

“... if we pool our resources, look what we can do rather than doing it on our own.” That is when things like crowd funding comes in too because you can tap into community resources and pay them back, literally in meat in this case. I think the cooperation element is critical. A movement isn’t a movement with one person. A movement is about lots and lots and lots of people and you don’t change anything on your own, you change it collectively. People united will never be defeated... the movement is gaining momentum and a voice and people are coming to support it and lend their voice and that is why the radical optimist says: “We are going to win.” Because they are, they are all getting involved and it is exciting!

Tammi Jonas¹

President of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance² (AFSA) and former chair of AFSA’s producers’ branch Fair Food Farmers United (FFFU)

Adele Wessel (AW). Tammi explain what you do, what your position is and where you live.

Tammi Jonas (TJ): I am a free-range pig and cattle farmer and a butcher on our property where we have our own boning room and we sell entirely through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model funding, and also the President of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance which is fighting for people’s right to access nutritious and culturally appropriate foods, and promoting everybody’s right to determine their own food and agricultural systems.

¹ Interviewed by Adele Wessel, August 30, 2016 in Kingscliff, New South Wales. Please note, this interview has been edited for length and continuity, and should not be taken as a verbatim transcription.

² <http://www.australianfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/>

AW: People would describe you as a food activist...do you accept that label?

TJ: Yes, I get that all the time. I think it is a fair label.

AW: What is your ultimate goal? What do you hope to achieve?

TJ: It is a pretty huge goal, right, for food to be “soil to stomach” or increasingly I am saying: “paddock to paddock.” So, the whole life cycle of food right back to what gets composted in the end. I think the ultimate goal is that all animals are raised with care and attention. They are raised on paddocks, not in sheds, they are not in this horrible air of those conditions of intensive agriculture. Workers are all treated and paid fairly for their efforts like we do in other industries. That is not just farm work but food workers, as we also know that the food processing industry is notorious for exploiting labor, particularly, migrant labour. It is also that we get back to a world where people value and eat mostly whole foods, and the processed food is not the norm. I would love it if everyone ate like I do, which is a ridiculous thing to say, but it needs to be from the moment you put the seed in the ground or feed an animal on the paddock, to the moment somebody eats that food and manages not to waste it in their household, and then the remnant (not ‘waste’), is put back to soil again. That would be a fair system.

AW: What kind of strategies do you use to work towards those sorts of goals and which ones would be the most effective?

TJ: They are super varied. I think my training as a cultural theorist, particularly in cosmopolitan theory, has really helped me with strategies, and also being an activist of sorts my whole life in various ways. They are very personal strategies and they are very broad stroke political strategies. One is just role modeling, one is simply living what a fair food system looks like. Being what we consider a fair food farmer. Where our animals are treated properly, our workers are treated properly, it is a beautiful place to be. As Joel Salatin in America says, our farms should be an aromatically and aesthetically pleasing place to be, and it is, and people want to come there because it is. Be fed beautiful long lunches of preserves and ferments and cures and all the things that we and our friends and community

make and share all the time. That is the kind of personal way that I do it. When I am out having conversations about what we are eating, not lectures because I think that is really boring for people, talking about the pleasure of making the choices that I do, they look limiting to some people. I won't eat pork or poultry off a menu because it is never actually free range, but I always ask about it, just to raise awareness but always with good cheer. Always with an, "oh but look there are all these other lovely things on the menu", I will have those and I do that really really intentionally. That is the kind of role modeling and just daily questioning, but then there are broader strategies. This year we are running the campaign for the legal defence fund for farmers who are facing property burdens, regulation and planning schemes that are outdated; in that campaign we are actually, again, doing kind of something that is very personally empowering for people with our protest potlucks – the "you can't buy what I eat potlucks". In those people bring all the things that they make and share. We are talking about venison stews and rabbit ragu and cured meats that they have made in the sheds and lots of vegetables and foraged apple cider and all of these things that are very empowering for people, because it is them taking control of their own food systems. Rather than telling them you can't bring supermarket chips or bread and you need to bring what you have made, we simply say, bring the most delicious things you have made yourself and they are the best potlucks I have ever been to because people really turn it on. Yeah, I made a raw milk ricotta from the milk we got from my cow. That is a very delicious way to entice people to fight for things. Again, you don't have to tell them why it is better, they actually take it into their very bodies and becomes part of their fight as well. The other side of that strategy, though, is the political dimension, we are meeting with ministers and we are explaining to them what farmers are trying to achieve and how much farmers and butchers for that matter, care about food safety and the accountability that farmers have about our direct relationships. I know when my CSA members birthdays are, can you imagine I make their child sick? They ask me to make them sausages for children's birthday parties. I would know if they got sick from my sausages. Food safety is really important to me. I have been doing self-study in microbiology to keep improving on my practise and to make sure the food is safe. That is what we tell ministers, this is how important it is to us.

