AGENDA SETTING WITHIN A COMMUNITY-BASED FOOD SECURITY PLANNING PROCESS: THE INFLUENCE OF POWER

CHRISTINE MCCULLUM, PhD, RD; DAVID PELLETIER, PhD;
DONALD BARR, PhD; JENNIFER WILKINS, PhD, RD

1Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research, University of Texas-Houston, Houston, Texas;
2Division of Nutritional Sciences, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; 3Department of Policy
Analysis and Management, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the effectiveness of using citizen politics as a framework for empowering citizens to build a community food security agenda.

Design: A critical perspective, case study design, and multiple qualitative methods were used.

Participants/Setting: Forty-four participants were purposefully recruited to participate in a community-based planning process called a search conference (SC). Seven additional disenfranchised stakeholders who did not attend the SC were also recruited to participate.

Phenomenon of Interest: To assess how power influenced agenda setting and to determine the extent to which disenfranchised stakeholders’ most salient interests were incorporated into the final SC action agendas.

Analysis: The constant comparison method, content analysis, and consensus were used to produce the final analysis.

Results: Power influenced agenda setting by managing knowledge, problem framing, trust, and consent. Two of seven of disenfranchised stakeholders’ most salient interests, including need for adequate food preparation skills and increased availability of locally produced foods, were incorporated into the final SC action agendas.

Conclusions and Implications: Citizen politics can be used to build a community food security agenda on issues that are not at odds with stakeholders in positions of power. To bring about change on issues in which power differences between groups are substantial, additional theoretical frameworks and public policy-making models are needed.

KEY WORDS: critical perspective, community food security, agenda setting, power

INTRODUCTION

Community food security is a relatively new term that has no universally agreed upon definition. It can be viewed as a numerical aggregation of household food security, which is concerned with the ability to acquire food at the household level. Alternatively, it can be viewed as relating to broader concerns underlying social, economic, and institutional factors within a community that affect the quantity and quality of food and its affordability. Communities are unlikely to be entirely “food secure” or “food insecure.” Rather, they can be placed on a continuum, with the end goal being a food-secure community, which has been defined as “all persons in a community having access to a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through non-emergency or conventional food sources at all times.”

Public dialogue is an important tool that can be used as part of a larger process to frame and prioritize key community food security issues and to generate social action around identified issues and concerns. As noted by Thomson and colleagues, opportunities to engage citizens in discussions on community food issues can empower local people in several ways:

1) citizens become aware of others who share common interests about food system issues; 2) people learn specifics about their community food system (such as the extent of hunger and farmland loss) and how they can put their knowledge to work; 3) citizens become part of a solution that addresses community concerns; 4) people can be prepared to contribute in meaningful ways to public decisions on how to deal with community concerns (such as food safety, sprawl, keeping local farms in...
business, or supermarkets closing in a neighborhood); and 5) citizen dialogue forces other people to consider the ideas and opinions of others as they create a vision for the future of their community food system.4

The research-based conceptual framework of “citizen politics” has been proposed as a way to empower citizens to take positive action on public problems such as poverty, hunger, and food insecurity in their communities.6,7 The purpose of citizen politics is to develop and strengthen societal capacity to do public work, influence public policy decisions, and enable disenfranchised stakeholders to participate as active citizens in the policy-making process. Citizen politics is based on 3 core concepts: public, diverse interests, and power.6,7 Public refers to a “public world” in which citizens use their collective power to act on diverse self-interests to shape their surrounding environments and solve common problems.7 The public work of problem solving and governance is carried out through mediating institutions, for example, schools, churches, and the workplace, which connect people to larger public arenas and issues. Diverse interests refer to the different life experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and talents that people bring to public life. Power, within this framework, is conceptualized as dynamic and interactive and is seen as being created through building relationships among diverse interests and taking action on shared problems and goals.6,7 Although citizen politics has been proposed as a way to empower citizens to take action on public problems such as hunger and food insecurity, to our knowledge, little research has assessed how power is used to influence agenda setting within this type of an approach.

