

# UC DAVIS

## AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE

*College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences*

**Fourth Annual Narrative Report to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation**

**Inter-Institutional Network for Food, Agriculture, and Sustainability (INFAS)**

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## 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. INFAS currently has scholar members in 20 states and plans to expand to encompass institutions in even more states, including areas currently underrepresented in food systems and sustainable agriculture efforts. Because it includes scholars from different disciplines, INFAS has the capacity to consolidate data and raise visibility about complex food system challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, individually we network extensively with diverse populations to link knowledge with action.

The primary strategy undertaken by INFAS in the past project year to work towards our network goals was to collectively initiate a **design process** that includes reviewing and refining the Network's priorities, values, and approaches to inform the design and implementation of collaborative projects the Network will undertake in the future. We started this process in the last project year and decided, early on, that (1) we can benefit from professional network facilitation and (2) to be most effective, we need to engage a broader range of food-system stakeholders, with particular emphasis on addressing needs of marginalized communities and vulnerable children, and need to expand the network design process team to more fully incorporate and enhance perspectives and areas of expertise that are important to us. The network design process is taking place in phases: (1) the Network consensus to pursue this process at last year's annual meeting; (2) development of a core Network design team to develop a process outline and proposal for a professional facilitator via a competitive proposal process; (3) selection of a highly qualified facilitator to lead the process; (4) virtual meetings with the core team and the facilitator to prepare for an in-person design meeting leading to the core team gathering, including the facilitator and three additional stakeholders; (5) network design pilot proposal dissemination to the broader community, including INFAS members, for discussion and feedback; (6) review and revision of the Network proposal following public input; and (7) launch of the revised proposal to a larger stakeholder meeting.

## Progress Toward Goals (2-5 pages)

### 1. Activities:

- A. **Writing Activities:** (1) Research Subcommittee Write-shop and (2) Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development writing efforts. In 2013, subsets of INFAS members took on writing activities:
1. The Research Subcommittee initiated a publication effort during the 2.5 day 'write-shop' held December 2012 in New Mexico, with thirteen INFAS members and the Coordinator in attendance, hosted by INFAS Executive Committee Chair Bruce Milne. Event goal: provide a response to the December 2012 PCAST publication on the future of US agriculture research and development funding and the recommendations contained within the report.
    - a. The initial publication approach was to weave together pieces produced individually during the write-shop. The intent was to develop a mature draft before participants departed leaving only minor editing for post-meeting work, followed by circulating to the rest of INFAS.
    - b. The reality: Initial discussions and writing took longer than expected at the write-shop; pieces were started but not woven together before the write-shop concluded. Participants left with the charge/intent to spend additional time back home integrating the pieces.
    - c. The next steps: The draft piece reflected multiple voices and themes and lacked a unifying mechanism to be coherent; the voices and tones and depth of information were too divergent. Seven phone conferences took place between Jan. 15-July 15th with adjustments as time passed: (1) Proposal to reframe the piece around Jane Lubchenco's 1998 Science article in addition to the PCAST report. (2) Proposal to shorten the piece to a policy statement. (3) Action items for the group to contribute alternatives to PCAST and one member volunteered to revise the outline. (4) End of May call to reassess previously missed deadlines and a decision to scale back the effort. Discussion that none of the participants felt they had time to lead the project to its conclusion. Group asked Coordinator to take the pieces drafted so far and integrate into a new draft. (5) July call: Group acknowledged the window of opportunity for responding to the PCAST report had passed. (6) June annual meeting- group reaffirmed finalizing the publication as a priority action item. (7) July call- two members agreed to develop the draft the Coordinator put forth in June, by end of August.
    - d. The outcome: As of September 16, 2013, the draft is not completed; only 1 member met the Aug. 30th deadline.
    - e. Conclusions-Lessons Learned:
      - i. It was a mistake to leave the write-shop and rely on later inputs; people too busy
      - ii. Members will be likely not going to agree 100% of the time; publications don't need to be published under INFAS as a whole, just under the participants who attend and are committed to completion