AW: Because you see that as an inhibiting factor in the food service issue and that is "why you can't buy what I eat".

TJ: Yes, the food safety regulations are a huge inhibitor. With all good intent they were set up for long industrial supply chains. Those supply chains are long and there are a lot of risk points in a system like that. A system like ours that has two of those squares instead of twelve in the flow chart is a much lower risk system. So, we need to be regulated slightly differently, whether it is frequency of audits or frequency of testing or sample size for testing. I have to send the same number of samples off as [an industrial meatpacker]. They will do 7,000 ton in a week. I do 7,000 ton of fresh meat a year. So, it is not the same thing and it shouldn't be measured as though it is.

We are having those conversations with Ministers but at the same time writing publically about these concerns and forcing a public accountability for the government and its regulators because nobody else is doing that. Nobody else is saying that we are meant to be accountable, the regulators make it so, but what about them? They are actually here to serve the public and they are not serving the public's interest while they are crushing innovation from the small scale, community embedded, farmers and makers. The strategies are really complex. As a cultural theorist, one of the things that I find intellectually enriching is choosing the disgressive mode for each of those strategies. Thinking about how I speak to the Shadow Minister from the Nationals compared to the Minister from Labor, compared with the farmer, compared with the butcher. They are all slightly different conversations but always about the same thing.

AW: Are some of those things coming to you to as the President of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) through that network? People raise those issues with you?

TJ: Yes, it is both. Because Jonai Farms has had such a big voice in its own right as a farm that took supply chain control. We were the first ones to crowd fund major infrastructure in agriculture. So, people come to us just because of Jonai and they have never heard of AFSA. Then, increasingly as we have been building up AFSA's profile they come to me because of AFSA and they learn about Jonai afterwards. So, they come into it from both directions.

AW: In terms of alternative or new food systems some of the new models that are emerging are around collaboration and cooperation. Could you talk about what you think might be most effective in terms of those things, and whether you see some new or emerging ways of modelling that?

TJ: I think there is lots of cooperation and collaboration going on in loads of informal ways. There are any number of Facebook pages, for example, that are for farmers or butchers who are on there asking each other questions about the problem they have.

AW: Yes, that is a new thing, having to share that way?

TJ: Yes, definitely. Social media has been a brilliant enabler of cooperation amongst all these different parties. The farmers have all these sorts of friendships that they form through Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. The logical conclusion of that is that they end up meeting in person as well.

“Deep Winter” was a brainchild, I suppose, of that. Last year was the first gathering, this year we had the second one. It is the coming together of small-scale farmers and our allies. The connections are Farmer’s Markets, Managers and Chefs. We come together and we share our successes and failures – and also importantly retreat to that space to nourish ourselves in each other. Especially those of us that do a lot of public face stuff. It is a place to go and just be, instead of teach everyone else what needs to happen. There is this idea about farmers being isolated, the world that I live in is the most connected community I have ever been in in my life. This movement of farmers is super connected and we are constantly keeping the field open so that others that don’t know about this wonderful world of the movement find us. We bring them in so that they can feel like they are not out there on their own either. Keep it as open and positive as possible. That is the informal, but I think there are more formal collaborations starting. You’ve got vegetable farmers that are starting to talk about things like alternating their crops so that they can run a year-round CSA jointly with another farm. One would cover the autumn/spring season and the other would cover your winter/summer. Whatever. That sort of collaboration is just beginning really. It is exciting to watch, I am not a vegetable farmer but I love watching those kinds of conversations.

