Introducing Food Systems
Thinking from the Farmer’s Perspective

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Introductions
Consumers in the Food System

• What do consumers want and need?
• What are the root causes of food insecurity?
• What does it take to create and sustain a cohesive movement?
Food Systems

- A food system includes all the stages of how and what we eat:

- The most common food system is the global agro-industrial food system. In a global food system food travels great distances from where it is produced to where it is consumed.

Diagram Adapted from: Shri, C. Center for Environmental Farming Systems; Williams, C.E, What is a Food System? Idaho Summit on Hunger and Food Security
Local, Regional, and Community Food Systems

- A movement: re-designing food systems for community health!

- People and organizations traditionally involved with separate parts of the food system are coming together to tackle challenges related to health, environment, and economy, as part of the “community food systems” movement.

- A **sustainable food system** integrates across the food system to enhance economic, environmental, social, and nutritional health for all.

- Education, Research, Policy, and Access
Benton County Extension's Role in Food Systems

This diagram illustrates how Extension programs and personnel work within various areas of the food system. The colored circles correspond to a different Extension program area, and the boxes correspond to food system functions. For example, the Master Gardener Program works on Food Production, Food Education, and Food Access.

Please note: these circles represent programs which in many cases, account for only a portion of an Extension staff's full FTE. Many of our faculty and staff conduct programming in several different program areas and some may not be directly connected to Food Systems work.

Community Partners help us to expand our reach and create synergies in the community as we avoid duplication of effort. Here are some of the community partners with whom we work:

- Benton County
- Benton County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Corvallis Sustainability Coalition
- Department of Human Services
- Granges
- Grocery Stores
- Farmers & Growers
- Farmers Markets
- Health Departments
- Hospitals
- Oregon Food Bank and Benton County Food Banks
- School Districts
- Sheriff's Office
- Social Service Agencies
- Farmers & Growers

Diagram developed by Lauren Kraemer OSU Extension Family & Community Health, for Wasco County, 2018
Adapted for Benton County by Teagan Moran OSU Extension Small Farms, February 2019
Challenges & Reality

• One local farmer stated, "The fact that you can get a bag of Cheetos cheaper than you can get a bunch of carrots, that's the primary barrier. Let's face it."

Eaters want local, high-quality food to be cheaper, but farmers need adequate support to make a living wage... many growers are food insecure themselves.
Challenges & Reality

What is the true cost of producing food on small farms that support a local economy?

- Super slim profit margins, exuberant overhead and labor costs
- Farmer vulnerabilities – one unexpected thing can disrupt an entire operation
- Most growers need off-farm income in order to make ends meet
- Small growers can't take advantage of highly subsidized programs
- Can't access economies of scale of larger operations – cost of production is much higher
Challenges & Reality

Bottom line: Farmers can barely afford to stay on their land. We need to invest and support our small farmers FIRST if we have any hope to have a thriving, local food economy.
What are the top three barriers/issues that local farmers face in order to economically produce local food at a living wage and stay healthy:

• Access to Land & Capital

• Access to Small Farm Meat Processing Infrastructure

• Expanding Opportunities for Agritourism- diversifying income on the farm

www.friendsoffamilyfarmers.org
What are farmers doing on an individual basis to address food insecurity?

- Farmers subsidize CSA shares, offer work trade for veggies, and even sell to low-income customers at a discounted price
- Participate in local gleaning programs
- Food donations
- Accept EBT cards, WIC FMNP and F&V, Senior FMNP
Highlighted Programs

Collaboration between non-profit organizations and for-profit farm businesses will have the greatest chance of ensuring farm viability while decreasing food insecurity.

- Food Hubs
- Veggie Rx
- Farm to School
- Farmers Markets - SNAP Match
- Food Banks and Food Shares Contracting with Farmers – Intentional Growing Program
- Crop Donation Tax Credit
• As demand for locally-sourced foods continues to rise, many smaller farming and ranching operations find it difficult to sell larger quantities to grocery stores, restaurants, and other institutions.

• According to the USDA, “food hubs make it possible for producers to gain entry into new and additional markets that would be difficult or impossible to access on their own.”

• **Food Hubs** are distribution centers that provide a logistical and marketing interface between farmers and regional buyers.
Through the Oregon Community Food Systems Network, the organizations of the Veggie Rx working group have been providing access to fresh, local foods for patients experiencing food insecurity and/or diet-related diseases. Partnering with local health clinics and Coordinated Care Organizations, healthcare providers prescribe produce prescriptions typically redeemable at Farmers Markets or for a CSA membership.

https://extension.oregonstate.edu/community-vitality/food-systems/veggie-rx-oregon
The Oregon Farm to School and School Garden Network’s (OFSSGN) mission is to improve the health and well-being of youth, families, farms, and the environment by supporting members of Oregon’s farm to school and school garden community the their work to incorporate healthy, local food into school meals and implement food and garden-based education.

http://ocfsn.net/oregon-farm-to-school-and-school-garden-network/
This statewide program provides cash incentives to low-income Oregonians who receive benefits through SNAP for purchasing locally grown fruits and vegetables at farmers markets and through community supported agriculture (CSA).

While most of Oregon Farmers markets accept SNAP benefits (also known as Food Stamps, EBT or Oregon Trail), many also offer a matching program, which doubles SNAP purchases dollar for dollar up to a certain amount — meaning you could get $10 worth of food for only $5 from your SNAP account.
Purchasing Power of Food Banks

• The purchasing power of regional food banks is yet another way they can help build community food security, by supporting local, sustainable farms.

• Linn-Benton Food Share (LBFS), which serves Linn and Benton counties, began an “Intentional Growing Program” in the 2016 growing season.

• BFS contracts with small, local farms to purchase an agreed-upon dollar amount of fresh, healthy produce on a regular basis over the season.
In the 2014 state legislature, Oregon Farm Bureau partnered with the Oregon Food Bank to reinstate the Crop Donation Tax Credit.

This allows farmers and ranchers to receive a tax credit of 15% of the wholesale value of a food crop they donate to a charitable organization. Before the credit, many farmers donated crops at a cost to their business because it was the right thing to do. This tax credit incentivizes even more farmers and ranchers to participate.
Thank you! Any Questions?

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"The future cannot be predicted, but it can be envisioned and brought lovingly into being. Systems cannot be controlled, but they can be designed and redesigned." Donella Meadows

Donnella Meadows, an influential environmental thinker, founded the Sustainability Institute, now called Academy for Systems Change.