Using Q methodology, Pelletier et al identified 3 diverse groups (social justice advocates, pragmatists, visionaries) who placed varying levels of importance on 4 different aspects of community food security: social justice, healthfulness of the food supply, economic viability of local agriculture, and environmental sustainability.8 Social justice advocates were primarily concerned about social justice and the social welfare of low-income communities (eg, their ability to access high-quality, healthful food), especially in light of welfare reform. Pragmatists were concerned about the decline of local agriculture but were not concerned about the environmental consequences of the current food system. They were also unsympathetic toward social justice and social welfare issues because they viewed such issues as a matter of personal responsibility. Visionaries were primarily concerned about the decline of local agriculture and environmental consequences of the current food system and were mildly concerned about the social welfare of low-income communities. These authors concluded that the diverse values and interests associated with the concept of “community food security” were salient to community members in 6 upstate New York counties but that not all persons embraced all community food security components simultaneously.8 Participants representing these 3 different groups (social justice advocates, pragmatists, and visionaries) were able to find common ground on various food system goals and commit to a series of action plans.9 However, the action plans that emerged from a series of community food security planning processes reflected the values and interests of certain stakeholders more than others, even in the absence of overt conflict.10-12 How power influenced agenda setting within these community-based food security planning processes has not been investigated.

Therefore, this study used a critical perspective, case study design, and qualitative methods (1) to assess how power influenced agenda setting within a community-based food security planning process called a search conference (SC) and (2) to determine the extent to which disenfranchised stakeholders’ most salient interests related to community food security were incorporated into the final action agendas that emerged from the SC. The main tenet of critical theory is that the construction of meaning and knowledge is shaped by social rules and larger social structures within which their action is guided and constrained. A critical perspective recognizes the importance of human understanding through multiple, socially constructed meanings and realities of everyday life; however, it also seeks to uncover silences that may reside in communication systems.13-16

STUDY PROCEDURES

Project Design

This research was embedded within a larger action research project entitled “The North Country Food and Economic Food Security Project.” Action research is a process that incorporates professional knowledge, local knowledge, process skills, research skills, and democratic values as the basis for cocreated knowledge and social change.17 A SC was used for the initiation of community-based food security action planning processes in 6 upstate New York counties.9 A SC is a strategic planning process that places citizens side by side with formal decision makers to define problems and goals, develop alternatives, and initiate action plans based on a common vision that emerges. Its theoretical premises of democratic decision making, open participation, and respect for difference and diversity18 are closely aligned with the theoretical premises of citizen politics, which include public, diverse interests, and power.5,6

The planning and implementation for the SC were carried out through a series of sequential steps: (1) community-based organizations committed to conducting the SC; (2) logistical planning occurred; (3) a community-referencing system based on informal relationships within the community was used to determine who was eligible to participate in the SC; (4) a “search question” was determined; (5) statistics and data on the problems or concerns of interest were collected by a community advisory committee (which were compiled into a profile and distributed to participants at the SC); (6) 30 to 50 persons participated in a 2- to a 2.5-day SC; and (7) post-SC meetings were convened to further refine
and implement action plans, goals, and objectives identified at the SC. A more detailed description has been provided elsewhere. The design elements for the SC where the current research was conducted are detailed in Table 1.

**Sample**

Forty-four participants from one county in upstate New York were purposefully recruited to participate in a 2.5-day SC on community food security. The Peer Reference System (PRS), a specific type of snowball sampling technique, was used to determine which individuals in the community would be eligible to participate in the SC (R. Rich et al., unpublished data, 1996). In this study, community was defined by a specific geographic location (ie, county). Members of a countywide community advisory committee were responsible for conducting the PRS. Advisory committee members (n = 11) were chosen by representatives from 2 community-based agencies and included 2 dairy farmers, a small crop farmer, a local business owner, 2 consumers (including 1 who was disenfranchised), an agricultural educator, a director of a social services agency, a food stamp administrator, a director of a community-based human services organization, and a health inspector from the county health department.