AW: That sounds like it is probably a geographical thing as well. So, that would be important in terms of people sharing with each other and knowing about seasons, conditions, and environment?

TJ: That is deep knowledge of where they are and what they can and can't grow. I think box schemes are part of this story. Food Connect being the most famous and the first really big one in Australia. They have been going 11 years. These kinds of enablers are the connectors as we call them. The ethical middleman, people also call them. They started with that earnest desire to connect farmers to eaters in a genuine way, to really know farmers, but for them to aggregate enough produce to export it to the middle man and get it to the eaters. It has proven to be an incredibly difficult model to be viable because the elephant in the room is that if you want to pay the connector appropriately for their labor, squeezing farmers is the old method, we don't like that. The new method is that you have to pay more for the food but good luck with that. Culture is not responding that well to paying much more in those kinds of schemes. They have to stay competitive with the other sources where people are get their food. I think that in animal agriculture it is slightly different. People are paying more because of the ethics of raising animals but I think that is a harder sell even with beautiful organic vegetables.

AW: But that seems to me about multiple stakeholders and the importance of people working together along that food chain. If people aren't selling directly, for instance, they are still those issues about sale and about transport and that sort of thing. So, working with all those people can become quite important.

TJ: It is and I think people like Robert from the Food Connector are really really good at it. They manage relationships really well and the complicated logistics of that sort of work as well. They manage their farmers really well. They don't manage their farmers, they look after their farmers really well. I think it is good, it's just really tough. I don't think we have seen a good example of a better scheme that is just flourishing because they have nailed what the business model should look like. Then the other collaborations that we have been doing: our region is looking at a cooperative to build ourselves a new abattoir; and Mary Valley up in Queensland is doing exactly the same. They already have a cooperative Mary Valley Co-Op and now the Co-Op has formed a working group that is working towards exactly the same project.

AW: Why is that important to you? Having a new abattoir rather than using the one that might be available and set up elsewhere?

TJ: A number of reasons. One, our current abattoir it is an industrial abattoir, so most of the trucks coming in there are dropping off a couple of thousand pigs at a time. I hate that about it, that it is the end to what was a horrible life for those pigs. I don't like taking our pigs to be there amongst that. On the other hand, it is a very professional place and I don't think animals are mishandled there. I think they are treated respectfully, and use this carbon dioxide stunning, which is considered best practise; very small abattoirs have struggled to keep up with that technology because of the cost. So, then we have to hold an hour and I would like to hold only 15 to 30 minutes. I would like to kill them on the farm but they are not going to let us do that.

The other thing for me is I have started to really get my head around what radical transformation looks like ... kind of "capitalism needs to die" sort of thing, which is all well and good to say but what does that actually mean? Most people aren't saying that, mostly the radical Marxists, but I am starting to get an idea of what that really means to the food system. What does make sense to people is that our public utilities used to be public and roads are still a publically owned thing but oh no, we have started selling those and having tolls too. But when you think about water and electricity and phone and roads and all the things that used to be in the public for the public good, owned by the public—so should food?

Your supply chain, whether it is your processing or your distribution or storage and sale, all of those things, if they were all in not for profit models, if there were no shareholders behind any of them, if they were just operators—as in they determine what is a fair wage for them and they get to earn just as much as anyone else and take their holidays. All the same normal things in society that everyone deserves, housing and food, but there is no extra being skimmed off to pay somebody who happens to have enough capital to invest in that because this is how that cycle has just perpetuated and we are doing that off the back of farmers right now with the processing and distribution in particular. Take an abattoir, turn it into a cooperative that is owned by the farmers, but also perhaps the eaters in that community and the workers in the abattoir. Some of the workers will be the farmers

anyway. Have it a not for profit model so that all funds go back into maintaining the facility and upgrading as necessary, providing more services whether it is the members, workers or for the people they feed. You just aren't going to have something that can turn into this beast that starts turning farmers away because they don't want to do small scale kills because – that is what is happening increasingly. They are not going to treat animals poorly because the farmers and eaters are invested in ensuring those animals are treated properly right up to the moment of death. And you are going to have this trusted regional brand coming through there and the whole region can then thrive knowing I only get dead local meat. I have been calling it “dead local meat” because I am from Oregon and [the TV show] *Portlandia* is always top line for me. Can you imagine if you said: “I only buy dead local meat.” Some people probably wouldn't like that but I think it is hilarious.

