Monitoring the Health of Your Local Foodshed

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Keeping track of the health of your local foodshed is helpful in determining 1) what is happening in food, climate change, and biodiversity, 2) which adaptation strategies to implement, and 3) how well your strategies are working. We recommend two distinct but overlapping and complementary approaches to monitoring.

1) Monitor data on selected indicators: Numerous indicators of the agricultural, economic, personal, food access, and environmental health of local foodsheds are suggested in the table in our section on Mapping Your Local Foodshed. In addition to gathering data on those indicators that are most pertinent to your community, we suggest that key indicators be monitored over time. A comprehensive monitoring of the health of your local foodshed would consist of:

- **Long-term monitoring:** Keeping track over time of data-based indicators of the economic, social, as well as environmental health of the foodshed is critical to recognizing changes in conditions and progress toward goals. Select a very small number of the most meaningful indicators that you and your partners can commit to watching consistently over a period of years. Ideally, this is data that is already collected by stable organizations and agencies, but you may need to work with such groups to establish more meaningful indicators and a means for tracking them.

- **Project specific monitoring:** Track indicators that relate specifically to community initiatives and current grants during the project period and beyond to see what longer term results occur.

2) Establish a whole community foodshed observing effort to engage producers, school children, environmental and nature groups, and local food consumers in observing and monitoring environmental indicators of healthy gardens, farms, ranches, and surrounding natural areas. This will engage many more people in understanding and protecting the foodshed, and result in better-informed food choices as well. See Observing Indicators of Foodshed Health for observing and monitoring guidelines for all ages, kids through adults—including Citizen Science opportunities.

- **Work with schools and preschools** to encourage more observing activities and Citizen Science projects. See our Wild School Gardens pages for more activities and resources.

- **Engage producers** currently selling, or willing to sell, food to schools to monitor some of the same indicators that the schools are observing, share results, and host school visits.

- **Call on community experts and organizations** in birding, entomology, weather, agronomy, and more to assist schools and producers in monitoring efforts.

- **Encourage all farmers and ranchers to monitor species and ecosystem processes of concern,** as well as climate impacts, in conjunction with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other groups, and share findings with schools and other community members.