

Roots of Change Fund

Remarks of

**Michael Dimock, Executive Director, Roots of Change Fund,
to The San Francisco Environmental Commission**

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Good evening Commissioners.

It is a great pleasure to be here. I am Michael Dimock, Executive Director of the Roots of Change (ROC) Fund based here in San Francisco. The ROC Fund is a foundation collaborative dedicated to the creation of a sustainable food system in the state of California by the year 2030. It is our sincere hope that the City of San Francisco will become an active partner in our work. I am so pleased to be testifying along with Paula Jones and Anya Fernald. Both are dynamic and effective advocates and leaders for some of the most cutting edge work in food systems in the nation.

Before sharing our vision, I want to recognize the great work the City has already done. A firm foundation has been laid. San Francisco is home to thriving farmers markets, including Heart of the City, which is a national model for redemption of food stamps and WIC coupons and Ferry Plaza Market, which is world renowned for its quality and beauty. The Department of the Environment's Organic and Fair Trade Ordinance and the Department of Health's new Sustainable Food Policy are also powerful frameworks for the detailed work ahead.

I'd like to request that this be but the first conversation of many with the City and its representatives regarding its food system. It is a revolutionary concept, really, for a city to be thinking expansively about a food system, which— along with energy and water— are the three fundamental systems that underpin every civilization.

San Francisco is poised to make history, to lead the nation, by becoming the first American city to pronounce a new urban-rural partnership, in which city embraces country because it deeply understands the multi-functionality of rural regions surrounding the urban core. Your rural neighbors to the north, east and south are a source of high quality food, clean energy, clean water, timber, recreation, and beauty. They are also places capable of using composted green and food waste (as you know), but also your recycled water and you're your excess carbon. Global warming will force all jurisdictions to develop means to sequester or mitigate heat-trapping gases, generated in large measure in the urban zones.

The world is changing rapidly due to the human species' misperception that we can live outside the ecosystem, or draw from it more resources than it can regenerate. The great awakening occurring today is that we must soon learn to live within the conditions of nature, which have evolved with incomprehensible complexity in order to allow the continuing evolution of life. We must now adopt a biologically based orientation in all human activity, one that acknowledges biological realities.

The food system is, in my view, the most important root system. It requires our attention because every human must eat to survive. And every culture is partly defined by its food. We are what we eat and our food system reflects our consciousness.

Today the reflection is not so inspiring. The hungry or obese child in this City; the farm worker living under a bridge in Santa Cruz County; the aging farmer in South Santa Clara County who sells his land to a developer because his equity has vanished due to the low market price of his crops; the pesticides in the rivers and streams that drain into the Bay; the 1500 miles that most food travels before it is consumed, using up to 150 gallons of fuel, while dumping carbon into the atmosphere; all these unfortunate realities are weakening the prospects of a sustainable San Francisco.

It is important to note that these realities are not because of farmers or one sector of our society. Rather, they emerge from our collective action and inaction; it is every adult American's responsibility to overcome these challenges.

There is, of course, an alternative. The food system can become sustainable. And when it does, it will offer a pattern to all other human systems based on principles and practices that conform to nature's needs. The Roots of Change Fund is committed to setting this required example. As I said earlier, we want San Francisco to be our partner.

I invite the City to designate some of your best people to work with us in the next phase in our development. In early 2005, we completed Phase 1 in our

three-phase strategy: we developed a vision of what a sustainable food system would look like in 2030. I have brought many copies of the narrative from our initial work for you today. It is entitled, The New Mainstream. We have assembled a comprehensive list of 76 indicators for measuring progress. We have outlined an approach focused on developing incentives that are based on healthy community values such as interconnectedness, health, diversity, social equity, regeneration, innovation, safety, and ownership. We believe we will improve the lives of a diversity of people in the process of creating a sustainable food system.

In the next couple of months, we will embark on Phase 2 of our effort: the development of a detailed strategy for implementation of several initiatives. This work will be done by leaders from up and down the state, and from all sectors: business, government, education and nonprofit. At the end of this process we will have a vast network of collaborators capable of implementing the vision. Phase 3 will consist of these leader-collaborators implementing powerful system-altering actions that will allow the niche elements of a sustainable food system to blossom rapidly and supplant the current approach—to become the new mainstream food and farming system.

In five years, we hope to have invested nearly \$10-15 million in the effort. We hope to have developed a sustainable funding stream to empower those people and institutions committed to working until 2030 to achieve the vision contained in The New Mainstream report.

Although I cannot now specifically describe these initiatives because they are yet to be fully defined by those who will implement them, I can say we

will deal with the empowerment of the food system labor force; the development of localized food production and distribution with concern for creating access to quality food for low income people; the articulation and passage of policies that will render a new urban-rural partnership, one that will recognize the interdependence of cities and rural communities; and the development of meaningful incentives for our large-scale farming operations to become biologically integrated, meaning farmers will work with nature, rather than against her by building and supporting healthy soil, using beneficial insects and other forms of bio-control to reduce or eliminate the need for harmful chemicals.

San Francisco has a multitude of opportunities to participate in our work. Let me share just a few ideas reflecting our vision of a sustainable food system for San Francisco:

1. We'd love to see you explore the development of a program in which the City begins to retain farmland in neighboring counties for production of food for your schools, hospitals and other institutions. These lands could be required to use biologically integrated farming and/or organic practices in order to meet the City's goals of feeding good and clean food to its students, patients, homeless, and prisoners.
2. We'd love the City create tax incentives for triple bottom line companies dedicated to food production.
3. We'd love City support for on-farm energy production in counties that surround the Bay.
4. We want the City to mitigate its food deserts by stimulating new retail stores and even more farmer's markets in low-income areas where food stamps and coupons can be used.

5. We'd love the City decide to only source regionally for all those commodities raised within the region. Meaning the City would no longer allow the purchase of grapes or peaches from Chile in the winter.
6. We'd love the City purchase all the endangered, yet delicious Gravenstein apple crop in Sonoma County for the kids in school and patients in hospitals for the six weeks a year that they are harvested.
7. We'd love the City to only purchase salmon or crab from its own fleet docked here at its port.
8. We would love the City to join the Slow Food movement by assisting in that organization's planning and implementation of its first huge event in the USA, *Slow Food Nation*, slated for one year from now, right here in San Francisco. I know Mayor Newsom understands the importance of the Slow Food Movement because he and I shared a wonderful meal last fall with Alice Waters during which we discussed how to better feed people who depend on the City using a Slow Food approach.

Yes, these several initiatives may cost more money, but yes...yes they will also render more jobs, more city revenue, and most importantly the improved health of humans and neighborhoods. We encourage the City to focus on quality food, meaning local, sustainable and seasonal, because it understands that by improving the food system, overall community health will improve and thus it will pay for itself in time. San Francisco is already a food mecca for those with money, let's make it a food mecca for everyone who lives and works here. That is our vision for San Francisco and we want to work with you to make it a reality.

Thank you for inviting me and thank you for listening.