AW: So, what do you see as some of the major challenges that you face in achieving the kind of goals that you want?

TJ: Getting people to collaborate and trust each other for that kind of collaboration and to set up an actual Co-Op is hard, even in a region like ours where the growers are very close and do a lot of sharing. People get very nervous, especially when it is about putting skin in the game – money, and knowing I have to trust you (and 8 or 30 other people) with that money just as much as myself. I think that is hard. Generally, I think our society is very bad about trust around money. We are the only people I know who share our profit and loss and tell everyone what we earn because we want the food system to be transparent. Working with others and helping them step over that line is going to be very interesting.

I think we still have problems with regulations and planning. The regulations won't be so much of a problem, with my boning room, setting up an abattoir, sure it is hard, you do have to meet all the standards, but they are not actually unreasonable standards in most cases. The ones that are unreasonable standards, same as the ones with the boning room, you just have to take those on one at a time and lobby for reform. The planning is probably going to be a bigger issue. Nobody wants an abattoir close to them and farm zones have permitted use for abattoirs in Victoria, I am not sure about all the other states. So, one of us could give up a parcel of our land for an abattoir. That might be the simpler solution rather than having to go off and having to buy land somewhere. But then I suppose a lot of farmers

wouldn't want an abattoir on their land either. So, planning the right site is going to be a challenge. So, that is the kind of thing, thinking more broadly about cooperation, there is the trust but also there is the logistics of how to set up these new systems. I don't think it will be hard to convince people that a not for profit is a good thing in an abattoir. I think that will be readily agreed, especially in a Co-Op model, but convincing them to work solidly together, to get things over the line, both schemes are the same, and try and work them together and farmers working with their communities. Getting people to genuinely collaborate is actually hard in our society.

AW: And it is time consuming.

TJ: It is super time consuming and most of us are not exactly time rich. We are not eating bonbons on the beach.

AW: So, more generally in terms of transforming the food system – you talked earlier around fair wages, fair prices for things, what are the challenges to being able to achieve those things?

TJ: One of the biggest challenges in the food system for being really fair in terms of money is how little the public is prepared to pay for food. Farmers, I know, they want to pay their workers fairly and some of them really struggle to do that because they are not even really paying themselves much. But they need extra help. So that is where you get a lot of the WWOOFing [Willing Workers on Organic Farms] and internships and lots of various forms of knowledge–labour exchanges which in many cases are totally fair and not an exploitative relationship, but in others they are probably exploitative. They are sometimes exploitative the other way too. I have seen WWOOFers and they are on a free wicket. I think it is something we have to always be on top of.

We test our system to make sure everything we do is fair. We go for a long period without an intern to see if the farm runs fine without them; if it couldn't, we would just pay interns and instead we have them as volunteers. They learn the whole system and they are not required to do anything. If they want to take a day off, they take a day off. We find they are so excited to be there, they are mostly don't take a day off, but they know that that option is

there. So, I think until we push people to pay a little bit more for their food that is going to continue to be a real challenge for the industry.

Actually, I am trying to work with NUW [National Union of Workers] at the moment on some of the work they are doing to improve the awards for horticultural, pastoral and the meat industry. I want to get in early with them and say: “This is awesome that you are doing this, how about we set up some meetings with small scale farmers because you are going up to the big guys. You are going after the Coles and Woolies [big chain foodstores] who we know are treating their workers poorly, but when you improve the award, that is going to have an impact on the small-scale farmers too. You are going to want buy-in from them from the beginning. You don’t want them coming back and saying the unions are ruining it for all of us. We should be working together.” Again, these are those collaborations for me. I am always thinking about who we should be forming alliances with because they are doing good work for fair food in another space. Animal welfare is not a problem – everyone agrees in the movement of how you should be treating animals. That is not hard, the workers is harder though, way harder.

