

UC DAVIS

AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE

College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

**Third Annual Narrative Report to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Inter-Institutional Network for Food, Agriculture, and Sustainability (INFAS)**

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Submitted by:

Dr. Thomas P. Tomich
W.K. Kellogg Endowed Chair in Sustainable Food Systems
Director, UC Davis Agricultural Sustainability Institute
Director, UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program
Professor of Community Development, Environmental Science & Policy
University of California, Davis
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences



Project Summary:

The Inter-institutional Network for Food, Agriculture and Sustainability (INFAS) is a national network of university and college educators, researchers, and activists, who collaborate in analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving with practitioners to increase U.S. food-system resilience; to illuminate critical trends and common stewardship of public goods essential for food systems, such as water, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and public institutions; and to reduce inequity and vulnerability in the U.S. food system.

The primary strategies undertaken by INFAS in the past project year to work towards network goals include: to collectively discuss and assess potential research, education, and outreach projects and activities that will leverage INFAS's breadth and depth; to collectively pursue network-prioritized activities; to seek avenues of engagement with external stakeholders including policy-makers, students, educators, and others that will broaden INFAS's collective impact; and to engage in self-assessment to ensure that our priorities align with network goals and mission. The past project year's activities include: (1) establishing the INFAS Research Subcommittee (RSC), convening a write-shop, and developing a policy publication; (2) collaboratively developing several funding proposals; (3) refining INFAS's mission statement and priorities for activities; (4) the convening of several INFAS meetings; (5) refining INFAS governance policy; (6) interacting within INFAS and with external networks via webinars and the INFAS email list-serve; and (7) establishing the INFAS Coordinator as a permanent position in support of Network activities, and appointing Dr. Joanna Friesner to that half-time position. These activities work towards our goals to enable a diverse pool of individuals prepared to lead initiatives; develop a stronger, broader consensus on priorities for research, education and outreach in food and agriculture which are relevant to society; contribute to science-based evidence in support of food system sustainability available to community advocates and policy makers; inform policy makers about farm and food policy choices and their consequences; and increase media attention on the issues of agriculture and the food system.

We operate with the understanding that INFAS priorities need to be continually reassessed and refined, and that each activity the network pursues has the potential to provide valuable lessons that will shape and inform this young network and its future activities. In the past project year, the INFAS Executive Committee (EC) established a process to evaluate INFAS and the INFAS host and

Coordinator during the annual meeting. To effectively facilitate the evaluation, the EC adopted a pilot process at the last annual meeting that begins with the development of an annual INFAS work-plan that frames the Network's priorities for the next cycle. Following approval and refinement of the work-plan by the EC, the Coordinator is charged with managing and executing the work-plan, including revising it during the year, as needed, in consultation with the EC. The work-plan and associated outcomes will be presented by the Coordinator and discussed at the following annual Network meeting after which the EC will perform a closed-door evaluation. The EC will provide feedback to the Coordinator and host during the annual meeting, as well as conveyed in written format by the committee Chair to the INFAS Coordinator, INFAS Host, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at the University of California, Davis, where INFAS is hosted within the Agricultural Sustainability Institute (ASI). The contents of the annual INFAS reports submitted to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation will be discussed at the annual INFAS meeting and used to inform the next year's activities. The reports are also posted on the INFAS website and the entire Network is invited to assess the progress of the Network. The second major approach to evaluating our efforts is reflection and self-assessment at multiple points including during or following an activity, and at the annual INFAS meetings. Lessons learned for past year activities, including setbacks, are expanded in the 'activities' and separate self-evaluation report. These setbacks will require the Network to collectively develop a process to address future possible roadblocks and additional evaluation discussions will take place in advance of, and during the 2013 annual Network meeting this June.

Progress Toward Goals

A. New Activity: Develop and pursue activities to enable the Network to collectively set a national food sustainability research agenda

An INFAS Research Subcommittee (RSC) was formed during the annual meeting held in the past project year to focus on identifying and acting on INFAS-relevant research opportunities. Last fall the RSC convened a number of teleconferences focused on potential activities and elected to convene a small, focused 'write-shop'. The meeting's main objective would be to collectively define a relevant research issue in sustainable agriculture and the U.S. food system and collaboratively develop a publication to raise the profile of sustainability science. In December 2012 ten Network members participated in the event hosted by Bruce Milne, chair of the INFAS executive committee, and facilitated by the Network Coordinator. Participants shared the various perspectives that had emerged through pre-meeting exercises to outline current trends, challenges and opportunities for food systems and sustainable agriculture. Discussions of the U.S. food system from research and societal perspectives were undertaken to begin to identify research 'gaps' where

additional scholarship would contribute to the current discourse. Ultimately the group focused on risk and resilience in the current food system and the need to redefine agricultural research priorities by considering the diverse cultural and ecological contexts in the U.S. and highlighting links between agriculture and health, social justice, and the environment.

