

## **Northeast Food Systems Initiative**

### **Forum Notes December 2011**

#### **Executive Summary**

On December 7-8, 2011, interested faculty, extension educators, and extension and research leadership came together in Beltsville, Maryland, for a Forum to discuss the potential for cross institutional collaboration in the development of a Regional Food Systems program. The group was presented with the charge of working toward the development of strong proposal(s) that builds on the combined strengths of the Northeast. During the forum, the attendees were divided into three working groups and given a series of questions to address during a morning breakout session. The groups then reported back and their reports were then used to identify three major areas where there was significant interest to work toward the development of future grant proposals. This information was captured and is providing in the following proceedings. Following the meeting, the steering committee continued to meet and discuss next steps. The next steps include:

- 1) Establish a contact person to provide leadership for a specific team to continue moving toward the formula or a grant or grants,
- 2) Encourage broader engagement in the teams – identify additional team members (extension, research, and resident education faculty or educators),
- 3) Explore opportunities to partner with other organizations, and
- 4) Set up routine conference calls to coordinate individual team activities and across team opportunities for collaboration.

## Forum Highlights Agenda with Notes

### Food System Initiative Charge:

1. Work toward the development of strong grant proposals around the area of specialty crops building on the competitive advantage of the Northeast states.
2. Engage the Northeast land-grant universities and other potential partners in defining a comprehensive proposal that combines strengths in local food systems, ethic and other niche markets, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), global food security, sustainability, and human nutrition.
3. Develop proposals that have a strong component on the human dimensions associated with adoption of local food systems.
4. Consider supply chain issues, agro-tourism possibilities, rural development, network science, demographic shifts, food deserts, and urban-rural connections.
5. Develop the proposal with Extension as the lead but include strong research and/or resident education connections and objectives.

### “Welcome to the Forum”

After Dennis Calvin, Director, Penn State, opened the meeting, Dr. Allison Yates, Associate Area Director, Beltsville Agriculture Research Center, provided a warm welcome to the facility and outlined for the group some of the work underway at the facility.

### “Regional, National and International Food Systems Perspective”

Panelists:                   Stephan Goetz, *Director, NE Regional Center for Rural Development-PSU*  
Diana Jerkins, *NPL, Ag Ecological Systems, USDA/NIFA/IBCE*  
Hiram Larew, *Director, Center for International Programs, NIFA Liaison to the NE Region*

First Presentation is posted at: <http://nercrd.psu.edu/NEFoodSystemForum.pdf>

### “Work Group Breakouts”

- Use the strengths and assets listed in survey summary to identify unique attributes of NE Food System
- Add concrete data or sources that quantify these strengths and assets for future grant applications
- Develop a statement that can be shared with the larger group

Attendees were asked to count off into three groups. Using the above charge, the groups were asked to use the strengths and assets listed in their survey summary to identify unique attributes of the NE food systems, add concrete data or sources of data that can help quantify these strengths and assets for future grant applications, and then develop a statement that could be shared with the other groups. On the survey summary, the 21 listed strengths and assets were divided equally and then assigned to a group to rank their top three. The 20 listed unique opportunities were also split into two groups of seven and one group of six and assigned to a specific group to rank their top three choices. They were then asked to list data sources that helped to justify the attributes that made the NE unique and well positioned for a Food System grant. After the breakout sessions, groups were asked to report out. Those reports follow.

## Group 1

### 1. Strengths and assets listed in survey to identify unique attribute of NE Food Systems:

#### Marketing

- Expanding existing markets and new diversified emerging markets.
- Shift from rural to urban population in most areas.
- Ethnic market expanding but domestic production not keeping pace. Great opportunity for local production and marketing rather than imported.
- Minimize food service losses.
- Crop diversification is critical for a strong Food System, aligns well with NE.
- Very entrepreneurial and experienced group of farmers to grow ethnic crops but may need help in how to expand to market.