AW: The question around food, though, if the focus is just on paying more for food, that is going to be a difficult end to achieve, but if it was paying less for other things so that that money could go there, I mean, in Australia we spend way too much money on communications and accommodation.

TJ: Yes, we do. I know and we are super aware of that but it is kind of like when people say: “If you are on a limited wage you can’t afford this kind of food.” The fair food movement can’t solve structural poverty. I think paying slightly more of your wage for food and accounting for that elsewhere, I think that conversation is actually going reasonably well. That is why I want to write this book with a bunch of other farmers where we will show the true cost of raising the food. You just have to keep telling the story. If you keep telling how much it costs to grow it, increasingly they will accept that they are going to have to pay that. Again, I don’t think you beat them over the head with it. You tell them beautiful stories and you tell them hopeful stories but you show them real stories.

AW: Do you want to expand on that a little bit then, just in terms of what you see as the greatest opportunities at the moment for those sorts of changes?

TJ: I think there are heaps of opportunities everywhere and the democratization of information is a big part of that. Again, back to social media where anyone can tell their story and more importantly lots of people can tell their stories. The more of these voices that are out there the better. People hosting the next potluck this coming weekend, they got a huge amount of press in the ABC and they wrote to me and said, “Do you want me to send them to you to interview?” and I said: “No, you guys have got this, more voices are better.” And it has been brilliant because now we have another strong voice out there. A young farming couple, just about to have their first child, telling the same stories that I have been telling and that other farmers have been telling. So, the more of us that are telling that then the more the government has to listen. They can’t think of it as just some single interest but also the more the population seems to be aware of these things that are happening. Potlucks are genius. They are so good because everybody wants to eat that food and when you tell them that there are laws on the books that say they can’t, they get riled up. They don’t like it. When you say to them, these laws will probably never be enforced but they are all in the books. You can’t bring your venison stew to my house it is illegal and they go “What!”

AW: I guess the other thing about cooperation and collaboration is with a collective voice, if you have 8 or 9 farmers who want to get together and do the abattoir for instance, they are connected economically to local region, so you have a stronger voice rather than just one farmer saying “this is my family’s livelihood”.

TJ: Absolutely! It is a funny mix of some strong history of collective movements in country, and yet there is the flip side of the lone ranger out there who is so independent and stoic; tapping into the collective side of this culture is important and not always easy. I think when you talk dollars to them and you say: “Look if we pool our resources, look what we can do rather than doing it on our own.” That is when things like crowd funding comes in too because you can tap into community resources and pay them back, literally in meat in this case. I think the cooperation element is critical. A movement isn’t a movement with one person. A movement is about lots and lots and lots of people and you don’t change anything on your own, you change it collectively. People united will never be defeated. We have more

than doubled the membership of AFSA this year because the movement is gaining momentum and a voice and people are coming to support it and lend their voice and that is why the radical optimist says: “We are going to win.” Because they are, they are all getting involved and it is exciting!

anything we've done. Nothing has been: "Good idea, just put it there." So, get a champion, a partner, and hire good consultants to write your documents.

Then once you have this done, media. I'm very savvy with the media, so anything we've done, any launch of a new program, the mayor is there, signing it off. Press releases, our media coverage has been amazing. When we haven't had something go our way, I knew how to get that back on track too with letters to the editor and support. If a door closed, it was that a door closed—I could figure that out. I remember when I first talked about gleaning, it was so funny because the planner at the time said, "Why would we put fruit trees in the park? We wouldn't eat the fruit. We just can't have people eating the fruit." I remember thinking, "Oh, my," and then ten years later they're the biggest supporter of gleaning. They've put a community garden in the park. Initially, there was no way we could get a community garden in the park, that was for the park! You could never put a garden in there because of the liability and everything. And now we have two or three, but I knew we would.

