, participants considered the food/health relationship to be more than the physical health, occasioned by taking in particular nutrients. Food Wellbeing was derived from a connection between the person, the planet and the community, mediated through food. In following these principles, they reported eating in ways generally advocated for personal health (*The Eatwell Guide*, 2016). The key components and connections that enabled this Food Wellbeing to be created are shown in Table 2.

Table 2   Food wellbeing: Connecting to Planet, People, Person

Planet	People (community)	Person
• Grown in ways which enhance nature rather than destroy it • Growing practices which respect nature and are supported by nature • Allows/supports biodiversity • Conserves water • Improves soil • Produce is seasonal • Uses things which might be otherwise thrown out • Has not travelled unnecessarily • Has used minimum fuel in growing • Production ensures animal welfare • Is not wasteful • Does not include plastics or other packaging • Grown in ways which are not "greedy" and are respectful of other life.	• Is fair to the producer • People involved in production at all levels are well treated (for example not dangerous working conditions or underpaid) • Is not taking food from communities which can't afford it or altering other people's systems unfavourably • Supports local community growers and traders • Increases levels of skill in the community and opportunity to share them • Sharing good quality food is the basis of strong community • Trusted local sources provide peace of mind (certification) • People have a right to good food	• Is good quality, fresh and tastes good; and so, contributes to a broad definition of health in many ways • Enhances enjoyment and enables recognition of real tastes • Won't be wasted • Increases personal skill levels • Increases amount and quality produce eaten • Quality produce replaces low quality processed food • Offers good levels of nutrients (fresh) • Helps children to understand where food comes from • Enables hands-on learning for children and adults • More affordable if you grow it yourself • It's clear that it's healthy—not confusing

Discussion

A Personal connection through food, to Planet and People (community) providing for Food Wellbeing

This study found that fresh, locally available food provides an important connection between people and their health, environment and one another, which creates the opportunity for food-related wellbeing. The value recognised in local fresh food meant that this was prized as the basis of good eating. Eating well was viewed as more than acquiring the right nutrients; it included a relationship with the environment and one another, which enhanced individual and community health. Food and

food value could be "known" by understanding how it was grown (and by whom) along with common sense judgements such as appearance, freshness and flavour. Nutrients were considered important but expected to be provided adequately by food chosen according to the values described. Good nutrition, in the sense of receiving adequate amounts of nutrients and not over consuming concentrated sources of energy, is a part of Food Wellbeing, but other aspects described by study participants such as confidence, trust, shared labour and goals, enjoyment of fresh food and a spiritual connection with land are also included.

A working definition of Food Wellbeing was developed as follows:

Food Wellbeing is possible when the following connections with food are present:

- Planet: An appreciation of where all food comes from and an understanding about how food choices impact on overall global sustainability; an environment which offers opportunities for personal connection to planet through food practices.

- People: A local living environment, which includes a food culture that enables the average a person to consistently source quality local food; A food culture including an appreciation of how food choices impact on the community and others. An environment which offers a connection to others through shared and understood food practices.

- Person: A sound practical understanding of how to maximise quality and trusted fresh food in the diet, along with growing / trading /purchase / preparation knowledge about fresh food and trusted food sources, with skills that support related habitual behaviour. These food practices being recognised as "normal" in that environment.

    (Food Wellbeing is closely aligned to Food Sovereignty (www.globaljustice.org.uk/six-pillars-food-sovereignty) and Food Security (www.fao.org/WFS/) and recognizes the opportunity for nutritional health as well as wider wellbeing.)

Important contributors to the connections described in this study are: Recognition of the true value of food, trust in nature and other people and shared learning in and with nature and other local growers (including commercial growers). The effort and time that developing these connections requires was considered worthwhile, and there was evidence of a concern that this connection needed to be developed to embrace the wider population. Relationships with others created around food were very important: Town growers valued being able to feed their families and extended families well, sharing harvest and knowledge, and community gardens and rural growers valued the mutual support and exchange of expertise, while those buying food from a local rural system valued the expertise and trustworthiness of growers and their contribution to community.

Appreciating the *true value* of food

Participants understood the superior value of their homegrown and local food through recognising the possible negative aspects (hidden costs) of food produced in an industrial system in relation to environmental damage, health impacts (O'Kane, 2011), and impacts on local communities (Winter, 2016). They compared these potential negatives with the multiple values of their own trusted food. This awareness of value arose from involvement in growing good food (knowing the labour, choices, difficulties and opportunities this creates) and from the opportunity in this expert growing environment to discuss food production issues with other informed people. This underpinned the positive food choices, discussed and observed, where a high value is placed on foods which are environmentally, socially and nutritionally desirable, so that, within this thoughtful, responsible and informed food culture, sustainable and healthy food choices were normalised.