#### Direct

- Consumers have a high “Food Education” and greater Global Food knowledge -Tell the Story of AG/ Food- connecting consumers to their food.
- Direct to the consumer- “strike when the iron is hot”
- Food Safety can be improved with local production.
- “Buy Local, Sell Local” can increase profitability and attracts investment.

#### Policy and Systems

- Likely changes to the Farm Bill in the commodity programs that could lead to more crop diversification.
- Northeast has great natural resources- productive land and plenty of water but shorter growing season.
- Already involved in organic production practices and “whole farm” systems.
- Potential for Rural Development- “in place” with funding for investment dollars.
- Integrating whole farm systems- Rural through Urban systems marriage.
- Must consider all sides of the equation of producers and consumers.
- Developing profitable agricultural enterprises will help retain young and not so young producers
- Work to reduce post harvest losses.

### 2. Data or sources that quantify these strengths and assets for future grant applications:

- Policy development
- Census Data
- Economic Development Councils
- NERCRD
- NESAWGS
- Unemployment data

- Urban design lab at Columbia University
- LGU Ag Econ Department
- GIS/GPS Data
- ERSI
- Extension Market Research

3. Statement to share with the group:

Three areas of importance are:

- Food Policy and Systems that encompass both rural and urban areas
- Direct marketing to consumers
- Marketing of Food Systems

## Group 2

### 1. Indicate strengths and assets of Northeast

- Strong public interest in local food production system including community gardens, interest in direct farmers markets, farm to institution and farm to school, and new generation of beginning farmers. Interest in improving health and nutrition.
- Highest percent of urban farms and small farms.
- Close proximity to population base, USDA, FDA and specialty crop production.

### 2. Data Sources to support and quantify those strengths

- Good to know the number of farmers in each state and the NE Region. Northeast Sustainable Ag Working Group is available online and contains useful information. [nesawg@smallfarm.org](mailto:nesawg@smallfarm.org)
- Also need to summarize data on population, demographics, and community gardens.
- Look at density of population. Northeast has some of the highest densities in the US. *USA Today* reports number of people per square mile as New Jersey: 1196; RI 1018; Mass: 839; Conn.: 738; average for US is 87.
- Also noted that the NE has the highest percentage of urban farms.
- Northeast may have greater opportunity for new or beginning farmers due to the smaller nature of farms. May have a greater number of new farm operators
- Also important to note that there are shifting demographics. Northeast may have a much higher percentage of minority, women, and young farmers.
- Food insecurity data is needed. There is data for each state. Food Stamp data is a good source. Second Harvest also has data.
- Number of farmers market in a food shed. Urban Design Lab has a lot of that data
- Look at number of farm to school and farm to institution opportunities available.
- Also look at obesity data as a percentage of population and numbers in each state.
- Look at studies which help make the link between availability of local foods and health benefits and well being. Also look at interaction between youth or adult involvement on food or garden food production and health and well being.
- Nutrition Information on obesity state: NHANES Survey, 2007 National Survey of Children's Health
- Need for micro-entrepreneurial type activities/ beginning farmer programs
- Academic programs can be involved
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### 3. Top three priority opportunities to share

- Look at opportunity to bring back wholesale food processing and distribution to the Northeast, particularly with fresh frozen vegetables and fruits. Regional branding and distribution for frozen

vegetables may be more competitive now than fresh. Fresh frozen is just as healthy as fresh. Capacity for processing is available.

- Shifting demographics may provide opportunity. Women farmers may be example.
- A lot of opportunity to work with farming on the urban and suburban fringes with 5-10 acres of production. Examples may include CSA, and organics. Northeast has the highest percentage of urban farms.
- Need to develop new or renewed courses that teach small farm skills. Also include traditional Extension programs to meet these new demands.

