Report from the Agriculture, Gardens, and Foodways Resource Group to the MOMCC Board of Directors

Report Date (meeting conducted March 13, 2020; submitted April 5, 2020)

Resource Group Chairperson: Jon Kuester

Resource Group Reporting Person: Debra Reid

People attending – 13

Meeting held: Saturday, March 13, 2020 (on the Spirit of Peoria)

Meeting Summary and Topics Discussed

                Attendees introduced themselves.

                Discussion revolved around two questions submitted by an attendee prior to the Resource Group meeting: 1) How do we better encourage sustainable ag? and/or 2) How best to educate consumers to shop better? Public interest exists, so how do MOMCC members interpret sustainable agriculture and/or how do they educate consumers?

1. Agriculture is an unnatural act, and the public is not knowledgeable about it. They don’t know what to ask, so basic information about why agriculture is “unnatural” and what practices make agriculture “sustainable” historically (and today) can prompt the public to learn more. What is sustainable agriculture? How do different groups define it historically and today (historic approaches at a time and place, organic farmers, production-scale farmers, living history farms)? Do any MOMCC sites interpret sustainable agricultural practices of the past or the present? Examples raised by attendees included: feeding scraps to livestock, barnyard fowl in farm yards, crop rotation and cover crops (integrated plant management), replenishing soil nutrient loss, reducing soil erosion, water conservation, self-sustaining communities such as Bishop Hill Illinois State Historic Site, the 2018 documentary about sustainable agriculture near Los Angeles (*The Biggest Little Farm*).
2. Consumer education in museums and historic sites can take numerous directions. Living history farms can help guests learn about “Where does your food come from?” because, over the course of a year, guests can learn about how farm families relied on markets for some things, but that they also fed their livestock, and produced, processed, and consumed their own food (at least to the 1930s). General stores in open-air museums and historic villages support interpretation of points of sale for foodstuffs. What about those “middlemen?” More could be done to interpret the public markets (constructed by cities to feed citizens), wholesale grocers, and farmers markets (incorporated by farmers and operated by them) where hotels, restaurants, green-grocers, and non-farm families secured their meat, vegetables, fruits, and other perishable goods. What lessons could be structured around basic definitions (selective breeding compared to genetic modification and biotechnology (see USDA glossary <https://www.usda.gov/topics/biotechnology/biotechnology-glossary> compared to the EU definition <https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo> )? How does that affect health and food security? Examples raised by attendees included: the 2018 documentary that addresses the question “Can we feed the world without destroying it? (*Need to GROW*); sites that do food production & preparation classes (i.e., maple syrup programs), historic canning methods (note health and safety regulations!), review *Interpreting Agriculture in Museums and Historic Sites* (2017) and review *Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine* articles [livestock reprint issue (2011); two reprint issues on food and food preservation (2011-12)]; *Innovation Nation* segment on “Eggs” aired February 2020 (<https://www.thehenryford.org/explore/innovation-nation/episodes/eggs/>) and Tom Vance’s articles on “Historic Breeds of Chickens” (*Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine* Spring 2018) and “Historical Poultry, Part 2: Goble, Honk, and Quack, etc.” (*Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine* Spring2020).

Magazine articles and other publications (actual and submitted)

                Discussion did not result in specifics, but answering the questions raised could support several magazine articles.

Conference sessions and/or presenters (actual and submitted)

                Discussion did not generate specifics but reinforced that the public cares, and MOMCC members can support each other by sharing method and case studies with members through conference sessions (and articles).

Any other activities:

                Facebook or Instagram posts featuring what MOMCC members do help sustain communities (believing that MOMCC decided not to have a twitter presence).

Next meeting topics to be discussed:

                Discussion did not generate specific topics for future Resource Group discussion, but the group benefitted from the opportunity for attendees to write down questions/topics for the group to discuss during the conference and before the group meeting. Looking forward to future conversations!