ARE THERE ROLES FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS IN SMALL COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS?

Brent Chisholm
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Overview

• Introduction
• Definition: community food systems
• Impetus for research
• Is this material appropriate for technical communicators?
• Determining documentation: 3 approaches
• Opportunities for involvement
• Conclusion
• Questions
Introduction

• Technical Communication related to agriculture
  • Research is sparse
  • Available examples are sparse…for this project

• Heavy Equipment

• “TC”
A Community Food Systems is…

• “food production, processing, distribution, and consumption…integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place. A community food system can refer to a relatively small area, such as a neighborhood, or progressively larger areas—towns, cities, counties, regions, or bioregions” (Eames-Sheavly and Wilkins 2012)

• Urban focus
City Gardens

- Chefs farming on rooftop of the Conrad Hotel

- Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan
  - 250,000 bees have taken up residence in manmade hives
  - Part of a larger effort to plant one million trees in the next decade
  - Pollinators
  - Honey

- Bronx housing project
  - Roof top: now a greenhouse
  - Food goes to co-op

- Food Distribution Center in the Bronx
  - 200,000 square foot farm…on the roof
  - RFP: they need a farmer and the support to make it happen
Berkeley Food System

- Gardens on school grounds
- Organic food integrated into school meal programs
- Curricula: food-system-oriented
- Food council: a part of the city of Berkeley
- Memo of Understanding w/ city health department
- Creation of Food System Shows Pattern
  - Idea
  - Sharing the idea
  - Put into writing (civil policy, curricula, district policy, etc)
  - Monetary Support
Material Appropriate for TCs?


- Technical/scientific
- Advocacy for action

- Genres of Conservation Writing
  - Pamphlets
  - Construction Projects
  - Environmental Impact Statements
Impetus

Environmental Rhetoric

Rhetorical/Genre Theory

New House

APP
My Situation

• Zero: my experience growing food
• Zero: number of relationships with knowledgeable people
• Zero: easily accessible community resources to help me
Unique Perspective: Technical Communicator

- How can I enable the action?

- Technical Communication…can lead to action (Katz 1992)

- Enable participation in a community food system

- APP is exploration of opportunities to participate
Of Note for TCs: Characteristics of Community Food Systems

• Knowledge and training, rather than industrialization
  • Non-SME (or non-farmer) participation
  • Extension Services
  • SAREP (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program)
  • City Farmer News

• Community scholarship tied to action
  • SAREP
  • UC Davis

• Involvement of multiple SMEs with non-SMEs
  • Philosophers, sociologists, economists, civil leaders, non-SMEs, farmers, agricultural specialists
Examining TC Theory

• Transmission of information
  • Copying verbatim from an extension service employee, farmer, master gardener, or SME

• Translation of information
  • …to language accessible by non-scientists or to collect data and draft a grant proposal to secure funding.

• Articulation of information
  • Articulate comprehensive versions of new food systems to various participants in those food systems (Doak, Miller, and Slack 1993)
Examining TC Theory

• Trying to create new community food systems where they do not exist
  • City
  • Urban environment

These different members of a community are all seeking an unconventional or previously nonexistent idea to be put into action; it could become a technical communicator’s role to constitute that vision by reconciling the necessary pieces of disparate technical data into descriptions of the new food system.
Three Approaches

• Documents based on user roles, rhetorical situations, genres

• Documents based on system requirements
  • Gail Feenstra’s Four Spaces required for community food systems

• Combining the two
Defined by Documentation/User Groups

- Example: **Green Bluff Growers**
  - 40+ individual growers
  - U-pick
  - Agri-tourism & helping farmers w/ various marketing techniques

- Customers (or non-SMEs)
  - Pamphlets or newsletters
  - Website

- Civil officials & city planners
  - Environmental impact statements, natural resource inventories
  - Policies, laws, memorandum of understandings

- Farming SMEs, other SMEs, & gardeners
  - Instrumental discourse, manuals
  - Agreement on vision of food system
  - Extension service products
Gail Feenstra’s 4 “Spaces”

- In addition to seeds, soil, land, etc

- Four types of “space” are needed
  - Intellectual
  - Social
  - Political
  - Economic

- TCs can have roles in each of these
Building a Theoretical Community Food System

- Population: 10,790
- Location: Eastern Washington
- Climate: Desert (base of the Rockies)
- Food production: Dry land hay crops
- Extension service: Washington State University

Vision
- City-sponsored food garden
- Neighborhood garden/market/food swap
Intellectual Space

- The creation of ideas

- Knowledge/information: SAREP, WSU Extension

- Inspiration by example: City Farmer News
Intellectual Space – What can I contribute?

• Build the idea and document it
• Extension service: single source of knowledge
• Reciprocally improve extension service products and increase my own knowledge
  • They can help improve my food system, and
  • I can help improve their documents
Social Space

• 3 farmer’s markets within fifteen miles
• 40 small farms within thirty-five miles
• Relationship with master gardener
• Relationship with nursery
• Relationship with homesteading store
• 4 local families who grow their own food (not farmers)
• Church organization: outdoor community service projects (free)
Social Space – What can I contribute?

- A single source that lists all local farmer’s markets
- People unaware of who grows their own food
- People unaware of...
  - Master gardener
  - Church program
  - City Farmer News
  - CSAs
  - Local extension service
  - Local markets

- If I build (a website), they will come...
  - Number of people growing their own food
  - Links to resources that enable food systems
Political Space in my Community

• Document the food system; make it official

• City council meetings time/location
  • Reviewed city project proposals and construction projects
  • Gaining a sense of the town’s priorities (cater rhetorical appeals)

• Support: policy, finances, city land

• What if city doesn’t offer support?

• Allows social connections, information sharing
Political Space – What can I contribute?

• Preference: Support from town leaders

• Author or co-author Environmental Impact Statements

• If not: town newsletter or website
  • Website, pamphlet, news article, phone number, link
  • Inform gardeners, farmers, and consumers: official policy might not exist
  • Community food system might exist as friendly relationships between a few citizens and the local food bank or homeless shelter.
Economic Space

• Every project needs it

• SAREP might help w/USDA funding

• Foundationcenter.org - funding community development

• Kickstarter.com – food related projects

• Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (Sare.org) - Agriculture projects in various communities
Economic Space – What can I contribute?

- Grants

- Rhetorical Expertise
  - Logos
  - Pathos
  - Ethos
TC Participation: Feasible

• Further research:
  • Participation in community food system where a technical communicator employ his or her skills
  • Gather data: how extension service employees design their products for users
    • Who has the manual for rooftop farming?
    • Who has the manual for urban beekeeping?
  • Is it better to address agricultural documents from the perspective of users, or from a structure determined by agricultural experts, ie
    • Customers, farmers, civil leaders, etc
    • Feenstra’s intellectual, social, political, economic spaces
Thank you

- Dr. MacKenzie
- Dr. Tesdell
Questions?