### Group 3

1. Strengths and assets/data sources
  - Consumer markets is the high density of populations
  - Hubs would also include rural farmers
  - Ethnic crops and specialty crops
  - Demand for local food in K-12
  - Extended growing season

Look at the Northeast as the new state

- Foster an Environment that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation at the whole system not just farmer.
- Provide tool box to address issues such as distribution.
- Identify the weaknesses within food systems

Food hub – food system /nutrition education/ consumers

- Nutrition, food safety, ethnic & specialty crops, meats, dairy
- Challenge – lack of slaughter houses & value added processing
- Move volume of locally grown food by 3% to tangible change over time
- Season extension of production; high tunnels

Healthy School Act (DC public schools) 50% locally grown food in a radius of 200 miles – challenge that the structure/system was not in place

- Food preservation safety for consumer/GAP
- Aggregation/distribution
- Infrastructure
- Need to cultivate the next generation of farmers
- How do you address farmer burn out –
- Lack of education of youth and population; cost of local food, conservation, process of producing food

#### 2. Opportunities

- Extension has contacts within the state; community coalition organizer
- Food Hub – find distributors, farmers, school systems
  - DC school system has truck to pick up “seconds” for vegetables
  - Development of food systems

Ethnic Crops – restaurants replacing ornamentals with ethnic crops

- Weakness is nutrition value of what is being eaten
- Cattle feed

- Locally grown grains

Review maps provided earlier

NE converting conventional farmers to be part of the local initiatives, including specialty crops

Land distribution – loss of land

Or new land owners and partner this group with new beginning farmers (Land Link);  
40-60 hours invested between the land owner & new farmer – need for assistance from  
Ext.

Can't replicate projects – need to work collaboratively within land grants and with non-profits

Look at NSS stats –

Market resource, develop the farmer most effective, c commitment charts developed by farmers,  
economic impact

Changing the eating habits of the populace - Heath & nutrition, awareness of purchasing local foods

### 3. Statement –

Develop seven regional food system hubs strategically placed in high density urban areas as well as in areas easily accessible to rural populations to address the duality of food deserts. Treat NE region as one jurisdiction.

- Goal - these hubs are to integrate marketplace with production (one stop shopping), and bring producers and consumers together. Educational component for farmers and consumers, collaborative/cooperative component for both farmers as well as for research and outreach.
- Education:
  - Importance of local foods, nutrition education
  - Education for new farmers and existing farmers to integrate innovations, new systems, and provide the tools to remain financially viable
- Develop farmers to collaborate and form cooperatives:
  - Bring together small to large farm operatives to collaboratively develop commitment charts of what they produce
  - Work collaboratively between large and small farmers on distribution
  - Provide food distribution systems, processing as part of these food system hubs
- Marketplace:
  - Provide an alternative to consumers where only locally grown foods are available
  - Hopefully at a lower cost (grant \$, subsidies, agro-tourism, economic benefit of addition of facilities and shared facilities)



- Research :  
Population- Change in eating habits both nutritionally and regionally/seasonally  
Economic- success of model, impact on large and small farmers
- Other:  
Facilities open for agro-tourism  
Maybe install geodesic dome for intensive production in urban areas?

After the morning breakout sessions and report outs, the leadership group met to distill the about thoughts and lists into three general thematic areas for further discussion. These were not fully inclusive, but represented the main themes. The three issues are:

- 1. Strengthen food systems through better connection of rural, urban and suburban food productions (sustainability of small and medium farms).**
- 2. Increase access to locally grown food for better health**
- 3. Ethnic Food Systems focus**

The attendees were then asked to select one of these three groups based on their personal interest in a specific issue area for further discussion.

**“Work Group Breakout Sessions by Issue Area”**

- Identify who has what type of capacity for issue expertise
- Determine how to build on the strengths and opportunities
- Identify potential funding opportunities for each issue

## **Strengthen Food Systems through Better Connection of Rural, Urban, Suburban Food Production (Sustainability of Small and Medium Farms)**

**Attendees:** Jon Traunfeld, UMD; Ben Beale, UMD; Dee Singh-Knight, WVU; Gordon Johnson, UDel; Anu Rangarajan, Cornell; Dan Rossi, NERA; Ginger Myers, UMD; Charlie White, PSU; Stephan Goetz, NERCRD; Shannon Dill, UMD, Abani Pradhan, UMD; Jeffrey Hyde, PSU; Kate Everts, UMND/UDel; Nick Place, UMD

**POC's to continue this group: Stephan Goetz, Anu Rangarajan, Nick Place**

This group also considered the sustainability of small and mid-sized producers as part of its overall charge.