The first step in conducting the PRS was to identify key informants who met 2 eligibility criteria: demonstrated interest in community activity and involvement in 1 sector of the food system. Using these criteria, advisory committee members identified 30 key informants representing 8 different sectors of the food system (farmland protection/natural resources conservation, agricultural production, food processing, food distribution/transportation, wholesale marketing, retail marketing, consumer, and “other”). Each key informant was contacted and asked to identify up to 3 potential SC participants who met the 2 eligibility criteria. After 3 iterations of the PRS, 204 individuals who met the 2 eligibility criteria and who also agreed to participate in the SC were identified. From this list of 204 names, members of the advisory committee selected the final 50 SC participants. Of these, 44 agreed to attend the SC. Table 2 illustrates selected demographic characteristics and the food system sector representation for the final SC participants (n = 44).

Disenfranchised stakeholders who attended the SC (n = 7) were recruited to participate in this research through the PRS, where they were represented in the “consumer” category. Seven additional disenfranchised stakeholders who did not attend the SC were also recruited to participate in this research through use of a similar snowball sampling technique. In this study, disenfranchised was defined as “the denying of a privilege, freedom, or power to a person or group resulting in a limited ability to participate in everyday life.” Disenfranchised stakeholders are often marginalized or discriminated against at the local level, leading to personal hardship and/or the need to turn to the federal government for assistance. To qualify as disenfranchised, each participant had to meet 1 of 3 criteria: participation in 1 or more food and nutrition assistance programs, receipt of unemployment benefits, and receipt of disability benefits. Thirteen of 14 (93%) disenfranchised stakeholders in this study were women, had at least a high school degree, and reported participating in 1 or more food and nutrition assistance programs. Ten of 14 (71%) participants reported receiving unemployment benefits, and 6 of 14 (43%) reported receiving disability benefits.

**Data Collection**

Participant observations were conducted at all advisory committee meetings held prior to the SC to assess how power influenced agenda setting within the larger community food security SC process. In this study, power was defined as the capacity to produce intended, foreseen, or unforeseen effects on others based on the ability to control access to valued resources. According to Bachrach and Baratz, agenda setting is shaped by “a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures that operate systematically and consistently to benefit some persons and groups at the expense of others.” All documents produced prior to and during the SC were also reviewed to assess how power influenced agenda setting and the extent to which disenfranchised stakeholders’ interests were incorporated into the final SC action agendas. Document review is considered useful in portraying the values, beliefs, and viewpoints on a specific issue expressed within a particular setting and can provide valuable empirical insights when used in combination with other methods.

An open-ended questionnaire was administered at 2 different points during the SC to all attendees (n = 44) to further assess how power influenced agenda setting. Questions developed for use in the open-ended questionnaire were based on theoretical considerations of group behavior and power dynamics and were pilot tested with community members. A subsample of participants (n = 25), including all disenfranchised (n = 7) and powerful stakeholders (n = 18) who attended the SC, were interviewed after the SC to gain further insight into themes that emerged from earlier data collection methods and to examine the extent to which their most salient interests were incorporated into the final SC action agendas. In this study, a participant’s categorization as powerful was determined by his/her organizational decision-making authority and access to valued resources and not by individual-level characteristics. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Focus groups were conducted with disenfranchised stakeholders (n = 14) prior to and after the SC to explore their most salient community food security interests within a safe environment, that is, an environment in which authoritative interests and values are not present, and to prevent the presence of ideological false consciousness, that is, a process by which people develop a systematic misunderstanding of themselves through participation in a world in which public ideas and images distort reality in the interests of various dominant groups. Conducting focus groups at 2 points in
Table 1. Design Elements for One County’s Search Conference on Community Food Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Search Conference Design Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Local sponsors welcome, describe background on search conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search managers describe philosophy of searching and the design principles of a search conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of participants is described and participants introduce themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search conference schedule is reviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions and answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and overview</td>
<td>Objective is to piece together the relevant history of the community’s food security system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What brought things to the current situation (both internal and external factors)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared history</td>
<td>Longest tenured participant is asked for appropriate starting point in time/history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants pair up (3 persons maximum) to identify most significant shaping forces, decisions,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group draws the history on pieces of paper that are on the wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants walk through the co-created shared history as a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Participants meet in small groups divided by peer groups (where each peer group is represented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by 1 of 8 different food system sectors) to bring out their special interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Each participant states his/her major expectation or desire for search conference outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable future</td>
<td>Search conference managers review agenda and comment on match of searching with expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probable future</td>
<td>Mixed small groups* with representation from all peer groups (organized beforehand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Groups asked to answer search question, “What should our local community food system look like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by the year 2005?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants complete midpoint search conference evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-search conference check-in</td>
<td>Search managers report results to participants during lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep, drop, create</td>
<td>Small groups meet as remixed from peer groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas for change: selection</td>
<td>Participants self-select into cluster most motivated to work on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas for change: definition</td>
<td>Search managers lead process of labeling identified clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action planning: force field analysis†</td>
<td>Groups analyze their results and identify major restraining forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action planning: work flow diagramming</td>
<td>Individually, participants identify necessary activities to bring about selected change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action planning: template</td>
<td>Group produces narrative sections of template, goals and objectives, and rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Discussion of follow-up and send-off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Each of the small groups had a self-selected group facilitator and group recorder. Both of these group responsibilities were rotated throughout the search conference, and each group member (search conference participant) was required to serve as a facilitator and group recorder during the 2.5-day search conference.