Outcomes and Assessment: The RSC is currently drafting a write-shop publication with the intent to increase media, policy-maker, and academic attention on issues of agriculture and the food system by leveraging interest in the recent 'State of U.S. Agriculture Research' report, released last December by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. That report calls for new funding streams and makes particular recommendations for research priorities; RSC members plan to address the report's findings and include an alternative set of recommendations. Members assessed that this small, focused, and intensive collaborative meeting and writing activity was effective to advance INFAS's priorities. Additional evaluation of the post-meeting process will be needed, and will inform future activities. A broader assessment is planned for the 2013 INFAS annual meeting this June.

B. Engaging stakeholders within and outside of the Network

- i. INFAS list-serve: The INFAS list-serve has a current subscriber base of 50+ members with plans to expand to new members. The list helps to quickly circulate information within the Network, which may then be shared with additional networks. All members are invited to share opportunities via the list-serve; frequently shared items include employment listings, meetings and gatherings, funding notices, relevant publications and blog posting.
 1. For example, Dr. Tomich was recently contacted by a colleague seeking INFAS members join the steering committee of a new food systems initiative, and the list-serve facilitated information flow.
 2. Similarly, Dr. Friesner was contacted by a staff person at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition offering to facilitate INFAS participation in an informational phone call with USDA program officers. The list-serve was useful to (1) gauge community interest; (2) facilitate a webinar; and (3) distribute findings from the webinar, including to those who hadn't been able to participate. During the event, INFAS members had the opportunity to ask questions of the presenters.
- ii. INFAS webinars: A 'future plan' from last year's report was to include INFAS webinars and other presentations on the INFAS website. In September 2012 INFAS host Tom Tomich presented a seminar entitled 'Is There Sustainability Science?' in the Sustainable Food Systems Strategic Initiative Conference hosted by University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR). The taped hour-long presentation was included in a February 2013 webinar which included a question-and-answer session between Tomich and webinar participants. This can

serve as a 'pilot' webinar for INFAS; a link to the presentation has been established on the INFAS website.

Outcome: More than 100 participants, roughly half of whom were from institutions outside UC Davis, and including graduate students from programs across the U.S., joined the webinar and Q and A session.

- iii. Agri-MOOC: A 'future plan' from last year was to participate in an Agriculture Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). The Network Coordinator joined several others, including two INFAS members, in an exploratory conference call in February 2012. Participants expressed interest in the activity; however a specific plan to move forward and secure funding has not materialized at this point. Challenges: MOOCs are a fairly new activity, and one that is gaining in traction, e.g. by universities that are pursuing new models for educating people. Challenges include broadening participation in this novel approach and achieving the 'buy-in' needed to allow prioritization of this activity within INFAS.

C. Pursuing funding opportunities to enable Network activities

INFAS members and the Network Coordinator developed two funding proposals in the last year, and revised a third proposal that was unsuccessfully submitted in the previous project year, all for submission to the National Science Foundation (NSF) Proposals included a request for workshop funding in the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR), a request for inter-disciplinary meeting support in the Science, Engineering and Education for Sustainability (SEES) track of the Research Coordination Network (RCN) scheme, and a Sustainability Research Network proposal (SRN). These efforts were pursued in order to facilitate broader Network participation and in-depth syntheses of specific issues that would advance the effort to set a national food sustainability research agenda.

- i. Outcome: The **EPSCoR** workshop concept white paper was developed for submission as the first step of the funding competition but could not be submitted due to unanticipated eligibility constraints imposed by the submitting university. We hope to include these ideas in a future Network activity. The workshop concepts included several components:
1. A comparison of the effects of climate change and globalization of food markets on the resilience of food systems in several regions of the US.
 2. Discussions of what is needed to improve future resilience, given what we anticipate from climate change predictions.
 3. Predictions of how the US food systems will be structured regionally, nationally, and within a global food systems context, in 2050.
 4. Facilitating a shift from merely adapting to new circumstances, to redesigning systems that inherently are adaptable and resilient.
 5. Barriers to changing current food systems (e.g. policies- governments, state and federal)

Lessons learned: We need to have back-up plans in these instances, for example, the idea might be rolled into another opportunity.

- ii. Outcome: The **RCN-SEES** proposal was intended to request funding for convening annual meetings between Network members and new colleagues to develop integrative and interdisciplinary research approaches to responding to challenges in the U.S. food system. We chose not to submit the proposal for this year's competition following a reassessment by Network members that resulted in a shift in the initial scope of work. Network members concluded that we did not have adequate time to initiate and cultivate these new contacts prior to this year's submission deadline.