- iii. There's a need for setting ground rules for future efforts
  - iv. Effort revealed the 'shallow connectivity between people' who assume coherence
  - v. The importance of investing in relationships and connectivity to lead to coherence
  - vi. View expressed that "vulnerable children" as a key focus was missing from the activity from the outset.
2. The second effort was initiated in April when Duncan Hilchey (JAFSCD) contacted the INFAS Coordinator to request facilitation of interested members in contributing a 2500 word commentary on 'Food Systems Research Priorities over the Next 5 Years'. INFAS member Michelle Miller responded immediately that she was interested in Food Systems and Climate Change, had a local group already formed that had just finalized an AFRI proposal on this topic, and she would lead the effort. Several INFAS members responded positively to participate. There was an early June deadline for submission which helped to catalyze the effort. Chuck Francis, part of the group, later decided to develop a second commentary on food webs and food sovereignty.
- a. The approach: Michelle Miller organized the effort (with the Coordinator facilitating phone calls, scheduling, and action items) and used pieces from her already-written AFRI proposal as a framework. Additional INFAS members volunteered to contribute sections. A phone call was held in early May where Molly Anderson volunteered to write the abstract for initial review, which was accepted for a longer submission. Chuck Francis similarly led the parallel effort for an additional commentary.
  - b. The next steps: There were email discussions, similar to the Research Committee's effort, that the pieces were disjointed and reflected diverse voices. Michelle championed the effort to integrate the voices and respond to concerns.
  - c. The outcome: Two commentaries were published at JAFSCD online (C. Francis: Aug. 2013; M. Miller: Sept. 2013). Total time from initiation to publication: C. Francis (4 months); M. Miller (5 months).
  - d. What worked: A PI champion took the significant leadership effort. There was a specific deadline worked towards. Team members contributed pieces within a defined timeline.

**Key questions for consideration when evaluating potential projects:**

- Is there a PI Champion?
- Is the 'product' compelling enough to motivate participants?
- Is there a timeline that catalyzes prioritization?
- Is there consensus on the Big Picture for the activity?

**B. The INFAS annual meeting and the major outcome: Network Design Focus**

The annual INFAS meeting was convened in conjunction with the 2013 Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society meeting at Michigan State University. A focus of

the gathering was to discuss current and future INFAS activities and to assess and prioritize the next steps for the Network.

1. Key New Outcome: Network priority-setting via a focused, facilitated Network development and design process with these objectives:
  - i. Develop a better understanding of what brings people to INFAS
  - ii. Develop a better understanding of group's passions
  - iii. Develop the Network's understanding of
    1. what we mean by 'community'
    2. 'engagement in issues of poverty'
    3. 'structural racism'
    4. 'latent tensions simmering under the surface'
    5. How to share understanding and framing of issues across regions
    6. Raising up local voices in the national level framing
  - iv. Consensus to:
    1. explicitly work on Network Design for the next year approximately
    2. Develop a core team; a Network Design Team (NDT), with a facilitator and evaluator
    3. Hold a series of working sessions addressing the context, current reality, desired state(s) over the next 1, 5, 10 years.
2. Governance: Bruce Milne concluded his one year term as Executive committee Chair; Patricia Allen assumed the Executive Chair position following one year as Chair-elect, and Molly Anderson was appointed to serve as Chair-elect for 2013-2014.

C. **Network Design** (*change in focus, following the summer 2013 Annual Meeting*) During the INFAS Annual meetings the Network engaged in lively discussion about the goals, activities, membership, and impacts of the Network and came to the consensus that an interrogation of values, goals and priorities was required, and that sufficient care and time, and professional facilitation, would produce the best results. In the past half year, since the annual meeting, a core INFAS Design team has had weekly, to monthly phone calls to develop a Network Design plan with these stages:

- i. Phase 1: Develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) to engage a skilled professional to provide process design and facilitation services that effectively engages the full range of diversity of food system stakeholders, with particular emphasis on addressing needs of marginalized communities and vulnerable children.
  1. Core Competencies/Skills that the Design Team focused on were
    - a. Experience working with complex collaborative multi-stakeholder change efforts and networks that engage diverse stakeholders
    - b. Strong process design (macro) and meeting/agenda design (micro) skills. Included in process design is the ability to help frame the collaborative initiative, conduct stakeholder analyses and

- determine decision-making methods, and identity appropriate and supporting roles and responsibilities.
    - c. Strong facilitation skills, especially in diverse and divergent settings, including a comfort with creating open space for emergent thinking and action
    - d. Experience and/or demonstrated understanding of and commitment to resolving structural and systemic issues regarding social justice, including race, class and gender.
    - e. Abilities to facilitate both in-person and virtually and work well and collaboratively with a team
    - f. Strong coaching skills for network participants and familiarity with network theory and practice as it applies to social change and sustainability efforts
  - ii. Phase 2: The Core Design Team and the Facilitator (selected via competitive process) participated in virtual meetings every two weeks to develop an initial plan for a Network Design proposal that will be shared with the entire Network (following Phase 3, in **Future Plans**.)
- 2. Several previous projects that INFAS was in the process of undertaking, or preparing to undertake, were placed on hold pending the outcome of the focused Network Design process. The projects included: submitting grant proposals to USDA and NSF; and INFAS webinars. It became clear during the 2013 annual meetings that a deep and broad reassessment of priorities for the Network was required for it to achieve the broad impacts that it strives for. In particular, it was acknowledged that the diverse commitments and priorities of the individual Network members presented real challenges to coalescing on a manageable number of Network activities. Further, it was clear that members needed to interrogate deeply how the Network activities can reflect our commitments to addressing inequities in the food system in a strategic way that takes our current limitations into account (funding, support for collaborations, support for external stakeholder participation, time constraints, etc.)

### **Future Plans (1-2 pages)**

1. *List the project and evaluation activities you intend to pursue during the next reporting period for each intended goal/outcome and note whether and how they involve modifications. (This list is what you will report on next year.)*

#### **Network Design**

- a. Phase 3: Core Design Team first face-to-face meeting: March 14-16, 2014, hosted by PI Tom Tomich at UC Davis.
  - i. Including the 8 member Core Design Team, the Design Team Facilitator, and two external members to broaden our discussion (Joann Lo, Director of the Food System Workers Alliance, and Cheryl Danley of Food Corps)

- ii. The opening event for this workshop will be an ASI/INFAS-hosted public panel by the Core Team entitled '**Perspectives on race, ethnicity, class, and gender in the food system.**'
    - iii. This panel will be recorded and shared online with the public.
  - b. Phase 4: The Core Design Team will present the outcomes of phase 3 in a proposal to the broader Network and community for input and revision, first by email, and then face to face during the annual INFAS meetings and workshops, to be held adjacent to the 2014 WKKF Food and Community gathering in Detroit (May 2014).
  - c. Phase 5: The Core Design Team, and additional INFAS members, plan to engage a broader stakeholder set (beyond INFAS) in a workshop to discuss and refine the INFAS Network Design proposal.
  - d. Phase 6: The outcomes of the Network Design process will inform the structure of INFAS and future activities of the Network, including expanding to work with other networks, engaging additional communities, and prioritizing Network projects and activities.
2. *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.

3. *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 (1/2 page)**

1. Two open-access commentaries were published by members INFAS. Joanna Friesner, the National Network Coordinator, facilitated the efforts. The commentary entitled 'Critical research needs for successful food systems adaptation to climate change' assesses knowledge gaps that present barriers to climate change adaptation by local, regional, national and global food systems. Authors of 'Food webs and food sovereignty: Research agenda for sustainability' describe the importance of addressing food equity, food security, and local food sovereignty as part of future projections for a comprehensive research agenda.
  - o Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development Miller, M., Anderson, M., Francis, C. A., Kruger, C., Barford, C., Park, J., & McCown, B. (2013). Critical research needs for successful food systems adaptation to climate change. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2013.034.016>

- Francis, C., Miller, M., Anderson, M., Creamer, N., Wander, M., Park, J., Green, T., & McCown, B. (2013). Food webs and food sovereignty: Research agenda for sustainability. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2013.034.010>
- 2. INFAS publications, reports, governance and processes are available at the INFAS website: <http://asi.ucdavis.edu/programs/inf/inf-reports>
- 3. We regularly share information to the INFAS email List-serve, which is open to interested people who wish to join.