†Force field analysis is defined here as an examination of the forces working in support of the search conference participants’ vision of “what should our local community food system look like by the year 2005?” the forces working against the identified community food system vision (restraining forces), leverage points (or opportunities for change), and recommendations for action.
time allowed for critical reflection, a deeper probing of issues and concerns, and discussions on ideological false consciousness. Specific focus group questions were developed in consultation with theories on power and community outreach specialists who worked with disenfranchised stakeholders. Questions were pretested with members of the target audience for readability and understandability. Focus groups were moderated by a trained community informant as a way to reduce power differences that existed between the researcher and participants, enable participants to be as comfortable as possible when discussing their interests and concerns, and allow the researcher to take field notes on the group interactions and dynamics. Focus group sessions were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Procedures for informed consent and confidentiality were applied throughout the study. A university committee on human subjects approved all aspects of this research.

**Data Analysis and Quality**

Data analysis occurred throughout the entire data collection process to identify blind spots in the data and to allow the researcher to pursue emergent themes in subsequent data collection. Data collected prior to and during the SC (including notes of observation, documents, pre-SC interview and focus group transcripts, responses from open-ended questionnaires, and field notes) were analyzed using constant comparative method and thematic content analysis. A second round of data analysis using verbatim post-SC interview and focus group transcripts was conducted to test working hypotheses that emerged from the first round of data collection. Identified themes common to all sources were included as emergent categories and were entered into a matrix to organize the data. The matrix included how many times each emergent category was mentioned and the breadth of each category. Inconsistencies in the categories were explored and revisions were made, and negative cases, that is, cases in which data did not fit into any of the emergent themes, were sought.

Focus group transcripts were coded to determine disenfranchised stakeholders’ most salient interests reported within a safe environment at 2 different points in time (before and after the SC). A salience score for disenfranchised stakeholders’ interests was calculated by multiplying the frequency of each response (number of times it was mentioned) by the intensity (low, moderate, high) with which it was expressed. For those disenfranchised stakeholders who attended the SC (n = 7), documents produced within the first small-group session at the SC (expectations) and responses from open-ended questionnaires were coded to determine their reported interests at 3 different points in time during the SC.

Two researchers independently coded themes that emerged from all data sources. Initial differences in agreement over themes that emerged were discussed until there was 100% agreement in assigned codes. Data quality was ensured by several criteria and corresponding methods: credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through the use of prolonged engagement, member checks, peer debriefers, reflexivity, method triangulation, and negative case analysis. Dependability and confirmability audits were conducted to ensure that shifts and changes in the data were both tracked and trackable (dependability) and through an inspection of the raw products of the research inquiry (confirmability).