Challenges and Lessons Learned: A challenge we encountered was that the funding agency revised its call to emphasize including external, out-of-network collaborators at an early phase in proposal development, after we had started our process. We learned that developing a competitive proposal that funds interdisciplinary collaborations with new collaborators is a process that requires significantly more lead-time than proposals that involve only within-network participants. It is important that we reach out to those in other disciplines and institutions, and make the necessary contacts, well in advance of proposal preparation. Additionally we learned the importance in having explicit discussions early on about (1) what benefits exist in the project to enable leaders to prioritize the effort, and if there aren't enough identifiable benefits, then the proposal should not be pursued; (2) which Network members are the best fit for each project, and a determination made of their willingness and ability to participate in project development within the constraints of the deadlines; and (3) whether clear commitments can be obtained in a timely manner. In order to respond positively to these lessons we are developing a systematic approach to evaluate Network opportunities (below).

A draft list of criteria that Network members can use to systematically evaluate potential Network opportunities was drafted in the past project year.

DRAFT LIST, TO BE APPROVED BY INFAS AT THE NEXT EC MEETING

1. PI champion to lead development and writing of proposal.
2. Proposed project has an inter-institutional nature which will enable INFAS to draw in participants from across the Network.
3. Fit between project topic and INFAS's vision and intended outcomes.
4. Intellectual interest or programmatic contribution (research, education, outreach).
5. Potential to make research or education connections across the Network and/or with potential Network participants.
6. Potential for outreach and collaboration with external stakeholders.
7. Funding amount and requirements for matching funds.
8. Likelihood of success.
9. Time and resources available to prepare proposal.

iii. Outcome: In the previous project year INFAS members, and other collaborators, developed a national food assessment project entitled '*Resilience, Resistance, and Risk in the U.S. Food System*' for the NSF's Sustainability Research Network (SRN) competition. The process involved an extensive number of collaborators to provide additional multidisciplinary expertise and regional representation. The previous pre-proposal submission was unsuccessful in the first phase of the competition; a goal of the past project year was to revise and resubmit the proposal. However, the competition was not repeated this past year though it may in the future. We have sidelined that proposal for now; members are committed to the project and will continue to explore funding opportunities. Opportunity: The additional time to resubmit this proposal will allow the Network to collect additional input from stakeholders and make revisions to the project based on Network reprioritization and activities. It will also give us the opportunity to bolster our resources and legitimacy through activities.

D. Develop protocols for current members to contribute ideas to the Network and to recruit new Executive Committee members

Discussion at the 2012 INFAS meeting considered options to more effectively bring in Network voices and a process for replacing members on the INFAS Executive Committee (EC) whose terms have expired, in an intentionally-inclusive way.

Outcomes: A process to recruit new members to serve on the EC was developed and will be used in the next project year. A process for Network members to contribute ideas for Network activities was drafted by the executive committee; its implementation is waiting for additional funding to be secured before the Network can fund activities directly. In the absence of funding, the Network continues to communicate and share information about possible relevant opportunities.

Challenge: To effectively bring in Network voices and perspectives in a way that rewards members and effectively capitalizes on their ideas. In the absence of funding streams to enable activities, the Network is limited in its ability to be a catalyst for activities, other than to act as a linking and knowledge resource.

Opportunity: Network members are motivated to collectively accomplish activities; Network funds that enable meetings and idea development can be leveraged to pursue additional funding, educational, and outreach activities.

E. The INFAS annual meeting

The annual INFAS meeting was convened in conjunction with the 2012 W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Food and Community meeting held in Asheville, NC. A focus of the gathering was to discuss and prioritize INFAS activities for the coming year. 16 Network members, including 3 joining by phone, participated in the meeting.

Outcomes: Priorities for the coming year included: to collaboratively revise the INFAS mission statement to broaden the statement to reflect the Network's priorities of reducing inequity and vulnerability in the U.S. food system; to explore a proposed activity to assess methods and evidence for local/regional food systems

and associated economics; to coordinate an activity to articulate a National Food Sustainability research agenda; to develop processes for facilitating input by Network members and recruiting replacement executive committee members; and to determine the need for developing a sustainable agriculture and food systems program inventory. A key meeting outcome was the establishment of the INFAS Research Subcommittee (RSC) which agreed to work towards an activity over the coming year (described in A, above.) A post-meeting outcome was to connect with the Sustainable Agriculture Education Association (SAEA) that allowed us to determine the academic program inventories available online; we've added links to the major resources on the INFAS webpage.