Once again, a perfect example, I have so many examples to share, but this is just one: public produce. This was an idea we had, it's just growing food in public spots, which is not a new idea, but it hadn't really come to BC yet, the name public produce. However, Montreal was very into it. So we thought, "Who's the expert of public produce?" and it was Darren Nordahl from the States. In his latest book he has a whole chapter on Kamloops. So we brought him out, once again through the City of Kamloops we got a \$5,000 social planning grant and partnered with master gardeners. I'm not a farmer. I have a community garden but I can barely grow anything, but I know who can grow so I'm more the front person, right? They all laugh at me at the Food Policy Council. But anyhow, we knew we needed to do that. We brought Darren in. We had such good media coverage. The room was packed with planners, it was amazing. That's where one of my mentees, who's now with the city, she was a student that came in. And I'm really good at people that just walk in the office: "I'm a third year nutrition student. I want to get an internship." I'll say, "Oh, come! Work." She was between jobs: "I just need some experience. I love food." I said, "Oh, good!" So basically she volunteered to get this thing off the ground and then we got a little bit of money and we could pay her. We've always been able to cultivate volunteers and get some money to pay them. And now she's working for the city. Look at all the experience she has,

and now she's writing all the communications for the city and has a special place in her heart for food policy.

Here's another example: *Best Practices in Urban Agriculture*⁹ With all that experience, once again we hired a consultant that the city uses and developed a best practice guide. This guide has gone all over North America. It's probably one of the more popular hits that we have on our website. That's just an example of something: put on a workshop, call people together, and then the person who wrote this document was a volunteer who is a planner. We really managed to get people to contribute with their passion. It's not like we're paying \$20,000 for a document. If we were to hire him to do that, it probably would cost over \$10,000, but he did it complimentary. So we leverage expertise with the project.

We don't take on too much at one time – this is what we did for five years. So now it's done, and the city has a public produce site and it's in the urban plan. Now gleaning is our latest thing, and then we want to get onto yard share. We try to do something well over five years and then move onto something else. Don't let the obstacles get in your way because there's tons of obstacles. If we were to have that negative mindset, a can't do mindset, then we just wouldn't be doing it. I also would go to city council twice a year just for the good news stories, not asking for anything. Just to say, "Oh, here are the great things you're doing! Look at the public produce!" and bring them all a basket of public produce. It's just all about how you keep everybody in the mindset that it's all everybody's idea, we're all working together.

LH: So much of your focus sounds really hyper-local. It sounds like it's coming out of a really deep care for Kamloops as a community, and the people that live here and relationships that you've built here, but yet, at the same time, your work has had national influence, definitely, maybe even international.

LK: Well, whenever I get asked I speak at a lot of international conventions. Whenever there's a convention I will put in a proposal or an abstract, and now I get asked to speak at various conferences. Across Canada I've done lots, I just spoke at Dieticians of Canada last year on food security and the dietician's role. I'm always looking at what is out there

nationally and presenting on the national stage. I get asked to do a lot of presentations. That is always a big part of it too because, once again, I'm using this as my community and I can't spread myself too thin, but I can share. I really am about sharing with other areas. For example, now I'm working in Salmon Arm to develop the same thing we've done in Kamloops. So I've always shared, as time permits, definitely. That's why I do the resources because initially I had so many people calling me. My masters is in education anyhow, so I'm all about education. I just share everything.

Our website now is totally being redone to post more of our resources and we have a whole communications group. I find that I'm not burned out because I still love what I do, but I don't have the skill set anymore. I still have the passion but I'm fifty-six and I've been doing this since my early twenties. I want people to take charge, and I would rather just come when they need me to go to city council, or I have such good connections. So if I need to call somebody up it's, "Who do I need to go call? Okay, just send me off there." I told the Food Policy Council that I'm hoping that we'll have that leadership there and they can just call me in when they need me.

LH: What have been some of the challenges or obstacles that you've faced?

LK: The whole education around food security, and people's thinking about food banks, just the whole culture shift. We're not food secure so it's a whole education around first, food poverty, people think "Oh, you're using the food bank because you're lazy," and there was major education about that whole area. And we all could be food insecure in three days if there is an earthquake in Hope, so that's always been a challenge. Even now, people don't go to the farmers' market, they think the food is too expensive, but they'll shop at Walmart. The biggest challenge is changing people's ideas about the local food system and understanding that it is vulnerable.

