



Rebuilding Your Local Food System

Taking a systems view to ensure sustainability.

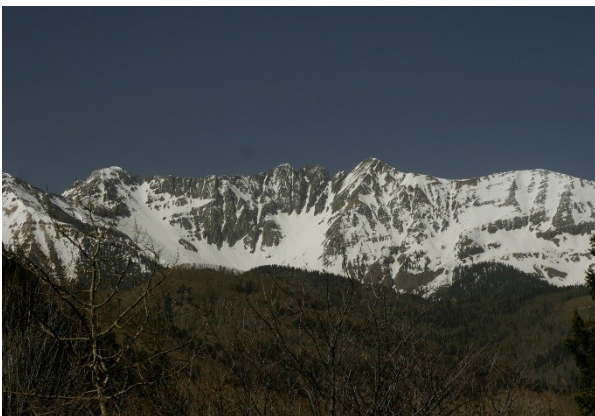
Rebuilding or just remodeling? You may be lucky enough to have an excellent local food system already in place, with only a few improvements needed. Most communities, however, face the challenge of bringing back the basic components of community self-sufficiency that have been lost during the industrialization of our food system. This booklet or “tool” is designed to help communities approach food system development in a thoughtful, inclusive, strategic, and effective fashion, and is part of a larger “toolbox” addressing food system development.



A SYSTEMS APPROACH

- CONSIDER THE WHOLE—Take a wide view.
- CONSIDER THE CONNECTIONS—Look for interactions.
- CONSIDER THE FUTURE—Take a long view.
- CONSIDER THE VIEWS & VALUES OF OTHERS—Question your assumptions.

LOCAL FOOD AS A SYSTEM



A wide view. Taking a systems approach to rebuilding your local food system starts with stepping back from the details and taking a careful look at all things involved with food in your community. You may be already working on the details of farmers markets, nutrition education, or Farm to School, but picturing the whole system is important to ensure overall success.

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Interactions. Next, look for how parts of the food system are connected. The more you look, the more connections or interactions you will see. Some interactions alert you to potential pitfalls where solving one problem creates several new problems. Other interactions are positive—synergies created when things work together well and the benefits multiply. Positive interactions can lead to “whole solutions,” where solving one problem helps solve others. See “Solving Problems,” page 3.

BENEFITS OF A SYSTEMS APPROACH

Uncover synergies.

Capture more benefits.

Use resources more efficiently.

Solve problems more effectively without creating new problems.



A long view. Another set of interactions relates to time. The state of our food system today depends in part on the choices made by previous generations. Likewise, the choices we make today help determine the challenges and opportunities that our children will face, and their children, and beyond. Planning efforts usually look 5, 10, maybe 20 years ahead, but the impacts of today’s decisions can last for much, much longer. Can we consider the impacts of our decisions “seven generations” ahead? Why shouldn’t we try?

LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF TODAY’S DECISIONS

An inch of soil eroded today may take **decades** to regenerate.

Greenhouse gasses emitted now from unnecessary shipping of food may contribute to climate disruptions lasting **centuries**.

A species moved to extinction by agricultural mismanagement today will **never** regenerate.



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Long-term and short-term planning are needed. Short-term planning helps protect current jobs, investments, and lifestyles we need and cherish, but is therefore quite resistant to significant change. Planning for 100-200 years ahead is essential for considering the fundamental changes, paradigm shifts, and new systems needed to protect future generations and the world around them.



SOLVING PROBLEMS

1. Start by asking the right question—a systems view can help you look for causes rather than just symptoms of a problem.

Consider whether we need cheap food or, rather, affordable food which requires livable wages for consumers and growers alike.

2. Avoid solutions that create more problems.

Consider how GMO crops designed to solve one problem create many new problems for farmers, consumers, and the environment.

3. Look for **whole solutions**.

Consider how growing some of your own food can reduce your food costs, reduce food miles, help you eat healthier, and give you more exercise.

