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Fiorito: Chewing on food as an election Issue

July 21, 2010

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The Canadian Urban Institute gathered together a group of smart people recently, in order to ask why the issue of food did not seem to appear anywhere on the election agenda.

A lively discussion ensued, although it wasn't so much about why food was not on the agenda, as it was about why it ought to be.

Okay, why?

Because there are places in this city where it's hard to find an unprocessed bite to eat. Because in some neighbourhoods the food bank is more important than the corner store. Because we are too fat. Because our kids think it isn't food if it wasn't wrapped in plastic. Because there are a dozen neighbourhoods in Toronto where you can't walk to the store. Because many of us have no garden, nor any place to put one. And because lots of people have no idea how to buy a whole chicken and cut it up, using some of the meat for the grill and making soup from the rest of it.

You get the point.

A useful question, then.

Of the candidates for mayor, only Joe Pantalone showed up. That tells you something about him, and a little more about the others.

The medical officer of health spoke first, about the Toronto Food Strategy. Darlings, I wonder if you knew we had such a thing. I also wonder if you knew that its goals are to protect the environment, promote social justice, foster economic development, support health and celebrate community.

None of that sounds like a bowl of pho to me, with a pair of cha gio on the side. Here, however, I should note that my own personal food strategy is to keep it off my shirt.

But the merest reason we need a food strategy is that this city buys 7,000 meals a day and serves them up in our shelters and childcare centres.

Our food strategy comes with a set of priorities, among them to eliminate hunger, to connect the city to the country, to develop food-friendly neighbourhoods, and to empower residents.

In plain language, if you can't afford the lettuce at the farmers' market, you should grow your own.

An aside: The logo printed on the city's food strategy documents shows fat slices of six different apples, stacked together to form an imaginary apple; of the six kinds, I could only name four.

What a sap?

What a wine sap.

There were more speakers; to them, I merely suggest that speaking from notes is always a good idea, because when you just get up and tell stories off the cuff, you run the risk of . . .

Sorry, my mind wandered.

I have, however, some questions of my own about food and the coming election:

When a developer finishes a neighbourhood, or a renovation in a neighbourhood, why is that developer not compelled to leave a couple of feet of topsoil behind, as opposed to an inch of sod on top of construction rubble?

Why doesn't the city use some of its land to grow its own food and raise its own eggs and distribute the results in public housing?

Why doesn't the city push the airport off the island, and reclaim the fields as farmland?

And why didn't Toronto buy the last Canadian cannery in the Niagara region a couple of years ago, and use it to supply city schools with juice and fruit?

A final thought: in the summer, they teach kids to fish in the swimming pool at Scadding Court. Funny, you can eat what you catch in an indoor pool, but not what you catch from the Humber or the Don.

Why not?

You know who to ask.

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