

**Observations from the 11th Annual SWMN Conference:
Local Roots – Regional Connections, July 15 – 17th
Marion Kalb, Conference Observer**

1. People in the San Luis Valley are truly amazing! I don't think I've ever heard folks express how they feel about their community in a way that suggests respect for the land and respect for religion. Both are clearly intertwined and appear to have built a strong bond with San Luis Valley residents. At least twice I heard people say they are not concerned about money – beyond what is necessary to live – but want to preserve the beautiful place where they live.

2. The work being done in the Valley is also shows a need to be involved in the policy world. Several folks addressed the policy issues that concerned them. It's wonderful to have key folks involved at this level. I was really impressed by how much folks have jumped in and taken on "the forces that be". A favorite quote of mine is from Gandhi:

First, they laugh at you
Then, they ignore you
Then they fight you
Then you win.

3. The issues surrounding Farm to School in the Valley are similar to others in rural areas. Price, food safety, exclusivity, distribution – these are issues all programs face. To resolve some of them, it's key to *keep moving*. The more farmers and food service understand the issues each of them face, the more you can progress in developing a program. As far as food safety goes, Farm to Table has some excellent resources, and can provide good information in terms of their approach.

4. Jim Dyer is involved in an effort where multiple school districts, led by Durango, are bidding successfully on both produce and meat. What a great success! I would think they would also be a resource. If it hasn't been done already, maybe folks could arrange a field trip to meet food service directors and farmers involved in this effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this event. It was a wonderful learning experience for me.