Eating Differently - a separate food culture

The study participants described "eating differently" (from the mainstream) and mostly feeling a level of confidence in eating well which depended on trusted fresh food. Some trade-offs and compromises were made in food choice and ideals were sacrificed where cost and availability of food limited choice. Choices made were compared positively with the choices made by other people not engaged in local food culture. These study participants have effectively created their own separate food culture, motivated by a range of factors in which personal health is important but environmental and social considerations are also deeply considered. Some participants expressed a spiritual

connection to land and food similar to those described by some indigenous cultures, which value land and food and express a responsibility to feed others (Kuhnlein, Erasmus, Spigelski, & Burlinghame, 2013). A feature of many such food/land beliefs is that the land and water support both physical and spiritual health, and this depends on a relationship of respecting nature and working with it, rather than suppressing nature and exploiting resources. The New Zealand Māori culture, for instance, has a tradition of Kaitiakitanga (guardianship of land and water, respect for land and water and avoiding over-consumption), and Manaakitanga, caring for community and others, sharing food and giving food to build relationships. The skills and values of respected traditional food experts are passed on through generations ((Reid & Rout, 2016; Matoe & Russell, 2017). While this is a concept that is not widely recognised in the UK, in countries such as New Zealand and Australia a wider acknowledgement of indigenous food values may help towards a positive food cultural change.

Teaching broader food values

A change in food culture, which enables food wellbeing to be the norm, requires the values expressed by these study participants to be shared more widely in the population. This contrasts with the traditional focus on teaching of nutrition as a science, with the expectation of individuals prioritising a narrow individual view of health and interpreting nutrition recommendations into daily food choices which has not resulted in a healthy normal diet for all (Scrinis, 2008). Broader food values education, coupled with experiential learning involving food growing and preparation, have emerged as important in this study and education focused on these aims may well result in a culture which better supports individual health, even when this is not the sole aim.

Conclusions and recommendations

At present, the type of Food Wellbeing observed in this study is not easily achieved and is unevenly accessible. The wealth of expertise and motivation in many communities could be called upon to initiate and support a transition towards a better, more sustainable, food culture. Further research is recommended in the following areas:

1. Ways in which food and nutrition education can incorporate broad food values and foster connections which support positive cultural change.

2. Acknowledging in food education, the natural world/food culture traditions of the indigenous peoples (e.g. of Australia and New Zealand) where indigenous food and land values are strongly connected with good food citizenship.

3. The development of strategies to enable community Food Wellbeing practitioners/leaders in the community to share their knowledge and experience more widely, and in community-specific ways.

Biographies

Dr Juliet Wiseman has practised as a dietitian and has worked in public health nutrition and in university teaching for the past 20 years. This research is the result of winning a two-year grant in order to study sustainable local food and nutrition. Juliet has long been concerned by the loss of traditional and cultural foods and skills associated with this. At the same time, she has been involved in nutrition education and believes that a scientific/medical approach to teaching about food cannot achieve good health for any but a very motivated minority.

Professor Jane Murphy is a registered Nutritionist and Dietitian and Head of Education (Health Sciences) in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Bournemouth University (BU), UK. Jane's research is committed to key nutritional problems faced by older people that impact on health and wellbeing especially the complex problems faced by people living with dementia. She co-leads the Ageing and Dementia Centre and has led key research to understand nutrition and delivering dignity in dementia care funded by the Burdett Trust for Nursing. (http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/nutrition-dementia). She has secured European Commission funded research (Horizon 2020) to understand the contribution of local sustainable food systems to nutritional health and wellbeing that will identify new competencies for training in public health nutrition.

Following a BSc(Hons) Psychology and MSc Information Systems, Dr Jacqui Hewitt-Taylor completed a PhD on the Social Psychology of Online Communication at Portsmouth University. Since then Jacqui has taught at BU and is responsible for units on Experimental Design, Research Methods, Social Psychology, Group Processes and CSCW. Research continues to investigate the impact of the Internet on interaction and I draw on this in teaching my final year unit on CyberPsychology. Jacqui is expert in qualitative research methodology.

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