SUSTAINABILITY VALUES

Consider the views and values other people care about. In addition to the physical parts of the food system—the tractors, stores, produce, etc.—it is wise to look at why people are trying to improve their local food system. Values that people hold are the reasons they are passionate about this work. Recognizing the great variety of values in food systems work is critical to harnessing community energy, being inclusive, and developing allies and partnerships. These can be called sustainability values, since people see these attributes as essential to have in their food system—now and well into the future.



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SOME VALUES COMMONLY SOUGHT IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Economic Viability	Environmental Soundness	Social Support & Fairness
Productive	Soil & Water Conserving	Fresh & Enjoyable
Profitable	Climate-Friendly	Healthy & Nutritious
Fair for Producers	Wildlife-Friendly	Affordable & Accessible
Fair for Consumers	Local	Culturally Appropriate
Good for Communities	Seasonally Appropriate	Traditional
	Restorative	Humane

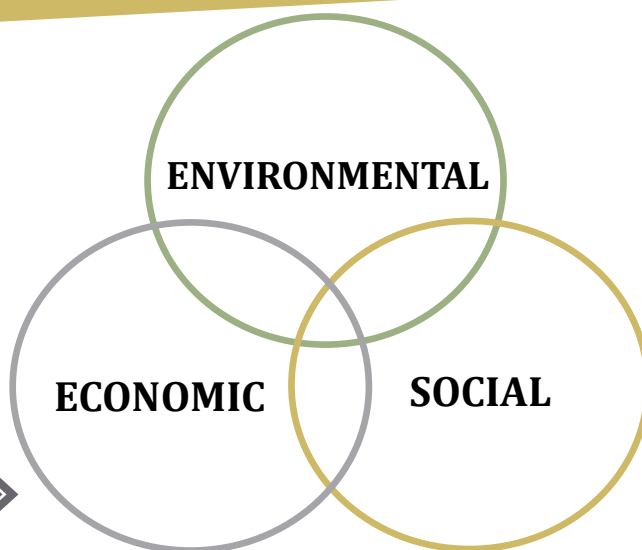
Too many values? It may seem overwhelming to consider all the things community members want to see in their food system. However, embracing the variety is critical to inclusiveness and effectiveness; recognizing patterns can help. First, each of these values tends to fall into one of three areas of sustainability: economic viability, environmental soundness, and social support and fairness—a much easier way to keep track of them. Secondly, actions taken to address any given value usually help address several others—making it much easier to start building them into your food system.

SUSTAINABILITY CAN BE DESCRIBED AS:

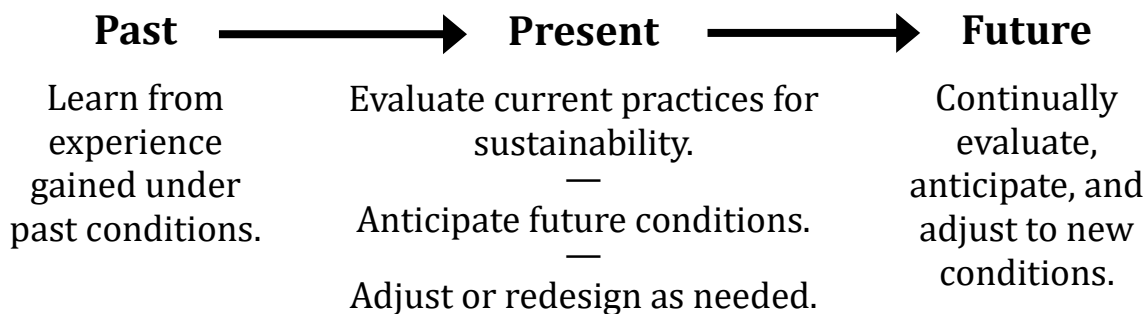
Providing for today’s needs, incorporating the values we care about, and preserving these choices for future generations.

It requires a wide view, a long view, and a concern for people and things beyond ourselves.

