

IN THIS ISSUE

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A challenging new profession: Food systems development practice



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In this issue of the *Food Systems Journal* we offer a bountiful fall harvest of papers on subjects ranging from urban soils and supply chains to social networks and community building. A cursory look at the titles in this issue would probably not yield a common theme, but it is there in plain sight. It’s the same theme that cuts across all our accepted papers and across all issues we publish. That theme is *people* — us — food systems development practitioners, working hard and enjoying our work (as this fall issue’s cover image depicts). We are scholars, farmer-activists, land-use officials, organizers, nutritionists, farmers market managers, food service directors, planners, program volunteers, extension educators, graduate students, and the list goes on. We are stewards of a vast, complicated, and fragile system that is linked to food security, livelihoods, culture, open space, quality of life, and many other multifunctional benefits. Yet as people we have our needs as well.

To learn more about *us* — our needs and challenges in food systems work — JAFSCD conducted a survey in collaboration with a group of colleagues around North America of self-identified “food systems development practitioners” in 2011–12. We promoted the survey on COMFOOD and other email lists, and even developed a Québécois version of the survey in order to have more participation from French Canadians. Given the “whiteness” of food systems work, we also made a special effort to encourage people of color to complete the survey. To our amazement, over 1,300 individuals responded. What we learned, in a nutshell, was that not only is the food system fragile, but so too are the projects many of us are working on, along with our livelihoods. By all accounts food systems work is emerging as a profession (or as a facet of other traditional professions like planning or extension), but during these nascent stages the profession is subject to the whims of public and private funders and ultimately, by unfortunate necessity, the stock market. This dictates the size of endowments and government coffers — the core resources for funding food systems work.

With the results of the survey in hand, a working group of over 100 survey respondents was formed to address the professional development needs of food systems development practitioners, and a steering committee was created to provide some leadership to the group. Without resources, the launch of what has become known as the **North American Food Systems Network (NAFSN)** has been challenging. But the development of this “community of practice” is ongoing and has begun to focus on establishing a food systems development certification curriculum that will provide a foundation of practice to those who are working in the trenches on hunger, new farmer programing, farm-to-institution projects, food hubs, food policy councils, agriculture of the middle value chains, etc., including the practical tools they need to plan and execute successful projects — tools such as methods of stakeholder participation, asset mapping, and metrics for measuring success and impacts.

As I write this, a partnership of national organizations and institutions is forming to help move NAFSN’s agenda forward in 2015. Anyone interested in joining the NAFSN working group is invited to contact me at duncan@newleafnet.com.

We start off this issue with a guest editorial from JAFSCD’s cosponsor, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. In *Evaluation and the Local Foods Data Void*, **Corry Bregendahl** and **Craig Chase** offer a fresh approach to gathering impact data on local food initiatives.

Next up is a column from **John Ikerd**, who is developing a keen interest in multifunctionality in agriculture and food systems. In *Multifunctionality: A New Future for Family Farms*, he puts the spotlight on recognizing multifunctionality as a means to a more sustainable future for family farmers.

Instead of writing his regular column, in this issue **Rami Zurayk** has written a deeper commentary of the insidious links between Ebola and fragile food systems in *Looking at Sierra Leone’s Ebola Epidemic Through an Agrarian Lens*.

In an open access paper entitled *Increasing Prosperity for Small Farms Through Sustainable Livestock Production, Processing, and Marketing*, **Darin Saul, Soren Newman, Tracie Lee, Steven Peterson, Stephen Devadoss, Dev Shrestha, and Nick Sanyal** explore the feasibility of regional livestock strategies in surmounting very high supply-chain barriers.

Jill Clark, Shoshanah Inwood, and Douglas Jackson-Smith present stakeholders’ feedback on farmland protection policy in the hinterlands of cities in *Exurban Farmers’ Perceptions of Land Use Policy Effectiveness: Implications for the Next Generation of Policy Development*.

The Farm Fresh Healthcare Project: Analysis of a Hybrid Values-based Supply Chain by **Kendra Klein** and **Ariane Michas** provides an inside view of a farm-to-institution project attempting to balance values and efficiency.

In *A Framework for Site Assessment Guides for Urban Impacted Soils: A Vancouver Case Study*, **Melissa Iverson, Maja Krzic, and Arthur Bomke** proffer a comprehensive method of evaluating and addressing the problems of soils in cities.

Next, **Yue Cui** evaluates the online social networking potential of farmers markets in *Examining Farmers Markets’ Usage of Social Media: An Investigation of a Farmers Market Facebook Page*.

Nathan Hilbert, Jennifer Evans-Cowley, Jason Reece, Christy Rogers, Wendy Ake, and Casey Hoy then challenge us to measure travel time in our identification of food deserts in *Mapping the Cost of a Balanced Diet, as a Function of Travel Time and Food Price*.

In *Bridging the Gap Between Farmers and Food Service Directors: The Social Challenges in Farm to School Purchasing*, **Brandi Janssen** presents an insightful reflective essay on the social barriers between farmers and food service directors.

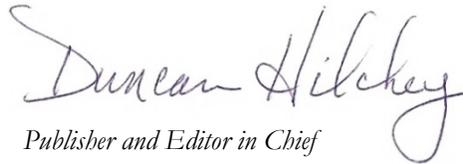
Cultural differences among local food system stakeholders are explored in **Yuki Kato’s** *Gardeners, Locavores, Hipsters, and Residents: An Alternative Local Food Market’s Potential for “Community” Building*.

Melissa Poulsen, Marie Spiker, and Peter Winch then explore the value of the acceptance and active engagement of local residents in *Conceptualizing Community Buy-in and its Application to Urban Farming*.

In our final paper of the issue, entitled *Illinois Farmers Markets Using EBT: Impacts on SNAP Redemption and Market Sales*, **Afroza Hasin, Sylvia Smith, and Pat Stieren** find that accepting EBT does increase market sales, and that the use of incentives, receipts and direct swipes, and volunteers handling EBT transactions can have significant positive effects on EBT sales.

In this issue we also offer two book reviews and JAFSCD's first movie review. **Philip Loring** reviews *Grass, Soil, Hope: A Journey Through Carbon Country*, by Courtney White, and **Molly Anderson** reviews *Sustainable Food Systems: Building a New Paradigm*, edited by Terry Marsden and Adrian Morley. Finally, **Jane Kolodinsky** goes to the movies and discovers there's more than one meaning of "chains" in the documentary *Food Chains*. 

Best wishes for a healthy and happy New Year!


Duncan Hilchey
Publisher and Editor in Chief