F. Develop a five step pilot process for evaluating INFAS activities

This past year was the first with dedicated staff support for Network activities and the Coordinator assisted Network members in all activities. The Executive Committee (EC) charged with performing annual Network evaluations elected in the past project year to develop a five step evaluation and feedback pilot process:

Outcome:

1. In consultation with the EC, the Coordinator develops an annual work-plan that reflects INFAS priorities (chosen during the annual meeting/other activities);
2. The Coordinator is tasked with managing, executing, revising and updating the work-plan as determined necessary by operations and INFAS;
3. Prior to the next annual meeting, the Coordinator drafts and distributes a summary of outcomes and lessons learned over the prior year to INFAS; comments will be invited from the network members;
4. Discussion of the work plan and outcomes will commence at the annual INFAS meeting to inform planning of the next cycle's activities;
5. Following discussion, the EC conducts a closed-door session evaluation and provides feedback and guidance for the next cycle's work-plan.

The executive committee chair is responsible for drafting the evaluation, circulating it for EC review, and transmitting it to the appropriate recipients including the University Dean, the Network Coordinator, and the Network host who will be responsible for submitting it to WKKF with the annual project report.

G. Revise the INFAS mission statement

Outcome: Network members discussed revising the INFAS mission statement during the 2012 annual meeting. Over the past project year it was amended to: *The Inter-institutional Network for Food, Agriculture and Sustainability (INFAS) is a national network of university and college educators, researchers, and activists, who collaborate in analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving with practitioners to increase U.S. food-system resilience; to illuminate critical trends and common stewardship of public goods essential for food systems, such as water, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and public institutions; and to reduce inequity and vulnerability in the U.S. food system.*

Future Plans

- INFAS webinars, or distinguished speaker series at different INFAS sites and posted at INFAS webpage. The tentative plan, to be discussed at the 2013 annual INFAS meeting, includes developing a library of taped seminars given by INFAS members in diverse areas of sustainability science (modeled after the webinar by Tom Tomich in the past year). Next, webinars would be organized that include a live Q and A session with the presenter and participants. The presentation library, with seminars freely available online, could potentially serve the needs of a broad set of stakeholders including academics, policy-makers, the public, extension specialists, etc. Goals/outcomes this will address: engaging effectively with relevant members of the community, creating broader consensus for research, education and outreach in food and ag; develop communication; increase media attention; better informed policy makers. At the next INFAS meeting (June 2013) we will also discuss approaches to better integrating young scholars into INFAS, starting with scholars associated with INFAS member institutions. Initially we will invite scholars to join the INFAS list-serve to help them become aware of opportunities and discussions. Another goal will be to attract students and other young scholars to participate in INFAS webinars. Additional young scholar ideas will be discussed this June and reported next year. Goals/outcomes this will address: developing scholars to engage effectively with relevant members of the community; building INFAS as a supportive community; develop corps of diverse, well-trained individuals prepared to lead initiatives.
- INFAS annual meeting- Goals/outcomes this will address: communication among members and between members and society; building INFAS as a supportive community; identify and engage potential new INFAS members and young scholars who would benefit from networking with the group.
- Investigate INFAS-relevant funding opportunities including: resubmitting the 'Resilience, Resistance and Risk in the U.S. Food System' food assessment proposal to one or more agencies/groups; revising and submitting the RCN collaboration proposal. Goals/outcomes this will address: a stronger, broader consensus for research, education and outreach in food and agriculture; science-based evidence in support of food system sustainability; Design projects and secure additional funding for a series of major collaborative initiatives that will increase awareness and understanding of trends and interactions that affect health and resilience of vulnerable communities and populations.
- Expand and improve the INFAS webpage, including adding links to INFAS-relevant webinars and relevant educational programs. Goals/outcomes this will address: communication among members and between members and society; increased media attention on agriculture and the food system.

1. What will be done this coming year to increase the likelihood that the project will be self-sustaining by the end of the grant period?

The project is funded by an endowment which ensures stable funding for staff support and some member networking. Additionally, many INFAS members hold endowed faculty positions ensuring continuity of representation from many of the member institutions. We are confident INFAS will continue to strengthen and grow.

2. What indications are there that this project can (or cannot) be adopted elsewhere?

There is no clear indication yet whether this project can (or should) be adopted elsewhere but since it is national in scope, and open to new members, it would not be obviously advantageous, or resource-efficient, to recreate INFAS domestically.

Dissemination

1. What information or evaluation findings from your project have been made available to the field and how?

The INFAS website disseminates information about INFAS, its members, and their activities. The site now lists the current 23 INFAS member institutions and their 26 INFAS members. The site also contains information from the national symposia held in 2009 and 2010 on the topics of food systems and sustainability, and links to the Sustainability Science webinar conducted by Tom Tomich in the past year. In addition, INFAS annual reports are posted on the website for public viewing.

2. What plans do you have, if any, at this time for disseminating information about your project during the next year and at the conclusion of Foundation funding?

The Research Subcommittee is currently writing a policy forum publication and plans to pursue its publication this year. We plan to expand the publicly-accessible INFAS webpage. In the future, as this project is conducted, it will include significant elements of communication and dissemination of information.