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History and Drivers of the Local Food Movement in Maine

Maine has a long history of living close to the land from farming, hunting, and fishing to logging. The combination of adequate rain, inexpensive land, a heritage of farming and a strong national movement made Maine a prime location for a successful local food movement. The geographic factors contribute to the growth of local food markets in Maine, but what were the drivers and history prior to the movement that led to its success?

Similar to Maine also has the geographic advantage of possessing bountiful woodland, which indicated that it would be possible to create a local wood market and economy. The question remains, what are the key factors in the local food movement that can be applied to a local wood economy?

Prior to Local Food Movement in Maine:

- Prior to the Civil War, the typical Maine home was a farm. The food system ranged from the field to the fork in a cyclic motion, all contained within a family's homestead and immediate surrounding area. Mainers ate what their farm produced, with most homes possessing at least one milking Jersey and an orchard, and in excess produced produce and livestock products (Maine's Food System).
- In the 20s, most families had their own farm and grew their own food. The state of Maine was extremely rural, even in center of Biddeford, which is now a residential and commercial area there were farms (Ross and Viles).
- The development of cars and trucks, and improved roads, along with the wide-scale use of tractors, an increase in the use of chemicals, and refrigeration, all brought significant changes to farms and homes in Maine. The opening of Aroostook County by rail and the development of chemical fungicides boosted potato production to the point that Maine was the largest producer in the nation. Almost every farming town had a canning facility, and many Maine people found wage work in the agribusiness sector. Farmers were producing for middle men who sold these commodities in urban markets, thus extending the supply chain from Maine ever farther (Maine's Food System).
- 50s and 60s- Families served local foods, however, there were no CSAs or farmer's market. Local food was delivered to the door, by an egg woman or the milk man. During the summer families went to farm stands. The area still possessed a lot of dairy farms and orchards (Ross and Viles). Diet was not romanticized, during the winter people ate canned food. Canned food all came within 50 miles though. Maine possessed many small cannery factories. Burnham and Morrill Company was a cannery vital to the Southern Maine farm economy. The cannery processed and canned a variety of produce. Regular workers, such as school teachers, who were not full-time farmers possessed gardens at their house and planted vegetables which were sold to Burnham and Morrill to be processed (Ross and Viles).

In Southern Maine Besse's apple juice was key to every apple farmer. The company took the imperfect apples that were not able to be sold in stores since consumers wanted blemish free apples. Besse's made apple juice out of the apples, and the farmers were able to make a living. The canning industry was vital to small farms (Ross and Viles).

China started processing food at a much cheaper cost, especially apple juice, since there was an increased labor cost in the United States and it became hard to get pickers. The apple market in Maine collapsed, when Besse's moved to China, and farmers no longer had a place to sell their blemished apples too. The apples sold to the juicing facility made up a large portion of the farmer's products, so when they no longer had a market for the apples the business could not be sustained. Many orchards sold vegetables in season, but since they lost the primary business of apples, the farmers went out of business. Seasonal farm stands began to close and the local food market disappeared. Development in southern Maine began, since property was worth more as a house lot than as farm land (Ross and Viles).

Decrease in family owned farms with the "get big or get out" revolution, forcing farmers to increase tillage and yield and homogenous their crop (Maine's Food System).

The general diet of Mainer's changed as a shift away from grain corn and toward cheaper grains produced in the West. This caused a large change in the local Maine food system, most of what was now consumed in Maine was increasingly produced, processed, and distributed from outside of the state and transported into Maine (Maine's Food System).

Currently, the ingredients for the average Maine meal travels 1900 miles from field to fork (Maine Department of Agriculture).