### **Future Dissemination:**

1. The recorded network design panel (March 14, 2014) will be posted online and shared via email.
2. Outcomes of the Network Design face-to-face meeting (March 14-16, 2014) will be emailed to the Network via the list-serve; reports, if any, will be posted to the INFAS website.
3. The Network Design team plans to propose a community workshop for the WKKF gathering in Detroit (May 2014) where we can exchange information and solicit feedback from INFAS, and other community, members.
4. We're tentatively planning to hold a larger Network Design stakeholder meeting this fall (pending the outcomes of the May meetings.)

### **Evaluation Questions**

- Was an effective governance structure established?

The INFAS Executive Committee (EC) was established in a previous project year. The ten person committee includes six regular and four *ex officio* members. All members guide INFAS activities; regular members advise INFAS host Thomas Tomich on the allocation of funds and facilitate communication of INFAS activities to Tomich and the Dean of the UC Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Members serve staggered terms to allow overlap with replacement members and provide continuity.

- How were issues identified for the network to address or coordinate joint activities and responses?
1. INFAS in-person meetings: In the past project year the EC and the Network convened the second in-person meetings during the June 2013 Agriculture and Human Values Society meeting in Lansing, Michigan. The first EC action was for current EC chair, Bruce Milne, to pass the Chair position to chair-elect Patricia Allen. Molly Anderson was then appointed as new Chair-elect. Molly and Patricia will serve for one year after which the chair-elect will advance to be chair. The committee's main focus in June 2013 was to discuss the outcomes of the annual General INFAS meeting that had taken place immediately beforehand, which produced the consensus that INFAS should focus on an intensive Network Design process over the coming year. The EC affirmed this decision and discussed the procedure to initiate this process starting with canvassing the Network membership for willing, and able, leaders. Several EC members volunteered to participate in the

planning process and serve on the core Design Team.

2. INFAS virtual meetings: There were a number of virtual meetings convened over the past project year with renewed emphasis and frequency following the June annual meetings where the consensus was to undertake a facilitated Network Design process. To inform the virtual meetings, INFAS members were engaged via email and the INFAS list-serve.
  3. INFAS administration and host: Network host Thomas Tomich has connections to a diverse array of networks spanning many disciplines and stakeholder groups. This places him in a key position to act as a conduit for information flow and to assess numerous opportunities for activities, resources, and shared collaboration. For example, he is a member of the Research committee for AGree, an effort supported by nine of the world's leading foundations (including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation) to transform food and agriculture policy.  
Network Coordinator Joanna Friesner meets weekly with Tomich to assess potential opportunities arising from his various connections and those from the INFAS committees, and the broader Network membership.
  4. INFAS list-serve: The INFAS list-serve has a subscriber base of 55+ members and regularly circulated information within the Network. 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.
- Is there evidence that providing for the endowed chairs to function as a network has raised the national profile of the science of sustainability?

While we don't have evidence in hand there are three activities that we think show promise: (1) as described in the narrative report, several INFAS members published articles in the past project year, with acknowledgements to INFAS as the coordinating entity. (2) As described in 'future activities' the Network Design Core Team will present a public panel entitled 'Perspectives on race, ethnicity, class, and gender in the food system' during their March 2014 Network Design workshop hosted at UC Davis. The panel will engage the local community in an important conversation, and will be recorded to share more broadly. (3) Finally, one outcome of the March 2014 workshop is expected to be a proposal to submit for the 2014 WKKF Food and Community meeting in Detroit (May) which will engage a broader community, including raising the visibility of the network, the endowed chairs, and our efforts regarding the science of sustainability.