The three main aspects of sustainability



SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT A DESTINATION, BUT AN ONGOING PURSUIT



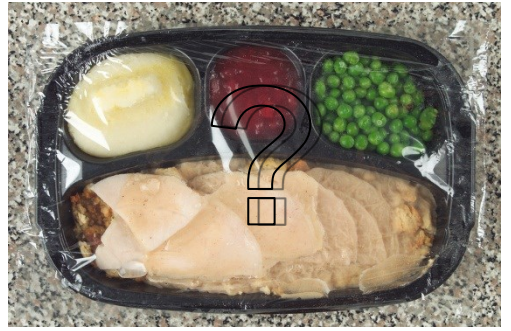
ESSENTIAL PARTS OF THE REBUILDING PROCESS

Questions for “you”—as a community:

- Understanding:** Do you understand your current local food system?
Consider how it works, who is involved, how it relates to the rest of the world.
See “Food Assessment Resources” in Online Resources.
- Stakeholders:** Do you have all the key stakeholders involved?
Include at least environmental, food/nutrition, economic, and environmental sectors as well as a fair representation of all socio-economic groups.
Use our “Values List” in Online Resources to find potential partners.
- Values:** Have you listened to the varied perspectives about the local food system from people in your community?
Listen to the community before “educating them.” What values do people want in their food system?
See our “Values Exercises” in Online Resources.
- Visions:** Do you have a vision for what you want your food system to be in the future?
Develop both short- (5-20 years) and long-term visions (100+ years).
See our “Picturing Your Food System Exercises” in Online Resources.
- Strategic Plans:** Do you have clear plans for how to achieve your desired future?
Establish long-term plans for broad systems changes and more detailed short-term plans that also address your long-term goals.
See our “Starting a Buy Local Food Campaign” Tool.
- Models:** Have you learned from the experience of other communities like yours?
Avoid reinventing the wheel.
See our “Community Models” in Online Resources.
- Education:** Do people in your community understand the issues and opportunities?
Provide education and outreach (after listening).
See our “How and Why to Buy Local” and “Sustainable Food Choices” Tools.
- Policy:** Do you have policies in place to support your local food system?
Promote local policies as well as provide input on state and federal ones.
See “Food Policy Resources” in Online Resources.
- Evaluation:** Have you evaluated your efforts to date in strengthening your food system?
Remember evaluation is essential for adjusting plans and allocating resources.
See our “Evaluation Resources” in Online Resources.

WHOSE FOOD SYSTEM IS IT?

Industrial vs. Local Food Systems. Our overall food system is a set of overlapping systems. Most food comes from a set of much larger industrial food systems of which we have little knowledge or control. Much of our food is “anonymous food.” We know little of what is in it, how good it is for us, who produced it, where, the impacts of its production, and how it got to our plate. Communities are combating anonymous foods by creating local food systems over which they have more control. Local food systems give people a greater chance of knowing their farmer and their food. Knowledge can lead to greater control through supportive community policies and especially by the food choices people make in the marketplace—voting with their food dollars. Local food encompasses the many values people want in their food systems.



Ownership. Communities should have significant and meaningful control of their food systems. It seems unfair and unwise for outside forces in the industrial food system to have nearly complete control over prices paid to farmers and charged to consumers, what foods are available, and what we know about them.

Obviously, we will share “ownership” of our food system with others in the larger food system, certain regulations are required for fairness and safety, and we need the support of groups outside our communities. The more we know about our food, and the more we take part in deciding what is important to us, the more we will own our food system and the more it will meet our needs and reflect our values.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Food sovereignty is a powerful concept arising from indigenous peoples’ movements which gives great meaning to “ownership” of food systems.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and societies.

Food Sovereignty: A Right for All
Political Statement of the NGO/CSO Forum for Food
Sovereignty—13 June 2002, Rome

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find online resources for this tool, as well as additional tool booklets on other community food topics, under “Food System Tools” at www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org or www.HCFS.org



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