### **Primary Themes that Emerged**

- Social justice and community spirit
- Economic discussion about urban agriculture
- What type of Urban Ag is economically viable?
- European model to utilize more land

### **Key Points for Consideration**

1. Who has what type of capacity for issue expertise:
  - Ornamental horticultural specialist who may already be working in urban settings
  - Expertise in Pest Management
  - Small Farm Specialist
2. How to build on strengths and opportunities:
  - Horticultural soils example- Utilizing on-site resources
  - Urban Ag can serve as a conduit to rural farms
  - Lots of expertise in pest production and commercial production in the NE.
3. Potential funding opportunities for each issue:
  - Developing Aggregation and Distribution System for Small and Mid-Size producers
  - Availability, Accessibility, and Affordability of the Collaboratives of Urban/Rural/Suburban
  - Regional Processing and Marketing Label
  - Adaptive Technology and Recommendation Programs for Small and Mid-Size Farms

Because of the broad scope of the topic, most of the conversation focused on defining the topic into more manageable components. These subtopics are described below:

#### **1. Urban Agriculture**

The group discussed that there are different visions of urban agriculture. One vision is for capital intensive, high-tech production in controlled environments. Another vision is for more community based production in small lots, parks, and reclaimed land using low-cost, basic technology.

There has been some skepticism of the economic sustainability of community-based agriculture so we thought an area of inquiry could be focused on understanding the costs of production, returns, and economic constraints related to urban agriculture.

The group also thought an interesting area for work could be to develop agricultural production on corporate campuses or community parks where vast acreage of lawns is currently maintained.

There is also an opportunity to link urban agriculture to suburban and rural agriculture. Urban farms often serve as recruiting areas for people interested in farming. By establishing links between urban, suburban, and rural farms, new farmers could be recruited from cities and placed into farming positions in suburban and rural areas. This link could then feed back into marketing channels from rural and suburban areas into urban areas.

Finally, the group recognized that along with community based urban agriculture comes an ethic of community development and social justice which would need to be recognized and integrated into work that Cooperative Extension does in this area.

## **2. Developing production recommendations for small-scale growers**

The group recognized that Land-Grant Universities in the region are home to the most scientifically valid and up-to-date production expertise, especially in the area of pest management. However, much of our current expertise does not translate easily to the production methods used in small acreage urban and suburban agriculture. Adapting our production recommendations, technology, and input recommendations to these small acreage models was seen as an opportunity for applied research and Extension.

## **3. Food Distribution Networks**

Developing enhanced capacity of food distribution networks to connect farmers with local markets was seen as an important area for work. The question came up whether Extension tries to adapt the current model of food distribution to meet the demands of local farmers and consumers or whether to create a separate, new distribution model.

## **4. Consumer Education**

To sustain the demand for local food and to also determine the potential market opportunities or constraints, the group felt that there was some need to have enhanced interaction with consumers. These interactions could be focused on education about the benefits and availability of locally produced food as well as to conduct research on consumer preferences and habits related to local food consumption.