The biggest challenge initially was working with local government and them not seeing the need for more community gardens, questioning why we would need that. When you're not educated about food security, you just have too many other priorities, it just gets pushed aside. Social issues with councils, it was all roads and fire department, it wasn't really about

the infrastructure and the social plan. We didn't have a social plan so I was very involved with the development of the first one which I think was in 2006—any meeting there was about social planning, or affordable housing, or the social determinants of health, food is one of them, I went to all of them. And that was a challenge because it took a while for that education. Now, you can't even open up anything without talking about food insecurity, rising food prices—now, everyone's talking about it but back in those days you couldn't get people to really pay it any attention. Then of course the challenge is that everything is done on volunteers, so financial challenges. Nothing really new that any other organization wouldn't experience. We're still being challenged now with financial reporting, we don't have the appropriate skill set in that department. We've done well, farmers are really good at action but administration wise that's a real challenge. We've done everything out of this address, this is the address for all of our documents right here, we don't even have a building, we don't even have a desk, we don't even have a computer.

LH: OK, so if we shift to doing some forward thinking, where do you see the greatest opportunities for change or work coming up?

LK: Now we have a community food centre opening at the Mount Paul church, so that's really exciting. I just see more partners coming, there's more people wanting to look at funding us, the city wants to work closely with us. I feel like it's just the time, we've arrived with where we need to be, and it's just once again, getting the resources to accomplish. In the Food and Urban Agriculture Plan, there's lots of fabulous suggestions and projects to get this going, to get that going, and we're named in some of them, and we're lucky if we even get one or two of them done. I just feel like with more infrastructure and more funding and support, we need a proper executive director. Whether that's two part-time people, we don't know what that looks like, but we need to have someone ongoing that can build the infrastructure and just keep moving forward. We'll be getting an office now at the community food centre, so that will be great once we have an office with a filing system cause right now you can see I've got everything everywhere. We've got so many resources and manuals, all of these resources have gone everywhere, and since then people have done their own.

I always kept in touch with what was happening in Toronto. I always looked at other successes. Debbie Field was a mentor of mine too, so Toronto FoodShare, whatever Toronto FoodShare did I wanted. I've gone for tours there and been involved when they had the very first food security conference at Ryerson University which was the first food security hub. It was so cool to meet with everyone from the UK, all over, who was doing food security. I went on a tour of FoodShare, anything they have, if it was out there I would just take it and modify it, so I didn't feel I ever had to create my own program—although sometimes it wasn't out there and you had to create it—but usually there was someone who did something and I would just cut and paste it to my community.

LH: And did you find that was effective?

LK: Yes, totally.

LH: Even with the differences? I mean, Toronto's obviously a completely different environment.

LK: Yeah, we figured out how to do it, once again, as a group: here's what it is, we'd always do the PowerPoint first, here's what they did, and what we could do. We always did the SWOT: what's our strengths, what's our opportunities? We'd all do it, we'd figure out how to make it go, we'd apply for money and then we'd hire a coordinator. Everything was the same system, and then we'd get that going. But we never evaluated it that well, that was probably one of our problems, but we knew it all was working because it was working! You move ahead, right. Looking back, at one point we did a food security report card, that was something we did, "Where are we at now?" and then we used that as a tool. Now it's a capacity building tool, from Health Canada, that's what we're all using, and that's what we've been putting into our evaluations.

LH: Can you talk about some of the forms of cooperation and collaboration that you've used so far? You've definitely talked a lot about the importance of that and the importance of building networks, but given shifts in things like social media that are so prominent now do you see that type of work in terms of collaboration changing in the future?

LK: Oh, absolutely. And that's where I've passed it on to the other board members in communications because we have a Facebook page and all of our social media, we're trying to put our interviews up there and on our website. That's where it needs to go, absolutely, and that makes it easier for us too because you can find things, like we're using google drive now. I think in terms of collaboration and trying to keep up with the technology, and then sharing resources with others and just working together, what I'm finding now is I'm just getting tired of trying to keep up with everything because in the old days you knew exactly who was doing everything.

