

Inter-institutional Network for Food and Agricultural Sustainability (INFAS)

Member Profile: Tom Kelly, University of New Hampshire

Background

Tom Kelly is the founder and the executive director of the Sustainability Institute (SI) at the University of New Hampshire (UNH). Tom works with the UNH community and many community partners to increase sustainability initiatives at UNH and within the surrounding region. Tom and his colleagues support collaborative sustainability education, research and practice at the intersection of climate, biodiversity, food and culture. Tom and SI colleagues initiated Food Solutions New England (FSNE) in 2010, and SI now serves as the backbone organization for this growing network.¹ Tom is one of the founding members of INFAS and the work that he is doing with FSNE is reflective of a commitment to social justice and racial equity within the food system as a critical component of sustainability.



Connection to INFAS

Tom's involvement in INFAS and FSNE have a number of parallels: both networks are working to improve the equity of the food system, and both networks demonstrate the positive roles that institutions of higher learning can play in collaborating with communities to promote sustainability. Both exemplify the value of University:Community partnerships to underpin collaborative networks that enable and inspire activism and societal change towards sustainability: FSNE focuses on the New England region while INFAS is national in scope. Both FSNE and INFAS have made commitments to advancing racial equity within the food system and as a result, both networks prioritize collaboration and activities that will increase the diversity of voices and participants within the respective network and its activities. FSNE and INFAS also foster connections between network partners which allow people to share information and stories and enable them to come together to work towards a common vision of sustainable food systems which by definition are inclusive and just..

FSNE has taken important first steps to come to terms with white privilege and structural racism and its pervasive impacts on the food system. Structural racism has greatly influenced who has land, and fishing rights, and who has access to working capital, technical assistance and education as well as food. Like INFAS, FSNE has made addressing these structural inequities a central objective to its work, understanding that the food system can never be sustainable if it isn't equitable across all of its dimensions. These commitments to racial equity have added new value and clarity to the networks and have refocused their efforts, activities, and priorities. As a result, both networks have committed to a set of values and practices that have clarified their identities and missions, and created within each a more holistic approach to building sustainable food systems.

Value of INFAS

Tom finds great value in participating in a network which can foster communication, collaboration, and action. Because each INFAS participant acts as a node in multiple networks associated with their own community-based projects INFAS also functions as a network of networks which presents a significant opportunity to create national change and to scale the successes of individual institutions and regions up to a national level. In Tom's view it is vital to create a network that can work on issues bigger than those at the individual institutional, regional, or state levels, and that will foster connections and relationships that lead to collaboration and change. Tom believes that clearly establishing racial equity as a core value and identity of INFAS's vision and mission is resulting in profound learning and deep engagement with

¹ <http://sustainableunh.unh.edu/kelly>; UNH Sustainability Institute. Accessed July 21, 2016

cultural values that drive network activities towards greater inclusion, pooling of diverse types of knowledge which lead to greater impact.

Project

Food Solutions New England (FSNE) is a regional network across Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont working to transform the New England food system into a driver of racial equity and food justice, healthy food for all, sustainable farming and fishing and thriving communities. FSNE's work includes *A New England Food Vision* and its ambitious goal of producing and harvesting 50% of New England's food while ensuring that it is produced, distributed, and consumed in a fair, just, and equitable way. FSNE has identified racial equity and dignity within the food system as one of its core values that is central to its overarching vision.



FSNE emerged in 2011 following over a decade of food system convenings by SI. In 2010 SI secured funding to convene the first New England Food Summit in 2011, which included state delegations as well as delegates working at the regional scale. Following the first summit, FSNE committed to convening annual summits around the region and to supporting the further development of what became *A New England Food Vision*². The first few Food Summits focused on network building and shaping a vision that the whole region could support. By the third Food Summit in 2013 the New England Food Vision was adopted and FSNE made a commitment to putting racial equity and food justice at the center of its work to create a sustainable and equitable food system in the six-state New England region. The Vision was published the following year and has since figured prominently in state summits, briefings, network meetings and countless gathering across the region and is continuing to stimulate new conversations about the future of the regional food system.

In its commitment to racial equity and ensuring dignity throughout the food system, FSNE strives to understand and demonstrate how structural racism is ubiquitous within the food system. FSNE has worked to increase its network diversity to gain critically needed knowledge and perspectives and conduct its work in a manner consistent with its values.

One of the first challenges was working to ensure that the FSNE Summits were including people beyond their typical networks. Since the first Food Summit, FSNE has incorporated more diverse members of the food system by engaging migrant workers, food chain workers, policy makers, and even the funders of FSNE into the Food Summits. An Ambassador team of three senior network participants working in the southern, and most racially diverse, states of the region (Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island) was established. The Ambassadors work to create more racially diverse leadership and mentorship opportunities for advancing equity in the food system. FSNE's high-level strategy resulting from a systems mapping project is focusing on democratic empowerment, a new food story, and building truly sustainable food economies.³

² <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/new-england-food-vision>

³ Images- <http://sustainableunh.unh.edu/sustainability-institute-staff/>; <http://www.unh.edu/unhtailes/food-solutions-new-england-summit/>; <http://interactioninstitute.org/leveraging-a-new-food-system-narrative/>