## **Increase Access to Locally Grown Food for Better & Improved Health**

### **Participants:**

Dennis Calvin, Penn State, Sue Snider, UDel; Luanne Hughes, Rutgers; Ken Schlater, Cornell; Lewis Jett, WVU; Liz Tuckermanty, NIFA

### **Capacity:**

- “Food Dignity” – AFRI Grant
  - Increasing access to low-income communities/residents
  - Entrepreneurial development opportunities
  - Ken S. to get listing of participants
  
- Horticulturalists – Extending the Season
  
- Food Banks
  - CSAs for limited-resource consumers
  - Using SNAP benefits to shop at CSAs
  - *Harvests For Health* pairs Master Gardeners and 4H to grow food to share with limited-resource consumers
  - Share Our Strength – *Cooking Matters*
  - Second Harvest/Farmers Against Hunger – Gleaning
  
- Farm-to-School (FTS) & Farm to Institution
  - Distribution is a challenge
  - GAP certification/food safety issues are a challenge
  
- Crop Mobs – Organized group gleaning events
  
- Community Food System Projects (Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia)
  - Hoop houses
  - Community gardens
  - White Dog Café (farm to restaurant)
  - Brown field funding projects to create farms/gardens
  - Youth farm stands/mobile farm stands, special needs youth/autism
  - Suburban gardening/farming operations that tie into nearby cities
  
- Healthier Food Options at Corner Stores/Bodegas
  - Opportunities to bring healthier food options into local neighborhoods, where supermarket access limited
  - Most corner stores/bodegas offer predominantly unhealthy “junk” foods (high-fat/high-sugar, low nutrient density)

## **Strengths**

- Ability to Partner as CES
- Concentrated Area/Working Regionally
- Medical Centers Involvement
- Growing Interest in Local Investment and Supporting Local Community
- Growing Interest in Farm-To-School
- Growing Consumer Interest in Local Foods/Seasonal Eating
- *Let's Move* White House Campaign for Healthier Eating
- How to Complete Tapestry of Food
- Diversity of Demographics & Large Population of Different Groups – Urban, Rural, Suburban
- Variety of Land Use – Many Different Commodities
- We Have Water!
- Independent Supermarkets?? (Do we have more in our region??)
- New Markets Opening Up (Where Others Have Closed)
  - Specialty markets
  - Independent markets
  - Farm markets
  - Source: Research by The Food Trust on Urban markets/food sources

## **Needs**

- Ways to Evaluate Impacts in Many Areas
  - Health
  - Better Jobs
  - Education
  - Changes in knowledge/behavior
  - Changes in environment – school, community, urban/suburban environment
- Look At Middle Income, not Just Low-Income
- Identifying Consumer-Friendly Packaging/Niche Products (minimally processed, ready-to-eat)
- Educating Families on How to Prepare Fruits/Vegetables (what to do with it)
- Changes in Ag Policy, to Strengthen Northeast's Funding Position

## **Funding**

- Program-Generated Investments (~5% of endowment)
- Financial Benefits to Foundations of Investing Locally in Local Projects (local capacity building)
- EPA Brownfields
- NIFA AFRI
- Large National Foundations (Heinz, Kellogg's, etc.)
- Web Site Challenges
  - Folks contribute \$ to raise funds to subsidize CSA shares, buy equipment, etc.
  - Cornell testing right now!
- Feed The Future
- Department of Health & Human Services

Ag Policy – Strengthen the North East’s Position to promote policies that better reflect what we grow here (more fruits/vegetables) – which is actually more consistent with health standards/recommendations

## Ethnic Crops

Participants: Bill Hare, UDC, Rick Van Vranken, Rutgers; Litha Sivanandan, WVU; Yao Afantchao, UDC; Shirley, Mary Farrah, UDC; Lillie Monroe Lord, UDC; Cerruti R.R. Hooks, UMD; Sudeep Mathew, UMD; Hiram Larew, NIFA; Nancy Garrabrants, UMass

