

YOU CAN'T RUSH THE PROCESS: COLLECTIVE IMPACT MODELS OF FOOD SYSTEMS CHANGE

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PHOTO CREDITS

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➤ INTRODUCTION

Local food advocates are increasingly joining together to form state and multi-state initiatives to strengthen food systems on a broader scale than has been possible in the past. Many of these efforts are built around the concept of collective impact¹, the idea that organizations representing diverse sectors must actively commit to a common agenda to solve complex social problems.

Michigan joined this trend in 2009 when three organizations – the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS), the Food Bank Council of Michigan, and the Michigan Food Policy Council – came together to develop a vision and set of goals for the state’s food system. These efforts resulted in the release of the Michigan Good Food Charter in 2010. Since then, a steering committee has emerged to guide the work, and a suite of state networks formed to push for food system change in specific sectors and communities. Now in 2015, there is a desire to understand the impact of the work on a deeper level and measure change in a way that furthers the capacity of and coordination between partner organizations.

A team of researchers from the University of Michigan and Michigan State University carried out this national scan of similar initiatives from across the country to

position the Michigan work on a national level. This report shares our survey findings. More specifically, the purpose of this report is to:

- 1) **inform the evaluation strategies** of the current Michigan Good Food Charter Initiative coordination, led by CRFS and funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, by identifying key metrics other state and regional food systems initiatives are tracking to assess outcomes,
- 2) **build the capacity** of CRFS by learning about the strengths, limitations and lessons learned from similar types of food systems initiatives using a collective impact approach, and
- 3) **share lessons** with other initiatives around the country engaging in collective impact models of food systems change.

METHODOLOGY

This “national scan” is one component of a larger, in-depth evaluation of the Michigan Good Food Charter work at CRFS. Due to resource and time constraints, this report offers only an initial glimpse into some of the many – and ever-expanding – networked food systems initiatives around the country. We identified initiatives to feature, starting with the Michigan Good Food Charter, through a snowball sample of some of the most well-known food systems initiatives. We focused on the largest efforts – those working at state or multi-state scales – and attempted for geographic diversity. The initiatives selected also shared the characteristics of a collective impact model, though not all explicitly identify their approach as such. This resulted in seven initiatives that were launched as recently as 2012 and as early as 1992 (see Table 1).

Our method (see Figure 1) included a review² of websites, white papers and academic articles specific to each initiative. Most of the lessons we feature, however, draw on 10 key informant interviews we completed with one or two coordinators from each initiative.

Five conditions of collective success:

- 1) common agenda
- 2) shared measurement systems
- 3) mutually reinforcing activities
- 4) continuous communication
- 5) backbone support

Our questions focused on the missions of each initiative, actors involved, their strategies, evaluation metrics, key challenges, lessons learned, and communication strategies. We also asked about strategies specific to reaching underserved and historically marginalized communities, a particular interest of the Michigan Good Food Charter Initiative. More broadly, our questions were framed through the lens of collective impact, the framework that guides the Michigan work. Kania and Kramer (2011)³ distinguish collective impact from other collaborative efforts by its “centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants” (p. 38).

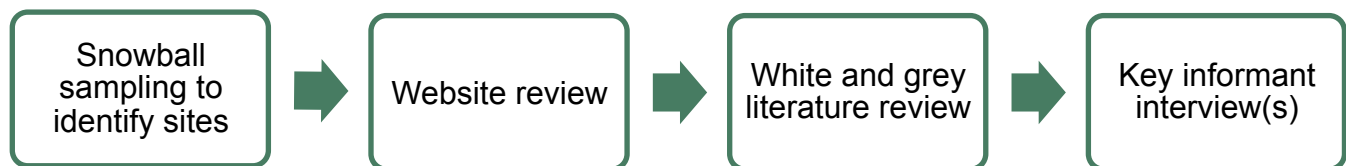


Figure 1. Overview of Methodology

Table 1. Overview of Initiatives

Initiative	Backbone Organization	Year Launched	Guiding Document(s)	States Involved
Minnesota Food Charter for Our Healthy Future	Terra Soma and University of Minnesota Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute	2012	The Minnesota Food Charter	MN
Food Solutions New England (FSNE)	University of New Hampshire Sustainability Institute	2011	New England Food Vision	CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT
Appalachia Foodshed Project (AFP)	North Carolina State, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, and community partners	2011	n/a	Western NC, Southwest VA, WV
The Michigan Good Food Charter	Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems	2009	Michigan Good Food Charter	MI
Vermont Farm to Plate (F2P) Initiative	Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund	2009	Farm to Plate Strategic Plan	VT
Regional Food System Working Group (RFSWG) of Iowa	The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture	2003	Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan	IA
Roots of Change (ROC): CA Food Policy Network	Roots of Change	2002	The Food Declaration	CA
Central Appalachian Network (CAN)	Rural Support Partners	1992	n/a	KY, OH, TN, VA, WV

➤ FINDINGS

Our review reinforces the fact that efforts to change food systems require attention to the context in which actors are operating. Factors such as agricultural systems, local politics, issues of equity, funder and nonprofit infrastructure, and the policy context all determine how local food advocates approach their work. As Margaret Adamek has learned in helping to develop the Minnesota Food Charter, the newest of the initiatives we reviewed, borrowing from other

states and initiatives only goes so far as “the unique features of each place are what dictate the strategy”. Like the initiatives we reviewed, therefore, this report does not claim that there is a particular model for achieving food systems change; even when many initiatives explicitly cited a collective impact frame, the specifics about what each initiative is doing, how, with whom, and for how long is uniquely shaped by each local context.

Accordingly, we acknowledge that lessons must be viewed within the context in which the work takes place. With this in mind, several crosscutting themes emerged that suggest similarities across the seven initiatives we reviewed.

Themes found across food system initiatives reviewed:

- investing time
- building trust
- being strategic about communication
- using stories as strategy and evaluation
- tracking economic impact and other metrics
- engaging diverse stakeholders

Changing food systems through a collective impact approach takes considerable time to learn how to build and work across networks, and also relies heavily on building trust. For organizations supporting the growing number of food system networks, this work also requires being savvy about when, in what way, and how much to communicate with the growing number of actors engaging in food systems change. While the evaluation approaches of the initiatives we studied varied widely in content, scope and quality, two things united many of them: tracking the quantitative, economic impact of local food systems, and sharing qualitative stories to inspire and identify successes. Finally, the inherent, networked nature of this work also means that all initiatives are engaging diverse stakeholders, though in some cases, efforts to reach historically marginalized communities has been a challenge or not an explicit goal until recently.

INVESTING TIME

Without exception, every initiative around the country spoke about the time-intensive nature of this work. For instance, Ellen Kahler from the Vermont Farm to Plate (F2P) Initiative explained that “it takes time for people to really understand and learn what it takes to work in a networked way...you can’t rush the process.” She

further elaborated that it wasn’t until year three of their network that people started to feel like they “get what it means to really be in a network”. Similarly, Marten Jenkins, a member in the Central Appalachian Network (CAN), explained that this work “always takes longer than you think it’s going to take. Everyone has to be around the table and pulling on the same oar. It is resource-intensive work, and there has to be alignment or it’s not going to get done”. Michael Dimock spoke about how the California-based Roots of Change (ROC) initiative has spent years laying the groundwork for their work, and “now it has emerged”. Similarly, reflecting about the evolution of the Food Solutions New England (FSNE), Tom Kelly shared that “there is value in being clear about what we are doing and how we are doing it. It took a long time to quiet the confusion of what was really going on”.

BUILDING TRUST

Six of the seven featured initiatives spoke specifically about the importance of building trust, relating both to doing and evaluating the work of collaborative initiatives. This is likely the task that takes the most time, as Nikki D’Adamo-Damery from the Appalachia Food Project (AFP) discussed how “we’ve worked for a long time to be accountable to our community partners”. Curtis Ogden, a member of the FSNE core team also wrote in a blog post that network success rests on such trust: “Change begins and ends with relationships, and a big part of systems change is re-wiring and bringing greater depth (trust) to existing patterns of relationships.”