**FINDINGS**

**Community Food Security Action Agendas**

Six final action agendas and corresponding goals emerged from the SC on community food security, including the need for...
for (1) distribution of surplus food, to strengthen a distribution network for surplus and leftover food; (2) education, to raise awareness of consumers as to the food and fiber system and related life skills through education; (3) family and community values, to encourage and nurture a commitment to personal responsibility and wider relationships through building community; (4) food processing and marketing, to give the North Country producers outlets for their products; (5) legislative initiatives and actions, to develop a plan to bring change to issues brought up at the SC; and (6) new agriculture, to explore agricultural economic opportunities in the North Country.

How Power Influenced Agenda Setting

Power influenced agenda setting through 4 separate mechanisms, including managing (ie, controlling) knowledge, problem framing, trust, and consent (Table 3). The results have been recontextualized in the data and are described below.

Managing knowledge. Knowledge was managed by use of “decisionless” decisions on certain issues and by avoiding discussion on sensitive issues. A decisionless decision was used during the pre-SC advisory committee meetings when the concern that some elderly persons in the county may be eating pet food owing to a lack of income was brought to the attention of the advisory committee members by a health inspector from the county health department: “I’ve had repeated reports from public health nurses that the elderly are eating dog food. But when I called the state to report what I had heard, they told me, ‘back off, there’s too much money involved.’” Advisory committee members acknowledged the need to make a decision as to whether the SC participants should be made aware of this problem; however, no decision was made, and this knowledge was not shared with participants. During the SC, knowledge was managed by avoiding open discussion on sensitive issues relevant to the topic of community food security as was reflected in a statement by a powerful stakeholder who attended the SC: “I avoided discussion on the topic [agricultural pesticide use] because I knew it would be perceived as controversial.”

Managing problem framing. Problem framing was managed by the pursuit of narrow interests, choice of the terminology used, and decisions being made before all identified costs, benefits, and risks were considered. Prior to the SC, problem framing was managed by the pursuit of narrow interests and by using the terminology of “community food systems” instead of “community food security.” For example, although it was originally agreed that the SC would focus on community food security, it was later reframed to focus on community food systems by a member of the advisory committee whose primary interest related to agriculture as opposed to hunger or food insecurity. Problem framing was further managed by the pursuit of narrow interests during the SC. A city planner observed, “Certain individuals were participating because they had their own agendas. They might have needed to justify how their participation was going to benefit their particular organization, and that gets frustrating because we were talking about communities and benefiting everyone.” Problem framing was managed during the SC by the choice of terminology used when some SC participants referred to government welfare programs as “easy welfare.” Not all SC participants agreed with the use of this terminology, including an associate director of a food and nutrition assistance program who commented, “Easy welfare—I don’t like this terminology; it’s used by people with middle-class values.” This participant, however, reported not feeling comfortable sharing this point of view openly with other SC participants. Finally, problem framing was managed by making decisions before all identified costs, benefits, and risks were considered. With regard to the issue of welfare reform, a disenfranchised stakeholder who attended the SC commented, “They kept talking about moving us [welfare recipients] off of public assistance and taking personal responsibility. But what I want to know is where I can get a decent paying job so that I can support me and my two kids? Right now the only place I can get a job is at [a fast food restaurant], and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanisms of Power</th>
<th>Before the Search Conference</th>
<th>During the Search Conference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing knowledge</td>
<td>“Decisionless” decisions</td>
<td>Avoid discussion on sensitive issues that are relevant to the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing problem framing</td>
<td>Pursuit of narrow interests</td>
<td>Pursuit of narrow interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice of terminology used</td>
<td>Choice of terminology used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All identified costs, benefits, and risks are not considered before decisions are made</td>
<td>All identified costs, benefits, and risks are not considered before decisions are made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing trust</td>
<td>Trusted individuals are selected to serve on advisory committee</td>
<td>Perceived credibility of the information source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing consent</td>
<td>Screened process is used for final selection of participants</td>
<td>Rules of “anticipated reactions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Argue that political issues are really technical issues best left to experts</td>
<td>Argue that political issues are really technical issues best left to experts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
there’s no way I can survive on those wages. They didn’t address this bigger issue.”