Start of the Local Food Movement (Broad Movement):

- **60s and 70s** Helen and Scott Nearing jump-started the back to the land movement (Ross and Viles). They were authors of *Living the Good Life: How to Live Simply and Sanely in a Troubled World*; *Man's Search for the Good Life*; *The Maple Sugar Book*; *Simple Food for the Good Life* and others. They moved to Maine in 1952 from Vermont and wrote books about ways to be self-sufficient and live off the land, which inspired many people and brought them the state to attempt to live off the land and become farmers (Amazon).
- **1962**-- Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, which exposed the harmful effects of DDT, a highly used pesticide across the world. The book is often cited as the beginning of the modern environmental movement and generated controversy about chemical pesticides. The increased awareness about pesticides helped spur a movement towards organic foods (Amazon).
- **Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit (1954)**--Adelle Davis an American author and nutritionist gained prominence in the **1960s and 1970s** after a series of her books gained wide spread popularity (Ross and Viles). She wrote a series of four books, beginning with a cookbook in 1947, that sold over 10 million copies. Davis acquired widespread media attention and became the most recognized nutritionist in the country, due to features in the New York Times, Life, Associated Press and the Tonight Show. She was an advocate for specific nutritional stances such as unprocessed food and vitamin supplementation. Her ideas, combined with the rise of a nutritional and health food movement due to increased awareness of pesticide affects and food additives, lead to an increased interest in local farms (Amazon).
- **1971**-- Frankie Lappé published a *Diet for a Small Planet*, which sold over 3 million copies. The book critiqued grain-fed meat production as wasteful and a contributor to global food scarcity. The book argued that world hunger is not caused by lack of food but by ineffective food policy, and encouraged a plant-based diet (Amazon).
- **50s- late 70s**--Vietnam soldiers returning home sought a meaningful life far away violence of modern warfare, so moved to rural areas to start farming (Ross and Viles).
- **1993**- Mad Cow Disease epidemic in the United Kingdom peaked with over 1,000 new cases being discovered each week. The outbreak lasted until 1996. Although, the epidemic was not in the United States, concern and awareness increased the United States (CDC). An interest in small farms and a desire to know where food came from increased.
- **2001**-- Eric Schlosser published *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the American Meal*. The book examines the local and global impact of the American fast food industry. A section of the book exposes the chemical components that make the food taste so good. It also reveals the dangers of the meatpacking industry, both as a work place and as a process which provides an ideal setting for E. Coli to spread. *Fast Food Nation* was an exposé into the cultural and realities of fast food in America. The book led to increased interest in local and organic food (Amazon).

- **2007-** Michael Pollen's book *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, was published. A New York Times Top Ten Books of the Year, the popular book followed different food supply chains, to trace the food system and caused readers to think about where food comes from (Amazon).
- **2008-** Barbara Kingsolver published the book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, in which her family attempted to only eat food that was raised in her neighborhood or grow themselves. The book encouraged purchasing locally grown food (Amazon).

Maine Local Food Movement(Drivers)

- **1979-** One of the first waves of people turning towards local food began in 1979, when due to rising diesel fuel prices, independent truckers across the United States launched a strike. The result was grocery stores throughout New England, specifically Maine were by and large empty of fresh fruits and vegetables, foodstuff and other commodities. Consumers had a stark realization of the degree of dependence on imported foods in Maine, and the homogenous nature of Maine's crops and products, such as corn, potatoes, eggs and dairy (Maine's Food System).
- **2011-**Most recently, a string of major food recalls scared consumers into buying local food. The recalls prompted consumers to be careful about the safety of their foods and be conscious of where food came from. The most recent and close to home scare occurred in the Fall of 2011 when ground beef from Hannaford caused sickness due of Salmonella Typhimurium in over 20 people in Maine, Vermont and New York. (Portland Press Herald) Over major recalls occurred starting in 2007, with major companies such as Nestle Tollhouse, Peanut Corporation, Kraft Chicken Strips, Hallmark Beef, and Cargill ground turkey. The outbreaks of Salemonilla, E. Coli, Listeria bacteria, and failure to follow federal regulations (Business Insurance)

Maine Local Food Movement (Actions)

