



Sample Radio Interview

The following imaginary radio interview is offered as a template for exploring how the conversation about food can be redirected to elevate the importance of food systems and effective reforms. Please note that facts, references, and names included in this interview are for sample purposes only, not for citation.

Host: Good morning. This is Roger Jones of the National Radio Broadcast. Today we are going to have an in-depth discussion of food, fitness and the rising obesity epidemic. With us today are the following panelists:

Dr. Jack Levitt, a pediatrician and public health expert working with the CDC
Mayor Marilyn Martin, from Mid City, USA
Rick Olson, a dairy farmer and owner of Vermont Organic Yogurt,
David Cannon, Executive Director of Good Food Think Tank, and
Cheryl Simple, spokesperson for the Federation for Consumer Choice

Almost two-thirds of American adults, and millions of children are overweight. Dr. Levitt, why is it happening? Too much food and too little exercise?

Move discussion away from consumer choice; create a systems perspective. Connect choices in food production with consequences for people.

Levitt: Well, it isn't that simple. To truly understand what is happening, we have to look at the massive changes in the food production system that have happened in just the last generation. Food today is very different from the food our parents and grandparents ate because of changes in food production. Take high fructose corn syrup, for example. It didn't even exist until 1970, and now the average person consumes about 75 pounds per year, because it is in virtually every processed food. Not only is this an unnecessary sweetener, but it also adds to overeating because it does not tell the brain the stomach is full like regular sugar does. There are many examples of changes in food production that have led to the flawed, out of control food system we have today. Imagine what it will be like for children in this country if we don't take steps now.

Support systems perspective; connect choices in food production with consequences for people. Use the Legacy value.

Host: So then is the answer to avoid processed foods and eat more fresh foods? Mr. Cannon?

Cannon: That is certainly part of the answer, but even with fresh foods we need to look at how choices in food production have consequences. Just continuing to

build on Dr. Levitt's point about how food has changed in the last generation, the same is true of fresh foods. In a study of 43 fruits and vegetables, researchers found significant declines in certain nutrients in the last 50 years. You would have to eat eight oranges today to get the same amount of Vitamin A as your grandparents got from one orange. Imagine what the food system will be like for our grandchildren if we don't take steps now.

Host: That's astounding. What has caused the nutritional decline?

Cannon: There are several possible causes such as relying on chemical fertilizers rather than nutrient-rich soil, or increasingly long-distances for transportation which lengthens the time between farm and plate. Even the plant varieties are different, with commercial growers choosing plant varieties that grow bigger and faster or that are able to withstand travel, but which may not have the same nutrition or taste. The point is that all of these decisions are being made without any oversight or planning for the consequences.

Suggest production choices over which consumers have no control. Connect production choices with consequences.

Host: What kind of consequences?

Levitt: Health consequences for one. Though more and more people are overweight, it is entirely likely that many Americans are undernourished if they are eating empty calories with little nutrition. Deficiencies in certain trace minerals can lead to infertility, cancer, depression and heart disease which are all on the rise in the United States, and which cost our society in skyrocketing health care budgets.

Connect production choices with consequences.

Cannon: Environmental consequences as well. Food increasingly travels hundreds and thousands of miles, polluting the air, using precious energy resources and increasing food costs due to unnecessary transport when we could be relying on agriculture closer to home.

Host: Mr. Olson, you own a dairy farm that makes organic yogurt that is distributed throughout New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. How do you react to this conversation?

Introduce Runaway/ Foundations model of the food system; demonstrate solutions. Use Ingenuity/Can Do values.

Olson: Farmers are the first ones to tell you how worried they are. We have a food system that is running out of control with nobody in charge, and it is affecting the foundations of life that we depend on. Farming chemicals like pesticides and weed-killer are permanently altering our soil and water. Genetic engineering is changing the nature of the plants and animals we eat. And mile-long fishing nets are dragging the ocean floor and altering ecosystems. It doesn't have to be this way. That's why I started Vermont Organic Yogurt – to demonstrate that you can produce food without sacrificing health, nutrition and the environment, and still have an economically successful business. With the vast agricultural resources we have in this country, we can do better.

Host: Mayor Martin, you are the mayor of a city in the middle of the farm belt. Your city was recently named the Good Food Capital of the United States by Sustainable Food Magazine. What is going so right in your city?

Martin: Well, it all started about 15 years ago when the city council realized that our metropolitan area was losing farms. Some farms were developed into housing communities and others were bought up by large corporations that started growing corn, wheat and soybeans for export or processed foods. The country farm stands that were a main benefit of living in the middle of the farm belt were quickly disappearing.

Reinforce systems perspective.

Show successes to demonstrate the system can change.

We realized that we had to act as a community, not just individual consumers. Just as the education and health care systems are essential to a community's quality of life, the food system is essential to our very existence. So we worked together to protect farmland and provide outlets to sell fresh, whole foods. In 1990, only 2% of the food consumed in our city was actually produced within 200 miles of the city. Now, fully 15% comes from our local area. The agricultural economy in our area is thriving and that has a ripple effect on the rest of our economy. We have made progress by making practical changes in our food system.

Host: How did you make that happen?

Provide solutions.

Martin: We started with incentives for small and mid-size farmers to stop the sell-off of farm land. Then we created farmer's markets and produce stands throughout the city, which allow farmers to make more money from the food they grow because there is no middle man. Most importantly, we required that public institutions contract with local farmers whenever possible. So hospitals and schools now get a significant percentage of their food from local farmers, and the kids sure love having the option to eat from a salad bar instead of just processed fish sticks and canned corn. People quickly realize that they feel better, physically and emotionally, when more of their diet is based on fresh, whole foods. Improving our children's health is a big step forward for us as a society.

Host: Cheryl Simple is here, from the Federation for Consumer Choice, which is funded by multi-national food producers and U.S.-based supermarket chains. Ms. Simple, the other panelists seem to be calling for changes in the food system that will result in more locally grown fresh foods. How does your organization respond?

Simple: The U.S. has the best food system in the world and we would be fools to interfere with it. You can walk into a supermarket in Chicago in the dead of winter, and buy a fresh pineapple, or mango. If extremists have their way, Chicagoans wouldn't be able to buy any fresh vegetables in winter because they can't be produced in the local area. How does it help improve health if consumers can't choose fresh fruits and vegetables in winter?

Do not reinforce

Martin: We heard those same ridiculous complaints when we started, but the fact is that we have been able to substantially increase the proportion of our food that is locally grown and we can still offer a variety of fruits and vegetables year-round. Some food continues to be imported, like pineapples and mangoes, but we have also been able to extend our growing season in this area with greenhouses. With a dose of ingenuity, most parts of the U.S. could do exactly what we've done.

Simple: But why change? Consumers can get all the food they want now. Americans don't want to go back to the limited choices their grandparents had in the old days. They want the modern, global system we have today.

Present the concept of sustainability using Legacy language. Give people actions to take as citizens.

Olson: The way we produce food is wasteful and cannot be sustained. Current production practices that rely heavily on farm chemicals are altering our soil and water. The long distances food travels unnecessarily are using up fossil fuels. We have to take responsibility and fix these problems now rather than leave a broken system for our children. We owe it to our children and grandchildren to leave them a system that produces nutritious food in a way that is environmentally and economically sound for the long-term. That means every citizen needs to pay attention to what is happening and get involved where you can, such as asking questions about your child's school lunch program or getting your church or community center to start a farmer's market.

Host: What about lower-income families? It is one thing to say that people should eat more fresh foods, but have you checked out food prices? It is a lot cheaper to eat at McDonalds.

Connect production choices with consequences.

Cannon: Farm subsidies are part of the problem, because they artificially encourage the production of corn, wheat and soybeans, rather than fresh, whole foods. That hides the true cost of processed foods and makes them cheap at the cash register. We could be subsidizing fresh foods instead of ingredients for processed foods and save the consumer money while increasing nutrition and good health.

Reinforce systems perspective, not consumer choice.

Martin: And there is another problem too, that is frequently unrecognized, and that is the problem of access in poor communities. In many low-income, urban communities, there are no supermarkets. Think about that. There may be fast food restaurants on every corner, but no supermarkets. So the only way to get fresh fruits and vegetables is to travel outside your neighborhood, or select from the limited, limp selection at the local convenience store. That's a problem.

Reinforce systems perspective, Runaway/Foundations model, and Legacy value.

Levitt: You know, food is at the center of just about everything in our society. You can't have good health if your food isn't healthy. Children can't succeed in school if they don't get the nutrients they need. According to the Mayor, even our local economies are stronger with a strong agricultural base. The food system

is too important to our lives and our quality of life to let it run amok. We need to get it back under control so it will be sound for the next generation and for generations to come. The ball is in our court.

Host: We're out of time. I'd like to say thank you to my panel of experts and thank you for listening.