Managing trust. Trust was managed prior to the SC through a selection of “trusted individuals” who were chosen to serve on the 11-member advisory committee and by the perceived credibility of an information source. This latter mechanism, that is, perceived credibility of an information source, was illustrated during discussions on agricultural pesticide use at the SC. An agricultural educator noted, “A few persons were talking about pesticides, that they were unsafe, but their source [the media] couldn’t be trusted.” In contrast, a member of the county’s soil conservation board stated that “Some participants felt media coverage on this issue [the negative effects of agricultural pesticide use] wasn’t trustworthy, but I feel it’s critical,” although this latter participant reported not feeling comfortable sharing her viewpoint openly during the SC.

Managing consent. Consent was managed through using a screened process to select final SC participants, by arguing that political issues were technical issues best left to experts, and by using the rules of “anticipated reactions.” With regard to use of a screened selection process to decide on the final list of SC participants, one advisory committee member noted that those individuals “who we get along with well” were more likely to be selected. Consent was also managed by arguing that political issues were technical issues best left to experts. For example, a powerful stakeholder who attended the SC commented, “This [recombinant bovine somatotrophin (rBST) use] is an issue that the government and scientists might be asked to talk about or make a decision on, but not your everyday person…. I don’t think it was the time or the place to discuss [rBST use]. It’s an issue best left to experts.” Rules of anticipated reactions were used when a fear of repercussions of what others might say or do at a later point in time prevented some participants from openly commenting on issues during the SC. A farmer who attended the SC revealed, “I didn’t bring it up [rBST use] because I knew some persons wouldn’t agree with what I had to say, and that I might regret it later.”

Comparison of Disenfranchised Stakeholders’ Interests to Final SC Action Agendas

Table 4 illustrates the most salient community food security interests reported by disenfranchised stakeholders (n = 14) during a safe environment (ie, focus groups) before and after the Search Conference on Community Food Security.

### Table 4. Rank Order of Disenfranchised Stakeholders’ Most Salient Interests (n = 14) as Reported in Focus Groups Conducted prior to and after the Search Conference on Community Food Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre–Search Conference Focus Groups</th>
<th>Salience Score*</th>
<th>Post–Search Conference Focus Groups</th>
<th>Salience Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. High food prices in low-income neighborhoods</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1. Food safety</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Food safety</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2. High food prices in low-income neighborhoods</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lack of access to high-quality foods</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3. Lack of access to high-quality foods</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lack of adequate food preparation skills</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3. Lack of adequate food preparation skills</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Store fraud/false advertising</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3. Store fraud/false advertising</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative impact of food advertising on diet and health</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4. Negative impact of food advertising on diet and health</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lack of availability of locally produced foods</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5. Lack of availability of locally produced foods</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The salience score was calculated by the frequency with which the issue was mentioned multiplied by the intensity.

