



A Review of Definitions of Community Food Systems

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Updated 5/2013

The complex nature of food systems issues such as the obesity epidemic, food security, and declining number of farms has inspired a whole or systems approach to food systems change. The University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Community Food Systems Team was formed in 2011 to promote an integrated, systems based approach by encouraging sharing and collaboration among colleagues in various aspects of the food system. Toward this end, the team compiled a variety of definitions of community food systems. In some cases there is significant overlap in the concept of a “sustainable” or “local” food system. Shared characteristics of community food systems based on these definitions include: existence of a **collaborative and integrated network, diversity, focus on local** production, processing and sale, integration of the **values of equity and social justice**, and consideration for **impact of food systems activities on the environment and future generations**.

American Public Health Association

“A sustainable food system is one that provides healthy food to meet current food needs while maintaining healthy ecosystems that can also provide food for generations to come with minimal negative impact to the environment. A sustainable food system also encourages local production and distribution infrastructures and makes nutritious food available, accessible, and affordable to all. Further, it is humane and just, protecting farmers and other workers, consumers, and communities. “

American Planning Association

“Community and regional food systems are ‘alternative, local, and sustainable’ systems designed to combat some of the problems of large, industrial food systems, including concentration of ownership and diet-related diseases such as obesity.”

University of California-Davis, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program

A sustainable community food system is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a particular place. Farmers, consumers and communities partner to create a more locally based, self-reliant food economy. One of the most important aspects of sustainable community food system projects is that they increase resident participation to achieve the following goals:

- A stable base of family farms that use sustainable production practices and emphasizes local inputs;
- Marketing and processing practices that create more direct links between farmers and consumers;
- Improved access by all community members to an adequate, affordable, nutritious diet;
- Food and agriculture-related businesses that create jobs and recirculate financial capital within the community;
- Improved living and working conditions for farm and food system labor;
- Creation of food and agriculture policies that promote local or sustainable food production, processing and consumption, and
- Adoption of dietary behaviors that reflect concern about individual, environmental and community health

Gail Feenstra

“A ‘community food system’ is one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place” (Feenstra, & Garrett, 1999).

A community food system, also known as a local food system, "is a collaborative effort to integrate agricultural production with food distribution to enhance the economic, environmental, and social well-being of a particular place (i.e. a neighborhood, city, county or region)." (Feenstra & Cambell, 1996).

Shared Principles of ADA, AMA, ANA, APA, APHA

Healthy, Sustainable Food Systems - Shared Principles of the American Dietetic Association, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, American Planning Association and American Public Health Association¹.

“A food system includes everything from farm to table. A community food system is a food system in which food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place. A community food system can refer to a relatively small area, such as a neighborhood, or progressively larger areas – towns, cities, counties, regions, or bioregions.

Health-Promoting

- Supports the physical and mental health of all farmers, workers and eaters.
- Accounts for the public health impacts across the entire lifecycle of how food is produced, processed, packaged, labeled, distributed, marketed, consumed and disposed.

Resilient

- Thrives in the face of challenges, such as unpredictable climate, increased pest resistance, and declining, increasingly expensive water and energy supplies.
- Diverse In Size and Scale – includes a diverse range of food production, transformation, distribution, marketing, consumption and disposal practices, occurring at diverse scales, from local and regional, to national and global.
- Geography – considers geographic differences in natural resources, climate, customs and heritage. Culture – appreciates and supports a diversity of cultures, socio-demographics, and lifestyles. Choice – provides a variety of health-promoting food choices for all.

Fair

- Supports fair and just communities and conditions for all farmers, workers and eaters.
- Provides equitable physical access to affordable food that is health promoting and culturally appropriate.

Economically Balanced

- Provides economic opportunities that are balanced across geographic regions of the country and at different scales of activity, from local to global, for a diverse range of food system stakeholders.
- Affords farmers and workers in all sectors of the system a living wage.

Transparent

- Provides opportunities for farmers, workers and eaters to gain the knowledge necessary to understand how food is produced, transformed, distributed, marketed, consumed and disposed.
- Empowers farmers, workers and eaters to actively participate in decision-making in all sectors of the system.

Sustainable

- Conserves, protects, and regenerates natural resources, landscapes and biodiversity.
- Meets our current food and nutrition needs without compromising the ability of the system to meet the needs of future generations.

We support socially, economically and ecologically sustainable food systems that promote health – the current and future health of individuals, communities and the natural environment. A healthy, sustainable food system emphasizes, strengthens, and makes visible the interdependent and inseparable relationships between individual sectors (from production to waste disposal) and characteristics (health-promoting, sustainable, resilient, diverse, fair, economically balanced and transparent) of the system.”

Defining Community Food Systems. In *Agriculture Sustainability Institute at UC-Davis*. Retrieved January 2012 from <http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/sfs/def>

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Toward a Healthy, Sustainable Food System. (2007). In *American Public Health Association*. Retrieved January 2012 from <http://www.apha.org/advocacy/policy/policysearch/default.htm?id=1361>

Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning. (2007). In *American Planning Association*. Retrieved January 2012 from <http://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/food.htm>

Principles of a Healthy, Sustainable Food System. In *American Planning Association*. Retrieved January 2012 from <http://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/foodprinciples.htm>

¹ These principles reflect the perspectives of the Healthy, Sustainable Food System Collaboration, comprised of the American Dietetic Association, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, American Planning Association and American Public Health Association. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Collaboration met June 9-10, 2010, at the American Public Health Association in Washington, DC. This statement is a broad articulation of shared principles. It should not be construed as any particular organization’s endorsement of a specific policy or policies.

This resource may be accessed online from the UW-Extension Community Food Systems Team at <http://fyi.uwex.edu/cfsi/>