

Food and Society

I. Building Regional Markets and Communities

Summary

This initiative aims to bring together farmers, distributors and community groups to develop viable regional distribution networks and infrastructures called “values-based supply chains.” Identifying regional suppliers is a key ingredient. Understanding how these distribution networks can work more effectively is essential as businesses scale up successful models in regional food systems. One type of supply chain focuses on farm to institution and farm to school programs. Farm to school programs have been shown to increase school children’s consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and promote healthful food choices. Farm-to-institution programs strengthen relationships between farmers, food services and the community and help students, hospital clients and other develop healthful eating habits. This initiative focuses on understanding how these new supply chains work best and measures their impacts on the environment, farmers’ incomes, and people’s health.

Problem statement/ Baseline

- Small and mid-scale family farmers in California are struggling to stay economically viable with current market conditions. Although gross income has continued to increase for the largest farms, income has been flat or has decreased for small and mid-scale family farmers.ⁱ
- Regional distribution and processing infrastructure is inadequate for many mid-scale producers who want to access regional markets. Concentration in the processing and retailing industries has escalated in the last 25 years.ⁱⁱ
- Many consumers find it difficult to stay healthy in a climate that markets unhealthy food to the youngest and most vulnerable.^{iii, iv} Obesity and diet-related diseases are increasing in our society, especially among children.^v Overweight is now a health problem for pre-school children 2-5 years.^{vi}

Structural issues/ Broad drivers shaping change

- Farm policy and USDA research provides proportionally more support to the largest farms (fewest in number) and to basic agricultural commodities such as corn, soybeans, wheat compared to specialty crops, which include fruits and vegetables.
- Global markets and large agrifood enterprises and retailers have contributed to escalating concentration in the food industry.
- Lifestyle changes including more sedentary habits and lack of health care for many has contributed to an increase in diet-related diseases.
- Massive food advertizing budgets have contributed to poor dietary practices.
- Increasing urbanization has contributed to fewer families coming from farm families or understanding where their food comes from.

Strategic opportunity

- The USDA has launched “Know Your Farmer/ Know Your Food” Initiative.^{vii}
- Large retailers, distributors and food service companies (eg Whole Foods, Walmart, Safeway, Sysco, Sodexo, Aramark, Chartwells, Bon Appetit Management Company) are interested in sourcing locally.
- Schools, universities and hospitals are beginning to source more locally and sustainably.^{viii}
- Communities are looking for ways to connect with regional growers and simultaneously support local economic development.

Desired outcomes

- A greater diversity of distribution networks, infrastructures and marketing initiatives focused on regional, sustainable foods, benefiting regional growers.
- More consumers are aware of where their food comes from and willing to invest in buying and cooking more regional, sustainable food for their families.
- Children consume more healthful, sustainable, regional food at school and learn how it is grown, who grows it.
- Institutional procurement and retail sales shift toward a higher percentage of regional, sustainable foods offered and institutions and retailers aggressively market these foods to their customers.
- Educational programs and materials are available at many entry points (farmers, distributors, food buyers, food service, community organizations) about how they can participate in more sustainable, regional markets.

Key Potential Partners

- Food service directors, school/college/university food service administrators
- Distributors, processors
- Farmers
- Ag organizations, ag/food NGOs (CAFF, Slow Food, Roots of Change, Farm bureaus, commodity groups)
- State, local and national policymakers [especially concerning Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act in 2009/2010; interest from Vilsack, Merrigan]
- Public health departments (local, state), nutrition professionals
- CA Dept of Agriculture
- UCCE (both farm and consumer science advisors, faculty)
- Research community (food system, ag econ, rural soc, nutrition)
- Business leaders, lenders, banks
- Community development organizations
- Regional planners (SACOG, Valley Vision)

Types of Activities

- Connecting Farms to Institutions. Conduct applied research, evaluation and outreach to understand how programs can be more effective in getting regional, sustainable food from “farm to fork” and how such programs might be ramped up.
- Farm to school. Conduct evaluation, applied research, public outreach, and share results with local, state and national policymakers about how to improve and expand programs. We also research the impacts of these programs on children’s consumption patterns.
- Values-based supply chain research. Conduct applied research on new distribution networks that bring regional foods from mid-scale farms to institutions and retailers.
- Fresh fruit/vegetable training for teachers, food service. Train food service personnel, and teachers about how to utilize more healthful, sustainable, regional foods in their school settings.
- Local agriculture marketing research. Conduct applied research on regional (county, region-eg Capay Valley, Sacramento Valley) agricultural marketing organizations or the potential for local marketing campaigns.