Table 5. Rank Order of Disenfranchised Stakeholders’ (n = 7) Most Salient Interests on Community Food Security Reported at Three Different Points in Time during the Search Conference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning of Search Conference (Expectations)* (n = 7)</th>
<th>Middle of Search Conference (After Probable Future) (n = 7)</th>
<th>End of Search Conference (Action Planning) (n = 7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food safety concerns (n = 2)</td>
<td>Education (n = 2)</td>
<td>Family and community values (n = 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store fraud/false advertising (n = 2)</td>
<td>Family and community values (n = 2)</td>
<td>Education (n = 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High food prices in low-income neighborhoods (n = 1)</td>
<td>High food prices in low-income neighborhoods (n = 1)</td>
<td>Hunger (n = 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of adequate food preparation skills (n = 1)</td>
<td>Hunger owing to lack of income (n = 1)</td>
<td>Increased availability of locally produced foods (n = 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of availability of locally produced foods (n = 1)</td>
<td>Increased availability of locally produced foods (n = 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Expectations refers to the first small-group session that was held at the search conference according to peer groups, where each participant was asked his/her main reason for participation in the search conference on community food security.
the SC. Table 5 highlights the reported interests of disenfran-
chised stakeholders who attended the SC (n = 7) at 3 differ-
ent points in time during the SC. Two of 7 of the most salient
interests identified by disenfranchised stakeholders, including
the need for adequate food preparation skills and increased
availability of locally produced foods, were incorporated into
the final action agendas that emerged from the SC (eg, edu-
cation and food processing and marketing). Five of 7 (71%)
of the disenfranchised stakeholders who attended the SC
reported that their most salient interests were either down-
played or ignored and that their most salient interests were not
incorporated into any of the final action agendas that emerged
from the SC. One disenfranchised stakeholder reflected, “I
brought it up at the beginning. You know, that many of the
stores in low-income neighborhoods have higher food prices,
but they really didn’t address it. I think it was an important
issue that should have been addressed, but it wasn’t.” Another
disenfranchised stakeholder commented that her most salient
concern related to food safety was not incorporated into any
of the final SC action agendas: “My biggest concern was about
food safety. Whether or not the fish being caught locally are
safe to eat…. This issue was not addressed by any of the groups
that came about as a result of the search conference.”

Negative Case

There was one negative case to report in this study. The direc-
tor of a community-based human services organization openly
challenged a participant during the SC who stated that “welf-
are recipients are lazy” by proclaiming, “I told him, ‘you are
just not in a position to judge.’” I mean I feel poverty does that
to people. You become chronically depressed as a result of
undergoing stress on a daily basis. I don’t know what poor
mother or father doesn’t go through that. It’s the problem that
poor people. Y ou become chronically depressed as a result of
undergoing stress on a daily basis. I don’t know what poor
fare recipients are lazy” by proclaiming, “I told him, ‘you are
just not in a position to judge.’ I mean I feel poverty does that
to people. You become chronically depressed as a result of
undergoing stress on a daily basis. I don’t know what poor
mother or father doesn’t go through that. It’s the problem that
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
enabled these women to initiate price changes in supermar-
tkets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
kets in low-income neighborhoods. However, they remained
powerless to overcome nutritional inequities that were con-
neriae
both facilitating factors and barriers to their participation in a SC.\textsuperscript{42}

Tarasuk has reported that, to date, the main emphasis of community food security initiatives in Canada has focused on enhancing food skills and alternative means of food acquisition as opposed to challenging the structural origins of individual and household food insecurity (e.g., poverty).\textsuperscript{43} Similarly, Chavis has noted that community coalitions can be used to maintain the status quo and contain the empowerment of grassroots leadership and marginalized groups.\textsuperscript{44} Power differentials and other resource limitations faced by disenfranchised stakeholders may limit their ability to bring about needed changes on their own.\textsuperscript{40} As stated by Travers, “there is danger in placing too much responsibility on the shoulders of those with the fewest resources and the least political power to initiate change. For the shift in power relations crucial to social change, advocacy is essential.”\textsuperscript{39} In conclusion, citizen politics can be used to build a community food security agenda on issues that do not conflict with the interests of more powerful stakeholders. However, for issues that generate conflict with stakeholders in positions of power, additional theoretical frameworks (e.g., theories on power,\textsuperscript{22,24,25} agenda building,\textsuperscript{36,45} and agenda setting\textsuperscript{45,46}) and policy-making models (e.g., advocacy and institutional politics) are needed.