We always have to be collaborating. That's where I think we've done well because we're totally the most collaborative group. Anyone could come to the meetings, and if they don't come for a few months, it's just free-flowing. There's not a closed shop. I know this with some of the other food policy councils, for example, I've been working with the Salmon Arm one, they don't have the big potluck. The board meets once a month, it's just four people. We have a board now, but we didn't have a board until two years ago. That's one thing we had to change because our monthly potluck was the board meeting – people were on the board but it was just names on a sheet to go the society. But, when we became a registered society we knew we had to have a separate board, so that's been a growing development. We did a strategic plan for ourselves, and we had to get much more organized to meet the qualifications for a registered society, so now the board meets once a month and the bigger group meets as well. We definitely have more work to do there, that's a work in progress. Right now we need to be doing a strategic planning session in the new year, someone needs to be taking that on. Normally I'd be leading all that but I need to step back from that. There's always a request, I just got a request for the twelve-month farmers' market, they're having a meeting Monday morning, and people always invite me because I've been the face of the food policy council. So I email it out, "Can anyone go to this, can anyone go to that?" just trying to break up the work load, it's a big workload now, because everyone wants you to be part of their committee.

LH: Yeah, it's a huge organization and it seems to me the food policy council is the biggest grassroots organization in the city?

LK: I think for the sustainability of it, for the length of it, I would agree with you, because I've been around, I think things have come and gone and other than something like an agency that started where they have a big budget, I'd think it is one of the largest grassroots organizations. That's a challenge too, I don't want it to change either. That's why we were so afraid of hiring an executive director. No one even wanted to call it that. We spent two meetings saying: "Nobody's directing us, we don't want a director," so then we called them an animator, the food security animator. Then we went to the United Way who is helping us, and they said "We don't know what an animator is," so forget that idea, nobody knows what that is. Then we had the idea for a manager, so we've kind of settled on community food action manager. I think the board is afraid to hire one person, I don't blame them, they want to have someone managing food action, but maybe it would be three people managing, a leadership team. We're going to be really creative with our model because it's not a top-down, top-heavy organization, so the executive director model doesn't really work for us. We want to all work collegially and collaboratively and not have one person running things. But then the problem is that we have these small contracts, and then nobody really had the financial contract, "Geez, who's doing the financial?" We laughed too, honestly we have the meetings and it's such a fun group. I don't know how we're doing what we do but somehow we always seem to get it done, and I think that's the benefit of it. I know if I step away it's still good and that's successful community development. Actually, the reason I haven't retired yet is that I can't retire until I really feel like this baby is a teenage or young adult. I thought I better stay until the spring and just see, because when I do go, I'm probably going to have to go away, I probably don't want to be in phone contact, I have to step away, otherwise I'll just keep working. I don't mind volunteering, I volunteered for so long, but I want to start going and doing other fun stuff. So, I'll be spreading my wings and go do something different.

I honestly don't think we've figured this out yet, so we have to figure it out, because you do ultimately have to have someone in charge. Whether that's a more administrative one, we have to figure out a better model. Apparently there is a model out there for food action groups, someone was sharing this concentric circle model so we're going to try to figure it out. In some ways, even though it's organized confusion we're obviously functional, look how well we've done. That's why we say we can't be too hard on ourselves, because somehow, we do manage to get the money and we do manage to do it right in the end.

An example is the United Way *Seeing is Believing Tour*, they're our funder, and they asked us to be on the tour. They have all the major heads of the banks and everyone on this bus, and they went to the Boys and Girls' Club, and when they came to our place we had it so organized and we had a beautiful event. It was in the Mount Paul church, we had tablecloths and we had all the local squash and we made appetizers with leeks and they came in through this area and the head of the United Way said, "We've never had a reception like this." They couldn't even believe it. The Community Kitchen coordinator came to it, she did all the cooking. Then we showed the PlanH video and had an overview and thanked them. It was beautiful, and you could see they had been raving about the tour and how we had helped the organization, so when we do need to do things we do it right. We just pull these things together and then we all feel proud of ourselves and I think it's because we really feel connected. Everyone feels connected and because there's no one really getting paid a lot, it's not: "Well, they're the executive director. Why should I do it, they're getting paid to do it?" With this job, it was part of my job but I did volunteer too, so nobody thought, "Well, she should be doing it," because everybody knew they each had to contribute. Keeping that going is going to be really important, so we have to make sure we figure that out how to do that.