ⁱ Data from 2007 Ag Census; graph created by Courtney Riggle, UC Small Farm Center.

ⁱⁱ In the U.S., concentration in grocery retailing has doubled since 1997; five companies now control almost 50% of grocery retailing. In 2006, Wal-Mart’s sales were nearly twice as high as Kroger, the second runner up. Four companies slaughter over 80% of beef in the U.S. (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2007).

ⁱⁱⁱ How marketing influences children and youth is the focus of the 2005 IOM report, Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity? The report provides the most comprehensive review to date of the scientific evidence on the influence of food marketing on diets and diet-related health of children and youth. The study was requested by Congress and sponsored by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The report finds that current food and beverage marketing practices puts children’s long-term health at risk.

^{iv} An NBER study (Currie, DellaVigna, Moretti and Pathania, 2009) on “The effect of Fast Food Restaurants on Obesity” found that a fast food restaurant within 1/10th mile of a school is associated with at least a 5.2% increase in obesity rates in 9th grade children. There is also an effect at .25 miles and .5 miles.

^v Overweight among school-age children increased 60% from 11% to 19% (1988/1994 – 2003/2004) according to CDC/NCHS NHANES survey

^{vi} Overweight among pre-school children ages 2-5 yrs doubled from 7% to 14% from 1988/1994 to 2003/2004.

^{vii} WASHINGTON, Sept. 15, 2009 – Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan announced a new initiative to better connect children to their food and create opportunities for local farmers to provide their harvest to schools in their communities as part of USDA’s ‘Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food’ initiative. USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) will team together and form ‘Farm to School Tactical Teams’ to assist school administrators as they transition to purchasing more locally grown foods.

^{viii} Sodexo, the multibilliondollar international food service management and facilities management corporation, hosted a sustainability conference here at UC Davis Feb 2-4, 2009. The conference was the SEED Conference - Sustainability and Environmental Expert Development. The conference included a group of Sodexo managers and corporate leaders from across the nation. One of the main foci was on sustainable, regionally sourced food.

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II. Community Food Security for Low-Income Residents

Summary

This initiative aims to coordinate research and outreach to improve community food security by linking low-income residents with access to regional, sustainable urban and peri-urban agriculture. Home and community gardens as well as urban and peri-urban farms can potentially provide higher proportions of healthful foods for low-income residents' diets through local markets. This initiative will explore win-win strategies that meet the needs of urban residents while also providing income for area producers. An added benefit is the potential for urban residents to understand more about where their food comes from and support the development of new urban-rural partnerships.

Problem statement/ Baseline

- The prevalence of “food deserts” is increasing.^{viii} Full service grocery stores have largely disappeared from inner cities (where many low-income people reside) and have been replaced by liquor and convenience stores and fast food outlets.^{viii}
- A United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report found that smaller stores also are unlikely to offer the variety of products carried by most major supermarkets,^{viii} and produce and other foods offered in smaller stores are often lower in quality.^{viii}
- Food environments of lower-income communities are of particular concern because obesity and diabetes rates are highest in these communities.^{viii}

Structural issues/ Broad drivers shaping change

- Where poverty is higher (inner cities, isolated rural areas), food insecurity follows. Poverty and unemployment are underlying conditions leading to food insecurity.
- Although healthy food access is a primary factor for obtaining a healthful diet, deep-rooted cultural factors may also play an important role.
- Economies of scale make it difficult for smaller stores to carry more healthful, sustainably produced food; direct markets (farmers markets, CSAs, farmstands) also need adequate sales at fair prices for growers, to make locating in low-income neighborhoods profitable.

Strategic opportunity

- The community gardening movement has been accelerating in recent years. The Community Food Security Coalition has an Urban Agriculture Committee dedicated to increasing community gardening in low-income areas.^{viii}
- New urban farms are increasing in California and one of their missions is to reach out to low-income communities and youth. Examples include: Soil Born Farms (Sacramento), Pie Ranch (Bay area) and Tierra Miguel Farm (San Diego).