There were several limitations to this study. First, the sample was very homogenous. All participants were white and resided in one county in upstate New York. Therefore, these findings cannot be generalized to other groups. The final selection of SC participants was based on a convenience sample and not a representative sample, further limiting the generalizability of the results. Because focus groups were not conducted with powerful stakeholders (n = 18), a similar comparison between disenfranchised stakeholders’ (n = 14) and powerful stakeholders’ (n = 18) interests could not be made. Furthermore, because focus groups were not conducted with all food system stakeholder groups, it was not possible to assess the extent to which other groups did not have their most salient interests incorporated into the final SC action agendas. Finally, all but one of the disenfranchised stakeholders recruited to participate in this study were women. Because men are more likely than women to influence macrolevel food security and food policy decisions,\textsuperscript{47} gender differences—as opposed to disenfranchisement status as defined in this study—may have explained why the majority of disenfranchised stakeholders’ most salient interests were not addressed within the final action agendas that emerged from the SC.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

These findings have important implications for research and practice. First, future research needs to be conducted to determine how community coalitions can be used to increase the power of grassroots and other citizen-led organizations.\textsuperscript{44} To achieve this goal, nutrition education researchers can more broadly use community organization\textsuperscript{48} and sociopolitical theories—including theories on power,\textsuperscript{22,24,25} agenda building,\textsuperscript{36,45} and agenda setting,\textsuperscript{45,46}—to assess how power influences agenda setting within other types of community-based food security planning and decision-making processes. Second, researchers working with disenfranchised stakeholders and other marginalized groups can adopt a critical perspective\textsuperscript{13–15} and a participatory action research approach\textsuperscript{36–40,49–51} to assess if community-based approaches designed to build community food security are truly empowering these groups or if they serve to maintain power differentials and other resource inequities.\textsuperscript{44,52}

Nutrition educators working to build a community food security agenda in their own communities would benefit from training in process-oriented skills, including facilitation, negotiation, conflict resolution, and constituency building, to transform conflict into greater capacity, equity, and justice.\textsuperscript{21,44} When community food security issues and concerns are connected to broader structural issues (e.g., poor conditions for low-wage workers) and institutional policies, educators would benefit from training in additional policy-making models, including advocacy and institutional politics and their corresponding strategies (e.g., convene meetings with decision makers, hold press conferences, and use mass media portrayals\textsuperscript{4} to influence public opinion and to help allocate resources needed to bring about desired policy changes). To strengthen efforts that involve an advocacy or social action component, nutrition educators can expand their use of partnerships from traditional institutional boundaries (e.g., government institutions, professional associations) to include nongovernmental organizations.\textsuperscript{33}

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Funding was provided through grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Cooperative Research, Education, and Extension Service (CREES). Additional support was provided through National Institutes of Health Grant #2R25CA57712-06, Behavioral Science Education Cancer Prevention and Control, National Cancer Institute. The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of the 51 participants who participated in this research. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 32nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Nutrition Education in Baltimore, Maryland.

**ENDNOTES**

*The term “empower” is used here to refer to the process of empowerment as proposed by Rappaport: “the process by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery (i.e., control) over their lives.”\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{4}rBST, or recombinant bovine somatotropin, is a hormone manufactured using recombinant deoxyribonucleic acid
(DNA) technology that is injected into dairy cows to increase milk production by 10% to 15%. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved rBST for large-scale commercial use in November 1993. However, its use has elicited controversy as a result of concerns related to its effects on cows, human health, and the economic viability of small dairy farms.44

The term “big science” refers to the scale of science policy initiatives and extends beyond size, cost, or extent of resources used. For a more detailed explanation of this concept, refer to Galison and Hevly.45

**REFERENCES**


47. Van Esterik P. Right to food; right to feed; right to be fed. The intersection of women’s rights and the right to food. *Agric Human Values.* 1999;16:225-232.


**VISION, MISSION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIETY FOR NUTRITION EDUCATION**

**Vision**
Healthy people in healthy communities.

**Mission**
To enhance nutrition educators’ ability to promote healthful sustainable food choices and nutrition behaviors.

**Guiding Principles**
- Fiscal responsibility
- Respect for diversity of opinions and perspectives
- Trust and willingness to communicate openly and respectfully
- Knowledge-based decisions
- Excellence and lifelong learning
- Professionalism and integrity
- Inclusiveness in membership
- Equality among members
- Rewarding and enjoyable experiences for volunteers and supporters