In addition to building trust with and between people involved in carrying out the work, another interviewee talked about potential trust issues that can arise related to the sources of funding, particularly when actors associate it with “big ag”. Corry Bregendahl of the Regional Food System Working Group (RFSWG) of Iowa also spoke about how external evaluators may not be able to fully keep up with the emerging nature of the work, understand who the actors are, or gain their trust to gather lessons learned if the evaluators are not deeply immersed in the work.

BEING STRATEGIC ABOUT COMMUNICATION

The importance of strategic communication was repeatedly articulated by backbone organizations. Many interviewees could relate to the struggle between striving for transparency and at the same time not wanting to overburden network members with too much information or “death by meetings”, as Corry Bregendahl of RFSWG Iowa put it.⁴ The Vermont Farm to Plate (F2P) Initiative is also very careful not to send out too many emails. Ellen Kahler shared that the password protected portal of the F2P website has been a helpful communication tool for network members.

D'Adamo-Damery also described how AFP is experimenting with several modes of communication. Aside from Facebook and a listserv, a “local wiki” is being launched with information about the organizations and projects emerging across the initiative's three-state region. As part of AFP's model of “dynamic governance”, AFP is also identifying people who can serve as “links” to other organizations or networks. When possible, there are “double links”, so that, for instance, a person from a Food Security Advisory Council would sit in on the AFP management team meetings and a person from the AFP management team would sit in on the Food Security Advisory Council. Coordinators with the Michigan Good Food Charter also continually assess the effectiveness of - and need for - various communication strategies, including a newsletter, social media, and in-person, conference call, and video-chat meetings that bring actors together across the entire initiative and within particular focus areas.

USING STORIES AS STRATEGY AND EVALUATION

Nearly all of the initiatives also feature stories either as a strategy – a way to inspire more action – or a form of evaluation to identify accomplishments. Vermont F2P prominently features stories on their website home page, as does the Michigan Good Food Charter, the Minnesota Food Charter, and FSNE. The RFSWG of Iowa has used stories as a strategic component of their regional reports to “lift up” various work identified by local food coordinators. Ogden, of FSNE, also described how “stories are like compost, because they can be recycled back into the system to fertilize growth”, inspiring others within the network to replicate success or generate new strategies.

Kahler of Vermont F2P added, “we are a firm believer in stories, and we use them in many different ways”, whether to explain data visualizations or as feature stories in newsletters or on the website to show progress. Speaking on behalf of CAN, Jenkins also noted how the stories they use complement more quantitative evaluation efforts: “The stories are what bring the numbers to life and get people engaged”.

TRACKING ECONOMIC IMPACT AND OTHER METRICS

Aside from collecting qualitative stories to illustrate how local food systems are changing, the initiatives we reviewed have chosen very different ways to evaluate their progress. The indicators they are tracking, for instance, range from public health outcomes to community food security, the multiplication of local food ordinances, the passage of policy, phosphorus concentrations in waterways, and

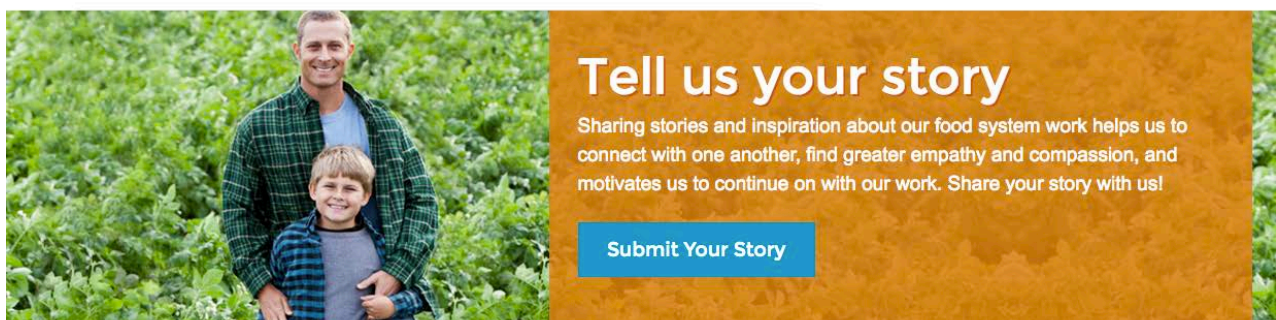


Figure 2. Food Solutions New England asks for story submissions via their website.

