

## **Food and Society**

### **III. Food System Assessment/ Food Policy**

#### ***Summary***

This initiative aims to coordinate research, engagement and outreach to conduct regional food system assessments. These food system assessments can then contribute to improving public policies that support more sustainable, healthful food systems. The past decade has seen a marked increase in city and county governments, regional transportation and planning agencies and interested citizen groups that are assessing the state of their food and agricultural systems. They are measuring baseline and trend data across a variety of food system sectors. This initiative would collaborate with existing groups to create robust food system assessments and model tools that reveal gaps and opportunities in a region's food system and help identify appropriate policy, market incentives, education and other options.

#### ***Problem statement/ Baseline***

- Although city and regional governments often have transportation, economic development or land use policies, many lack a comprehensive food policy that integrates food and agricultural issues.<sup>i</sup>
- The food and agriculture research community and practitioners do not often connect with urban and regional planners and public health officials to implement more sustainable food systems.
- Few local governments, health and land use agencies collect comprehensive food and agricultural systems data and indicators to inform food policy choices.<sup>ii</sup>

#### ***Structural issues/ Broad drivers shaping change***

- Local governments have limited resources and tend to focus on policy options that will bring big revenues to cities and regions. Food policies are new and are not often priorities.
- Reduced state budgets (especially in California) put additional pressure on local governments to reduce spending (including for data collection and analysis).
- Turnover of elected officials, makes it difficult to create shared understandings and implement new approaches to regional food and agricultural policies.

#### ***Strategic opportunity***

- Regional governments, public health officials and citizen coalitions are beginning to create new alliances to implement strategies such as: regional aggregation and distribution facilities to source fresh, local food; building new markets that preserve regional farmland and assist entry-level and immigrant farmers; and improving transportation routes to healthy food access points.

- Groups such as SACOG (Sacramento Area Council of Governments), SANDAG (San Diego Association of Governments) are creating new models that educate the public and elected officials about new policy options.<sup>iii</sup>
- An increasing number of California coalitions are organizing to conduct food system assessments and create food policy councils.

***Desired outcomes***

- New data on food and agricultural trends are collected and institutionalized in public agencies and used by policymakers to improve food system sustainability.
- An increase in the number of comprehensive food system assessments and coalitions throughout the state that can be used as models by other regions.
- An increase in food policy councils that work with local governments and use food system assessments to improve food and agricultural systems over time.

***Key Partners***

- Community development organizations (eg., Local Initiatives Support Corporation-LISC San Diego; Community Development Corporation-CDC San Diego)
- Ag organizations (CAFF, Farm Bureaus, San Diego International Rescue Committee)
- Community health orgs (San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, San Diego Hunger Coalition, Public Health Dept-Siskiyou County)
- State and local government (DHHS-state and county, county supervisors)
- Planning agencies (SACOG, SANDAG)
- UCCE (both farm and consumer science advisors, faculty)
- Funders (CA Endowment)

***Activities***

- Conduct participatory food system assessment projects (city, county, region) with key partners (above) to describe the state of regional food systems (with baseline data) and to highlight gaps and opportunities for improving community food security. Examples of coordination with community/regional groups include:
  - San Diego Food System Assessment
  - SACOG / RUCS/ Valley Vision food system assessment
  - Lake/Siskiyou County food system assessment
- Coordinate with local governments, public health, planning agencies, UCCE and others to influence public policy (potentially through food policy councils) that supports more sustainable, regional food systems.

***Process***

- SAREP competitive grants to UCCE, researchers, communities, farmers
- Collaborative research/outreach projects (extramural funding) with UC, other universities, colleges, JCs, NGOs

- Expand SAREP/ASI staffing to coordinate activities more effectively (at least 1 additional FTE-extramural)

***Resources needed for 5 years***

Total need: \$1.5 million

- Competitive grants @ \$200K/yr for 5 years = \$1 M
  - Research grants
  - Education grants
  - Grants specifically for grad students
- Collaborative research (extramural) @ \$100K/yr for 5 years = \$500K
- *Additional SAREP/ASI staffing (using extramural funds) dedicated to FAS @ \$60K for 5 years = \$300K [part of all initiatives]*

Current extramural grants: \$58,000

Additional need: \$1.442 million

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<sup>i</sup> Mark Winne, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the table in the land of plenty*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

<sup>ii</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures “State Legislation on Childhood Obesity Options 2007.”

<sup>iii</sup> See: <http://www.sacog.org/rucs/>.