

FOOD REVOLUTION

JAMIE OLIVER'S

Huntington,
W.Va.



Photo by Chris Terry

Chef Jamie Oliver, filming his first stateside episode in Huntington (left), said he could not have done the show without Turenne's team. "I wish we had Sustainable Food Systems here in the UK," he said. SFS Chef Alden Cadwell (below) gets feedback on new recipes from elementary school children. One mother wrote to the school "What did you do to the corn? My daughter hasn't stopped talking about how good it is!"

By Beth Lorenzini

In August 2009, John Turenne, sr. associate member of FCSI, president, Sustainable Food Systems (SFS), received a call from celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's office.

Oliver and ABC TV were getting ready to film the new reality show, *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution*, with its mission to teach people around the world how to eat more healthfully. The town of Huntington in Cabell County, W.Va., had the dubious distinction of having the most obese population in the US (in a Centers for Disease Control ranking), and it was there Oliver and the network wanted to film the first US season. But to do so, they needed stateside help.

"Jamie and ABC needed a US-based chef/consultant with institutional food and sustainability experience who would be able to help him affect change in the town's school menus. But they had to do it within the district's strict USDA nutrition guidelines and budgetary restrictions," Turenne says.

The goal was to develop new school menus from fresh, whole foods and to source locally when possible. But to make the changes Oliver envisioned, he (with SFS) would need to develop recipes, equip kitchens and train staff to prepare them—all while fighting the status quo and all while filming a major TV network production. "We faced a lot of challenges," Turenne laughs.

To begin, Turenne and his team conducted a thorough assessment of the Cabell County School



foodservice department—menus, facilities at 26 schools, equipment, staffing and competencies—and educated Oliver and his team on the finer points of US school foodservice requirements, food procurement processes and students' dining habits. "Essentially, we needed to give Jamie an idea of what he was walking into," Turenne explains.

Next, SFS needed to select and ready a site from among the schools to become a pilot test kitchen and filming location. Finally, the team needed to collaborate with the foodservice department and West Virginia's Office of Child Nutrition to train the district's 75 foodservice employees.

While the drama of Oliver's fight for healthy food played out on film, Turenne and his team worked furiously behind the scenes to show employees how to cook and serve the more fresh, from-scratch foods. SFS created a culinary boot camp to teach the staff *why* the changes were

Project: Cabell County School District

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Scope of Work: Facilities Assessment, Policy & Procedure Assessment & Improvement, Culinary Training, Coaching, Recipe & Menu Development, Equipment Recommendation, Public Relations, Marketing

needed (mindset) and *how* the changes could be made through more scratch cooking and better recipes (skillset).

Minor equipment purchases, including hand-held immersion blenders, chopper/cutters, food processors, etc., and lessons in cooking techniques convinced skeptical employees that they *could* cook better tasting, healthier food without more labor. “Once they perceived what they could do, we gained their trust and more importantly, they became advocates for the changes,” Turenne says.

Turenne and company reviewed and streamlined the district’s food ordering process. They helped Oliver create and test more than 50 recipes incorporating foods they could get through the USDA program and from local growers (vetted by SFS). “Remarkably, some of our biggest challenges were bureaucratic roadblocks,” Turenne says.

He recounts one meeting with the governor and his staff. “I brought USDA-issue breaded chicken patties with their 32 ‘ingredients’ listed on the label, and USDA 8-cut, whole muscle chicken [ingredient: chicken], and put them both on the table,” he explains. “I told the group ‘We want this,’ pointing to the whole chicken piece, ‘but we’re told we can only get this,’ pointing to the patties.” The moment wasn’t filmed, but it was dramatic, and resulted in state support. SFS went on to identify many whole foods to replace processed foods acquired through the state’s donated food program.

Once the first school was up and running producing the new recipes, Turenne and company took the show on the road to train cooks at all 26 schools over the next six months. “We developed a 3-week cycle menu for the elementary schools and menus for the middle and high school. At this point in time, Oliver and ABC had wrapped production, but through a grant from Cabell Huntington Hospital, the district was able to retain SFS to ensure the initiative was completed successfully.

In fact, community outreach is a critical part of



SFS’ Balanced Approach to Sustainable Change in Food Service model, with its focus on food, facilities, community, communication and fiscal/nutritional responsibility.

Beyond involving the hospital, SFS connected with the community by sourcing local foods, holding family cooking classes at the schools, and organizing a menu club with high school students.

It also effectively communicated the success of the initiative. “We produced materials for Cabell County Schools and Cabell Huntington Hospital newsletters, wrote articles and op-eds for local and national newspapers, and directly contacted the folks behind the White House/First Lady’s ‘Let’s Move’ initiative,” Turenne says. “We wanted to help spread the word and increase awareness about healthy food and healthy choices, and this experience showed how successful a program can be.”

SFS was pivotal in shifting people’s mindsets from concern and apprehension to passionate belief in the power of positive change and the principles of better food. “The Cabell County foodservice employees were the true champions!” he says. The county’s model is sound enough to replicate all over the state and beyond, and the state has taken notice.

The Jamie Oliver project brought John Turenne (above) and SFS a lot of great attention including two additional jobs in W. Va.; one to create the new menu for the Boys Scouts of America’s National Jamboree facility.