Image from: <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/>

emerging local food partnerships. The most common indicator across initiatives is the economic impact of local food. These analyses focus on metrics such as dollars spent on local food, jobs created as a result of local food commerce, or dollars leveraged for local food infrastructure and businesses. The RFSWG of Iowa, in particular, has engaged in robust economic evaluation efforts.

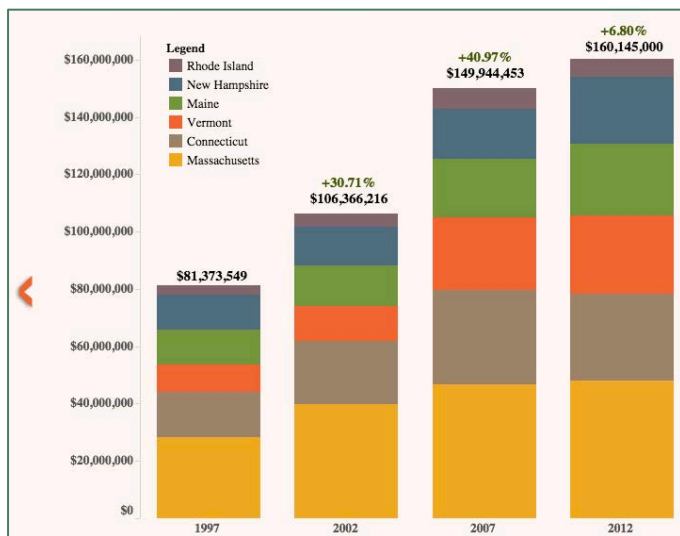


Figure 3. Vermont F2P tracks the total value of farm direct sales over time in New England as an indicator of local food consumption. Image from: <http://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/getting-to-2020/1-total-local-consumption>

The Vermont F2P Initiative has one of the most comprehensive evaluation efforts of the initiatives reviewed. Prominently featured on their website, Vermont F2P links population level indicators to each of their 25 goals using data visualizations created with publicly available information. Most initiatives, however, admit that their evaluation efforts are still being developed and must become more robust. One of the major challenges noted by three of these initiatives is attributing the impact of this work – “trying to find ways to tell the story” is a challenge when “backbone” organizations are not in fact the ones doing the work. Even Kahler with Vermont F2P notes

that the data they track allows for a statewide view of progress in Vermont, but attributing change at the population level directly to the F2P work can be a challenge.

D’Adamo-Damery from AFP also discussed how, “The causality is hard to establish...so much exciting work has grown up alongside our work, but we didn’t do it directly. It’s our partners’ work, on the ground. We are trying to facilitate some of it, foster connections between people, organizations, and ideas. These spaces we’re creating for people to interact and talk are very important, but how do you justify that without it being the main story or sounding like the dominant work?”

ENGAGING DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS

Another common strategy across many initiatives is the engagement of diverse local food system leaders. The RFSWG of Iowa, for instance, supports “local food coordinators” to help bring together stakeholders in their region and collect evaluation data. Several initiatives are also taking more active steps to reach broader and more diverse audiences. As Rich Pirog, Senior Associate Director with the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, explains, “our work has increasingly revealed the importance of addressing race and equity issues within the food system explicitly and the limited circle of leaders across networks and projects, both of which point to a need to build up new and diverse leaders in food system work.”

Similarly, FSNE is soon to launch its second year of a New England-wide “ambassador program,” which “supports people of color in the network to go out into their communities and engage people about their hopes, dreams, and ambitions for the food system”. Each ambassador is responsible for recruiting five delegates from their communities who then attend the FSNE summit and become engaged with the network.

CONCLUSION

Although the initiatives featured in this report were launched in different years, almost all of the key informants expressed how there were no clear models for them to follow when they began. Only a few years ago, Kahler of Vermont F2P recalled the excitement of discovering that others were launching similar initiatives when she met representatives from several backbone organizations around the country (e.g., Mike Hamm from Michigan, Michael Dimmock from California, and Rich Pirog, working with Iowa initiatives at the time) at the first 2011 New England Food Summit organized by FSNE.

Pirog also explained how many of the actors and networks featured in this report have been interacting in other ways for the last five to seven years, “learning from and inspiring each other along the way”. They have interacted through many phone calls and field visits, by participating in trainings sponsored by other initiatives, and in two cases, former coordinators or graduate students involved in one initiative are now coordinating other efforts. Since 2011, collaborative food systems work has expanded and matured around the country, in part due to this informal learning community and the cross-fertilization that has linked many of these efforts.

We only looked at seven food systems initiatives, each of which is more complex than we could feature and understand in this report. Our analysis, therefore, only begins to touch the surface of the emerging strategies, lessons and evaluation approaches that might help inform decision-making within and across food systems change initiatives. More systematic research is needed to identify how this work advances

our understanding of collective impact and many associated theories, such as actor network theory⁵, rural wealth creation⁶, social movements⁷ and collaborative leadership capacity⁸, that could continue to strengthen efforts to transform food systems.

One question our review raised, for instance, is about the extent to which creating “backbone” organizations is actually necessary, or desirable, for carrying out collective impact work out of concern that existing institutions can begin to see the backbone agency as “additional competition for funding”. D’Adamo-Damery, for instance, noted how AFP partners have discussed whether it might be possible to simply exist as a network without a lead organization or, as another partner in the collaboration wondered, whether they could establish a “proto-backbone” organization by creating the “conditions of a backbone organization” without any one institution actually serving as one. In addition to learning how to diversify the communities engaging in this work, at least two initiatives have also started raising questions about how to bring policymakers into the conversation, though in some cases, like Vermont’s F2P, policy actors are already at the table. As this work continues, the strategies, evaluations and analysis must also move beyond a focus on process to begin to identify more sophisticated ways to assess outcomes, so that networks can identify unintended consequences and determine how, and under what circumstances, their efforts are able to (re)build local food economies, close gaps in access, mediate conflicting interests, engage underrepresented voices, prevent food-related public health epidemics, engrain ecologically sustainable practices and more.

MINNESOTA FOOD CHARTER



“The Minnesota Food Charter is a roadmap designed to guide policymakers and community leaders in providing Minnesotans with equal access to affordable, safe, and healthy food regardless of where they live.”

KEY STRATEGIES

- Using a “Healthy Food Access” framework, which is a unifying focus for rural communities, Tribal Nations and other interests in the state
- Using a “collective action” approach, which includes all five components of collective impact
- Focusing on health equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Using strategic communications to deploy a popular education campaign focused on policy change and food systems, using adult learning theory
- Using a distributed leadership model, which actively works for broad participation across the Minnesota food system (i.e. new immigrants, large farmers, the food industry, philanthropy, higher education, location public health, small organic farmers, tribal nations, school kids, etc.)
- Using the local public health infrastructure to engage the public and implement proposed strategies, which has a presence in every county in the state
- Led a major public engagement effort to develop the charter: “Building the movement while building the document”

EVALUATION INDICATORS

- Body Mass Index
- Funds raised
- Developed list of indicators, but have not used yet

LESSONS LEARNED

- “Change happens through policy change and systems change at all levels”.
- Process matters: building relationships has huge dividends, but it also takes significant time and energy.
- Rigor matters in every facet of the work - in engagement, drafting, communications, relationship building, effective collaboration, systems change literacy, and inclusion.
- Communication must be strategic to effectively engage diverse stakeholders.
- Understanding the relationship between agriculture, politics and food systems is essential to moving this work forward.

➤ **LAUNCHED 2012**

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» FOOD SOLUTIONS NEW ENGLAND



“We believe that New England can be substantially food self-reliant producing as much as 50% of the food we eat by 2060.”

KEY STRATEGIES

- Using a regional network, collective impact approach across six New England states; key supports include a 28-member Network Team representing all six states and diverse food system perspectives as well as a 10-member Core Team that provides ongoing process design.
- Coordinating an ambassador program that supports three people of color to work in CT, MA and RI to identify and make connections with new and diverse partners, organizations and individuals. Each ambassador identifies five others who participate in the FSNE summit and become connected to broader community efforts. This program helps to create space for a more racially diverse leadership.

EVALUATION INDICATORS

- Stories as indicators of change
- The region is in the process of identifying shared indicators, and will likely use a similar approach as Vermont F2P (publicly available, population level indicators); examples include data from the US Census of Agriculture, the USDA, and Centers for Disease Control
- Tracking diversity of attendees at New England Food Summit
- Tracking up-take of the New England Food Vision

» **LAUNCHED 2011**

» **CONTACT**

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LESSONS LEARNED

- “There is value in being clear about what we are doing and how we are doing it. It took a long time to quiet the confusion of what was really going on.”
- “After the third summit, FSNE added racial equity and food justice to the center of the work. This led to re-thinking about who is a part of the core team and network team. FSNE needed to re-think how to identify and recruit more diverse network members to influence the network process.”
- “It’s about directly involving vulnerable communities, not about delivering food or rushing out to help.”



➤ APPALACHIAN FOODSHED PROJECT

“The AFP's mission is to help create a place-based food system that is resilient, accessible, affordable, and healthy for Appalachian communities.”



➤ **LAUNCHED 2011**

➤ **CONTACT**

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KEY STRATEGIES

- Using a foodshed framework
- Facilitating multi-state Community Food Security Assessments using the Community Food Security Coalition's model of Whole Measures for Community Food Systems (see <http://www.wholecommunities.org/pdf/WholeMeasuresCFS.pdf>)
- Fostering relationship by engaging partners around food assessments and project decision-making
- Modeling regional community food security using System Dynamics, based on concepts similar to those advocated by the Systems Dynamics Society
- Providing sub-grants for Community Enhancement Projects aimed at enhancing community food security

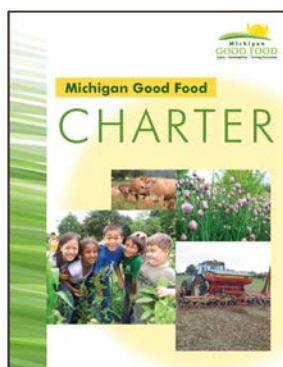
EVALUATION INDICATORS

- Partnerships and projects that emerge out of the spaces the initiative creates that help actors connect
- Community food security, including access to local fresh foods

LESSONS LEARNED

- “Different people come to the table because we aren't doing straight up economic development and value-chain work. It's important to create space for other aspects of community food security.”
- “Either everyone or no one wants to be the backbone organization.”
- “The causality is hard to establish...so much exciting work has grown up alongside our work, but we didn't do it directly. It's our partners' work, on the ground. We are trying to facilitate some of it, foster connections between people, organizations, and ideas. These spaces we're creating for people to interact and talk are very important, but how do you justify that without it being the main story, or sounding like the dominant work?”

➤ MICHIGAN GOOD FOOD INITIATIVE



“We envision a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people through a food system rooted in local communities and centered on good food.”

KEY STRATEGIES

- Convening and coordinating networks, including the Michigan Farm to Institution Network, the Michigan Food Hub Network, the Michigan Local Food Council Network, the Livestock Work Group and the Food Justice Work Group
- Using a collective impact framework
- Hosting a biannual statewide summit
- Facilitating the creation of a shared measurement system
- Improving food access and fostering viable food businesses through provision of technical assistance to food hubs and the recently launched Michigan Good Food Fund, an adaptation of a healthy food financing initiative that will provide loans across the supply chain

➤ **LAUNCHED 2009**

➤ **CONTACT**

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EVALUATION INDICATORS

- Progress towards six goals of the Michigan Good Food Charter, which calls for 20% of Michigan’s food to come from Michigan by 2020
- Signatures to the Michigan Good Food Charter Resolution of Support
- Growth in number of networks, network participants and connections made because of network participation
- Indicators related to economic impacts and healthy food access are being developed through a shared measurement project

LESSONS LEARNED

- Education and capacity building are needed at the start of almost every new project, as was seen most recently in the shared measurement project.
- Racial equity has to be an explicit focus of the work and new leaders must be cultivated in order to continue to grow the movement.
- People are hungry for collaboration but facilitating this in a way that leverages current work, rather than adds to it, is a continual balancing act.

