

Food Policy and Regional Food Systems: Opportunities for Networking

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Regionalism: a food systems framework

- Based on assumption that regions are different
- Responds to regional characteristics and needs
- Encourages regional approaches and solutions

Local and regional

- Local food attributes and merits (direct, “short chains”, small scale, emphasis on consumers and community)
- Local and regional: value in distinguishing them (new ERS publication...)
- Regional is:
 - Larger geographically: could be within a state or multi-state
 - Larger functionally: food needs and volume, variety, supply chains, markets, land use, policy

A regional food and farming system

- A regional food system operates at various scales and geographies to supply some significant portion of the food needs of its population.
- Economic and social return to all stakeholders
- Minimizes imports
- Local is part of regional; necessary but not sufficient
- Regional is more than scaled-up or scaled-out local
- May include seafood
- May include non-food products

Thinking regionally

- What is the optimal size, scale and/or location to address a specific problem or for a particular activity?
- What is—and should be—the role of regions in feeding ourselves?
- What contributions can “thinking regionally” make toward a more sustainable *and resilient* food and farming system?

Regions...

- Can be defined by:
 - Political or administrative boundaries (e.g., Dane County, “Tri-state”, EPA Region 1)
 - Bio-regions (e.g., Chesapeake Bay, Hudson Valley) → “foodshed”
 - Culture (e.g., the Big Apple, Silicon Valley)

- Are fluid, nested and interactive
 - E.g., Cape Cod → New England → Northeast
 - Inter-regional trade (oranges for apples)

- Bridge the rural-urban divide → inextricably related

Models for working regionally

- Formal compacts, commissions and authorities
- Intergovernmental bodies
- Memoranda of Agreement/Understanding
- Regulatory harmony and reciprocity (within and across states)
- Regional networks and initiatives
- Coordinated multi-state planning

Challenges to working regionally

- Parochialism and loyalty
- Complexity
- Policy and political disincentives
- Priorities and mandates
- Distance, logistics

Opportunities for working regionally

- Hubs and chains
- Coordinated services (e.g., inspection, Extension)
- Food Policy Councils: multi-community and multi-state planning and advocacy networks
- Targeted problem solving and joint action
- Branding
- Education and best practices
- Solidarity
- Funders thinking regionally (e.g., New England Food Policy Project)

Resources

- *It Takes a Region... Exploring a Regional Food Systems Approach*
 - Kathryn Ruhf and Kate Clancy at www.nesawg.org/resources
- *Is Local Enough? Some Arguments for Regional Food Systems*
 - Kate Clancy and Kathryn Ruhf in Choices, the Magazine of Food, Farm and Resource Issues (google for URL)
- *Are We Being Served? A Regional Framework for U.S. Farm and Food Policy*
 - Kathryn Ruhf at www.nesawg.org/our_work .
- *New England Food Policy: Building a Sustainable Food System*
 - American Farmland Trust, Conservation Law Foundation and NESAWG (google for URL)
- Kathy Ruhf kzruh@Verizon.net

Thank you!