

CHARTING GROWTH: BUILDING A STRONGER CASE FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

A growing number of organizations in the United States, supported by public and private funds, are trying to build food systems that simultaneously reap environmental, social and economic advantages for participants and the broader society. Yet articulating the parameters of such food systems so that we can measure their growth and build a stronger business case for them has not been done in a credible, rigorous way.

Charting Growth is developing indicators for sustainable food and using these indicators to assess the current availability and increase in good food in the U.S.—food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable. The vision guiding this project is one of greater viability and number of food systems that provide access for all communities to a safe and healthy food supply, grown in a manner that protects the environment and adds social and economic value to rural and urban communities.

In this project, the Wallace Center is partnering with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Food and Society (FAS) Initiative, which has a long-standing interest in supporting the growth of sustainable food systems.

OBJECTIVES

The Wallace Center's goals for this project are to define the attributes of good food (healthy, green, fair and affordable) so that they can be measured and to develop indicators for estimating, at any given time, the amount of good food available in the U.S. Obtaining access for all communities to a safe and healthy food supply requires first that such food be available; this project focuses on the determinants of availability and the data needed to measure this in a credible way.

Charting Growth will provide operational definitions of the attributes of good food that include goals for each dimension, a literature review of the use of sustainability indicators in food systems, a concise set of indicators and metrics appropriate for the national scale, recommendations for adapting these indicators and metrics to the state or community scale, and a national estimate of the current availability of good food that will serve as a baseline for tracking future growth.

ACTIVITIES

A Core Team meets and communicates regularly to share ideas about food system sustainability, develop an electronic interface to solicit engagement from stakeholders, organize additional meetings to solicit input and coordinate other project functions. The Core Team includes John Fisk (Director, Wallace Center); Molly D. Anderson (Senior Fellow and Project Manager, Wallace Center); Gail Feenstra (Food Systems Analyst, Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program at University of California Davis); Sandhya Rao (Senior Consultant, Emerging Markets Group);

and Michael Rozyne (Executive Director, Red Tomato). Stephanie Daniels, a research consultant with expertise in international development and certification standards for cocoa, also contributes to the project.

The Core Team is conducting interviews with people who have experience with food system data available in the public and private domains to assess its credibility and determine its value for measuring the attributes of good food. The next stage involves compiling data, determining gaps and integrating the data with assistance from different food system stakeholders. Project assumptions, methods and results will be peer reviewed.

The Core Team also will propose how to clearly communicate information about the availability of good food to the public, and create a report that places this project within the broader context of measuring the sustainability of food systems and places the national availability of "good food" within the broader context of ensuring access by every community to safe and healthy good, grown in a manner that protects the environment and adds social and economic value to urban and rural communities.

CONTACT

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The Wallace Center supports entrepreneurs and communities as they build a new, 21st century food system that is healthier for people, the environment, and the economy. The Center builds and strengthens links in the emerging chain of businesses and civic efforts focused on making good food – clean, green, fair, affordable food – an everyday reality in every community. Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.