- Food system assessments in California, and the food policy councils that follow, consistently include community gardening, urban farmstands, farmers markets, urban-rural linkages in their strategies to reduce food insecurity.^{viii}

Desired outcomes

- Improved access to and consumption of nutritious, culturally appropriate foods in low-income communities through local markets, home and community gardens.
- More successful, sustainable urban farm operations which cater to low-income residents for at least part of their business.
- Greater diversity of local markets which provide healthful sustainably produced foods in low-income neighborhoods.

Key Potential Partners

- Regional farmers, ethnic limited resource farmers
- Low-income community residents
- Community development organizations (eg., Healthy Food for All Coalition-Sac)
- Ag organizations (CAFF, Farm Bureaus, San Diego International Rescue Committee)
- Community health orgs (Health Education Council-Sac; San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, San Diego Hunger Coalition)
- State and local government (DHHS-state and county, SACOG, county supervisors)
- UCCE (both farm and consumer science advisors, faculty)
- Research community (food system, community development, nutrition, public health)
- Funders (CA Endowment)

Potential Activities

- Applied research, evaluation, outreach of urban-rural partnerships such as:
 - Soil Born Farms-Healthy Food for All project in Sacramento to connect regional growers with low-income consumers through farm stands, farmers markets, and farm to school program.
- Conduct participatory food system assessment projects (city, county, region) to describe the state of regional food systems (with baseline data) and to highlight gaps and opportunities for improving community food security. Examples of coordination with community/regional groups include:
 - San Diego Food System Assessment
 - SACOG / Valley Vision food system assessment
 - Lake/Siskiyou County food system assessment

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III. Food System Assessment/ Food Policy

Summary

This initiative aims to coordinate research, engagement and outreach to conduct regional food system assessments. These food system assessments can then contribute to improving public policies that support more sustainable, healthful food systems. The past decade has seen a marked increase in city and county governments, regional transportation and planning agencies and interested citizen groups that are assessing the state of their food and agricultural systems. They are measuring baseline and trend data across a variety of food system sectors. This initiative would collaborate with existing groups to create robust food system assessments and model tools that reveal gaps and opportunities in a region's food system and help identify appropriate policy, market incentives, education and other options.

Problem statement/ Baseline

- Although city and regional governments often have transportation, economic development or land use policies, many lack a comprehensive food policy that integrates food and agricultural issues.^{viii}
- The food and agriculture research community and practitioners do not often connect with urban and regional planners and public health officials to implement more sustainable food systems.
- Few local governments, health and land use agencies collect comprehensive food and agricultural systems data and indicators to inform food policy choices.^{viii}

Structural issues/ Broad drivers shaping change

- Local governments have limited resources and tend to focus on policy options that will bring big revenues to cities and regions. Food policies are new and are not often priorities.
- Reduced state budgets (especially in California) put additional pressure on local governments to reduce spending (including for data collection and analysis).
- Turnover of elected officials, makes it difficult to create shared understandings and implement new approaches to regional food and agricultural policies.

Strategic opportunity

- Regional governments, public health officials and citizen coalitions are beginning to create new alliances to implement strategies such as: regional aggregation and distribution facilities to source fresh, local food; building new markets that preserve regional farmland and assist entry-level and immigrant farmers; and improving transportation routes to healthy food access points.

- Groups such as SACOG (Sacramento Area Council of Governments), SANDAG (San Diego Association of Governments) are creating new models that educate the public and elected officials about new policy options.^{viii}
- An increasing number of California coalitions are organizing to conduct food system assessments and create food policy councils.

Desired outcomes

- New data on food and agricultural trends are collected and institutionalized in public agencies and used by policymakers to improve food system sustainability.
- An increase in the number of comprehensive food system assessments and coalitions throughout the state that can be used as models by other regions.
- An increase in food policy councils that work with local governments and use food system assessments to improve food and agricultural systems over time.

Key Potential Partners

- Community development organizations (eg., Local Initiatives Support Corporation-LISC San Diego; Community Development Corporation-CDC San Diego)
- Ag organizations (CAFF, Farm Bureaus, San Diego International Rescue Committee)
- Community health orgs (San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, San Diego Hunger Coalition, Public Health Dept-Siskiyou County)
- State and local government (DHHS-state and county, county supervisors)
- Planning agencies (SACOG, SANDAG)
- UCCE (both farm and consumer science advisors, faculty)
- Funders (CA Endowment)

Potential Activities

- Conduct participatory food system assessment projects (city, county, region) with key partners (above) to describe the state of regional food systems (with baseline data) and to highlight gaps and opportunities for improving community food security. Examples of coordination with community/regional groups include:
 - San Diego Food System Assessment
 - SACOG / RUCS/ Valley Vision food system assessment
 - Lake/Siskiyou County food system assessment
- Coordinate with local governments, public health, planning agencies, UCCE and others to influence public policy (potentially through food policy councils) that supports more sustainable, regional food systems.

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IV. Farmworker & Rural Community Wellbeing

Summary

This initiative aims to coordinate research and outreach to improve the lives and working conditions for agricultural workers and their families in rural communities. We are particularly aware that the “social justice” part of sustainability is often given less attention or neglected altogether; one manifestation of that is that proportionately fewer resources are directed toward the wellbeing of farmworkers. This initiative would provide resources to examine and improve working and living conditions, employment opportunities/ creating viable long-term career paths, training and job development, and access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food through local markets, gardens and government food programs. It would also examine the intersection of these issues with rural community viability.

Problem statement/ Baseline

- More than 85% of all labor that produces California crops and livestock is performed by hired workers.^{viii}
- Income for farmworker families is below poverty. Average total farmworker family income ranged from \$15,000 - \$17,499 and 2009 Poverty Guidelines for a family of 4 is \$22,050.^{viii}
- Job security and benefits for agricultural workers are inadequate.^{viii}
- Illness and injury rates for agricultural workers are higher than the rate of injury and illness across all occupations. Pesticide exposure is a primary concern.^{viii}, ^{viii}
- Farmworker health and diets are inferior to that of the general Hispanic population in the U.S. Approximately 75% of agricultural workers have unhealthful weights; 1/3 are obese and a higher percentage suffer from iron deficiency anemia compared to the U.S. population.^{viii}
- Farmworkers neighborhoods often do not have adequate access to healthful food.^{viii}

Structural issues/ Broad drivers shaping change

- Immigration reform is unlikely in the next 5 years.
- Lack of rural development in Mexico forces a stream of economic refugees to enter the U.S. looking for work to feed their families.
- Enforcement of current policies meant to improve conditions for farmworkers is inadequate.

Strategic opportunity

- Along with the increased interest in sustainable, local food, consumers and institutional buyers are expressing a growing interest in social justice for agricultural and food system workers and want these issues to become part of the criteria for procurement.^{viii}
- Large grower/rancher groups, certification organizations and NGOs are looking into how to include “social certification” into sustainable certification programs (Food Alliance, ANSI standards, Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops).
- Innovative projects/businesses throughout the state are targeting farmworkers to help improve their economic self-sufficiency, self-development and access to quality food. There is great opportunity to multiply these efforts. (CIRS, ALBA, Farmlink, Healthy Corner Store Network, Center for Race, Poverty and Environment, Swanton Berry Farm)

Desired outcomes

- Improved economic well-being for agricultural workers through new employment arrangements (year-round labor, training programs to teach business, management, marketing skills for becoming small scale farmers, etc.)
- Improved working conditions for farmworkers, particularly less exposure to agricultural chemicals through changes in farm production practices.
- Improved access to nutritious, culturally appropriate foods through local markets, home and community gardens

Key Potential Partners

- Unions
- Legislators, Local government
- Farmers
- Local health organizations, networks
- Legal services (CRLA)
- NGOs (CIRS, PAN, Center for Race Poverty and Environment)
- Farm labor contractors
- Foundations
- UC and UCCE researchers

Potential Activities

TOPICS:

- Improve access to healthful, nutritious, culturally appropriate food for farmworker families through:
 - Flea markets, bodegas/ corner stores, luncheros
 - Community and home gardens
- Improve working conditions through:
 - Transitions to more sustainable farming practices (create innovative farmers/farmworker teams to do outreach, training of other regional farmers about adoption of sustainable farming practices)

- Increased monitoring, research, outreach/education on the impacts of pesticide drift, water contamination in communities where farmworker families live
 - Research on impact of more environmentally friendly practices on farmworker health and well being.
- Improve economic prospects through:
 - Training and job development programs to increase skills, including business training and career opportunities
 - Promotion of “green jobs”
- Convene diverse stakeholder groups to discuss critical issues and options for improving farmworker well-being.