- **Late 60's-** First food co-op in Maine, based in Hallowell. Arranged trucks to the Boston market. Driven by incentives of higher quality and financial reasons, cheaper food (Ross and Viles)
- **1971-** MOFGA (Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association) formed. Brought together a core group of interested farmers. MOFGA started with local chapters until it became a bigger organization. It began as a place to share information, tips, farmer's sharing equipment. First to have organic extension agent (Jean English). Charlie Gould, a Cooperative Extension Agent in Lewiston, calls a gathering at Thomas Point Beach in Brunswick of the many people who had been calling him with questions about organic gardening and farming. Scott and Helen Nearing were guest speakers, and from that meeting, over the winter, came the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).
- **1970s-** University of Maine professor of plant and soil sciences Frank Eggert supports MOFGA, helping the organization connect with the resources of the University. Also, one of the first in the United States to experiment with organic methods (Jean English).
- **1972-**MOFGA established certified organic, with public policy initiatives such as a "No-spray Register," organic food labeling, and a campaign focusing on hazards of pesticide drift. They work closely with Cooperative Extension to promote organic agriculture (Jean English) (MOFGA).
- **1975-** MOFGA begins apprenticeship program to teach new farmers (Jean English).
- **1977-** First Common Ground Fair takes place, spreading the word about MOFGA and organic and small farms in Maine (MOFGA).
- **1978-** FEDCO seed company is founded in Maine (Jean English).
- **1988-** University of Maine developed one of the first sustainable agricultural programs. The program developed since there was nothing else, everything was falling away. Matt Liebman was

hired in the 1980s as an extension agent and created the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. The Cooperative extension offers a Master Gardener program and the Maine Harvest for Hunger Initiative, volunteers glean commercial fields and community and home gardens. Providing education and new research (Ross and Viles)

- **1989-** Jill and Charlie Agnew of Willow Pond Farm and Orchard in Sabbathus start the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm in Maine and proved that the model could succeed (MOFGA).
- **1995-** Russell Libby the executive director of MOFGA starts a campaign to get Maine families to buy \$10/week worth of Maine-grown food in order to keep \$100 million more in the state economy each year (MOFGA).
- **1996-** Crown O' Maine Organic Cooperative (COMOC) in North Vassalboro, emerged with the rise of market demand for local organic food, COMOC is supplied by organic farms and CSAs throughout Maine and supports natural food stores, organic food markets, buying clubs, and a number of restaurants, which are generally located in tourist areas and some of the state's larger communities (Ross and Viles).
- **1999-** Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) was created to help protect farmland, both directly through its own projects, and by helping Maine's numerous local and regional land trusts undertake projects of their own. FarmLink program places next-generation farmers on land. Farm Viability projects, current farmers prosper, through direct assistance and innovative community projects (Maine Farmland Trust).
- **1999-** MOFGA forms the Journeyperson Program as a next step for people who have some agricultural background but are not yet ready to buy a farm and start their own business (Jean English).
- Revitalization of downtowns leads to boost rapidly increasing local food movement. As small-scale farming is increasing, farmers need to find outlets to sell their products. Reviving downtowns are building stronger and more resilient local food systems (Maine Public Broadcasting Network).
- **2011-** Local Food and Community Self-Governance Ordinance of 2011 in four towns Local town ordinance passed in Appleton, Livermore, Sedgwick, Penobscot, Blue Hill, Trenton, Hope and Plymouth. It would indicate that the citizens of the town support the right of their community to produce, process, sell and purchase local foods (Portland Press Herald).

Government Policies

- 1984 Food Policy of Maine (Maine Department of Agriculture).
- Farm Bill, with a shift from corporate agriculture subsidies to farmland protection, conservation, and community-based healthy food systems (American Farmland Trust),
- Government assistance is available in the form of grants in order to help farmers create thriving business plans to increase the success of Maine farms. One of the programs available is the Maine Farms for the Future Program (FFF) is a competitive grants program offering business planning assistance and implementation funds to Maine farms. FFF exists because the State of Maine recognizes that farmers are innovators who often lack the time or resources to research ideas, analyze markets and crunch all of the numbers before launching new enterprises or production systems on their farms. (Maine Department of Agriculture).

WHY LOCAL FOOD IN MAINE

--LAND IS CHEAP

-- LOTS OF RAIN (no need for irrigation)

--HERITAGE of local farm (know quality of food)

--ECONOMIC-- along coast-- out of state tourism-- bringing money in-- quality and quaintness

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