Production - NJ, MA, DL, MD, PA, and DC

Availability, Affordability, Accessibility

- Food safety issues, GAP, processing between different markets
- Developing production management strategies for the farmers and consumers (community gardens & back yards)
  - nutrition
  - Pest mgt.
  - Post-harvest
  - Season extension models
- Food safety/processing/canning/freezing/drying
- Production/Seasonal Production
  - MD - Fertility
  - NJ – Management Strategies
  - MA Adaption of Mainstream Farmers
  - DE -
  - DC -
- Assisting main-stream farmers shift to ethnic crops
- Understanding the markets , i.e. market maker
  - International markets
  - Farmers markets
  - Understanding the consumer; when to pick
  - Agro tourism – pick your own
  - Ethnic Crops Cooperatives
  - Direct sales, wholesale markets
  - Value added chains
- Nutrition/health
  - Research nutrition value of these foods
- Climate change
- External partners
  - Non-land grants universities
    - Tufts, Columbia, Hopkins, Feed the Planet, World Watch Institute, Wallace Foundation/Winrock, Gates, Fair Foods, Whole Foods stores, World Market
  - State departments of Agriculture
  - Access land; land trusts, landowners, etc.



## STRENGTHS

- Education and documentation through Extension publications and fact sheets
  - World Crops – website
  - eXtension CoP on Ethnic Crops
  - Resources for farmers (World Vegetable Institutes)
  - Resources for consumer

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Extension has direct contact with ethnic crop producers and consumers
- Growing immigrant population with a high density within the NE
- Market expansion
- Value added marketing techniques
- Develop potential for year round production processes
- Limited educational information current
- Research opportunities for climate change
- Small business mgt. entrepreneurship
- Food safety vs. imports
  - Food loss
- Education of the next generation of farmers; 4-H, FFA, new farmers
  - Youth Food Ambassadors
  - Land link program to link new farmers with existing farmers
- Research; pharmaceutical properties
- Uniformity of crop names across ethnic cultures
- Seed production
- Undergraduate education

## GAPS

- Distribution systems
- Consumer education; food preparation of these foods
- Nutrition information
- Best Management practices in production of ethnic foods; what science is missing
- Post Harvest practices
- Seed Propagation
- Food safety – handling to market and by consumer
- Marketing of availability of foods
- Access to land for potential growers
- Accessibility of capital for new farmers
- Advocate for Ethnic crops within the Farm Bill Reorganization

- Utilize World Crops website as a vehicle to post research information, BMPs and other resources

#### POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND GRANTS

- Other NE institutions – Tufts, Columbia, Johns Hopkin
- World Vegetable Institute
- NIFA through grant programs like Beginner Farmer and Rancher, SARE, and Specialty Crops
- HUD
- NIH
- FDA
- Other USDA Agencies like Ag marketing and Foreign Ag Services
- USAID
- Private Foundation, like Sullivan or Gates
- Pew Trust
- FAO
- United Nations
- Fair Trade movement
- Land owners
- Conservation Groups

## **“Lessons Learned and Next Steps”**

Presenters:

Stephan Goetz, *Director, NE Regional Center for Rural Development-PSU*

- Start slowly to develop ideas – 3-5 years is reasonable
- Communicate frequently – did monthly calls for three years with some face-to-face meetings.
- Work to bring the right people together to think about the larger good and help them learn to speak the same language.

Dan Rossi, *Executive Director, NERA*

- Need important problem identified jointly with stakeholders
- Problem must be consistent with goals of funding agency
- Must break new ground in problem solving – a novel idea or approach
- Project must be doable within the time and budget allotted by funding agency
- Project must be truly collaborative; the whole is great than the sum of the parts.
- Team members must be complimentary, not competitive with each other.
- Leader (PI) must be qualified to handle the project; needs a proven track record.
- Project must have measurable metrics; clear milestones.
- Proposal must read as a single entity; not a cut and pasted proposal.
- Carefully follow the RFA instructions to avoid a “technical turndown”.
- Start discussions with stakeholders/partners as early as possible.
- Matching funding must be confirmed when required; best to overmatch as some match may be disallowed.
- Demonstrate how project is leveraging funding along with grant funding.
- Have some group review prior to submission and allow time to seriously consider their recommendations.
- Project may be improved by having an external advisory panel
- Allow adequate time for institutional officers to process their paperwork.
- Planning grants are available at NERA; last round was just due in November.

Elizabeth Tuckermanty, *NPL, NIFA*

Build on the knowledge of the 350 food projects funded through her project. Web site is...

<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm>