Diversifying Local: Expanding the Local Foods Movement to Include Culturally Appropriate Foods

Abbey Haugen
Advisors: Dr. Derek Larson and Diane Veale-Jones
College of St. Benedict and Saint John's University
Environmental Studies Department

Introduction:
The local foods movement offers environmental, economic and social benefits to its consumers, but it is criticized for being limited to white, affluent consumers. How can the local foods movement be more culturally inclusive? Providing local access to culturally appropriate foods can ensure increased involvement of diverse cultural groups. Culturally appropriate foods are foods needed for the traditional diets of various ethnic groups. These specialty foods are typically imported rather than locally available. The traditional diet of Hispanics is of particular relevance to the Central Minnesota area due to a large and growing population of Hispanics.

Methods:
- An extensive literature review of the local foods movement was conducted which included newspaper articles, USDA publications and consumer survey data
- Interviews with local farmers market vendors, CSA members and co-ops to determine barriers to a more diverse movement
- A case study of the local availability of foods for the Hispanic traditional diet was conducted involving a market basket of five main Hispanic foods including rice, beans, tomatoes, chiles and tortillas

Conclusion:
Culturally appropriate foods need to be more available on a local level, to encourage diverse groups to buy locally. The case study of Hispanic foods in Central Minnesota, revealed that most of these ethnic foods are imported and thus not available at a local level, while foods for a typical American diet can often be found locally.

Solutions To the Diversity Problem?
- Improved communication between local producers and consumers through marketing campaigns directed towards marginalized groups
- Education for diverse groups on the benefits of local as well as local availability of their traditional foods
- Support and attention of social justice concerns from funders, policy-makers, scholars and local food advocates