➤ VERMONT – FARM TO PLATE (F2P)



“Vermont Farm to Plate is the statewide initiative to increase economic development and jobs in Vermont’s food system and improve access to healthy local food for all Vermonters.”

KEY STRATEGIES

- Using an explicit collective impact framework
- Focusing primarily on food-related jobs, economic activity and access
- Serving as the backbone for five working groups: aggregation and distribution, consumer education and marketing, education and workforce development, farmland access and stewardship, production and processing
- Implementing a shared measurement framework based on Results-Based Accountability, an approach that emphasizes population-level results as opposed to focusing on strategies and performance, or the means for getting there (see <http://raguide.org/>)

➤ **LAUNCHED 2009**

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EVALUATION INDICATORS

- 25 goals they hope to reach by 2020 focused on economics, environment, health and education
- Tracks (statewide) population level indicators for each goal using publicly available data, such as: number of jobs created, institutional purchasing metrics, BMI, acres of farmland in production, phosphorus concentrations in waterways, farm to school programs, direct to consumer produce sales, rate of waste disposal and diversion

LESSONS LEARNED

- “It takes time for people to understand what it means to work in a networked way – you can’t rush the process.”
- Collective impact has proven to be a very useful framework. Collective impact articles were required reading at the second and third F2P annual gatherings and helped people to understand the structure of the work.
- Data visualizations are a helpful tool to communicate the big picture, shared goals, and progress being made on these goals.
- “There should be a sixth condition to collective impact – multi-year funding and funding partners.”



REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM WORKING GROUP OF IOWA



“The Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) is a statewide umbrella network for all Iowans working to build a more resilient regional food system.”

LAUNCHED 2003

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KEY STRATEGIES

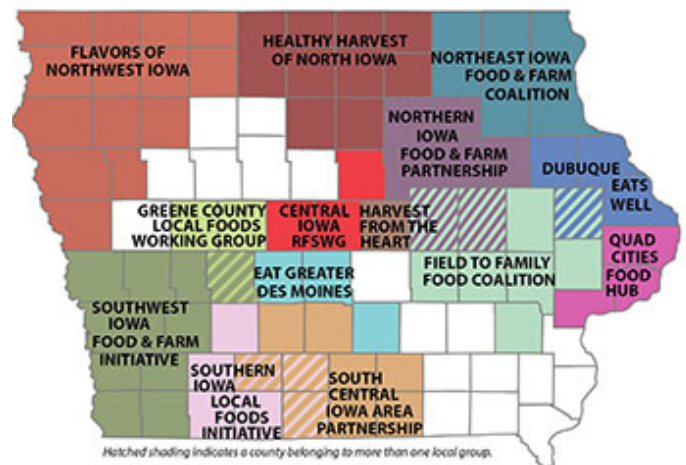
- Using a collective impact and shared measurement framework
- Working with “local food coordinators” for 15 geographically based groups.
- Developing both a statewide report of aggregated data from the geographically based groups as well as short customized reports for each regional group, each of which includes a featured story and farmer
- Engaging regional food coordinators in conversations to discuss evaluation metrics and results at quarterly meetings
- Collecting data on local food production to coincide with the tax season to minimize farmer burden and purchasing data from buyers to coincide with the end of the school year

EVALUATION INDICATORS

- Quantitative economic indicators (e.g., local food sales, local food purchases by institutional and intermediated markets, new jobs created as a result of local food commerce, the public cost of new jobs, and financial leverage secured by local food coordinators)
- Outcomes associated with the networks – economic growth of local food systems, engagement of new and diverse partners, and new efforts.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Relationships and trust are essential to quality data collection.
- “The goal is to build evaluation into the work itself”, meaning to work external evaluators out of a job as the capacity of network actors to integrate evaluation increases.
- “We are not writing 50-page reports anymore. Now we make visually appealing, two-page reports that engage people and become a part of the conversation.”



➤ CALIFORNIA – ROOTS OF CHANGE (ROC)



“Roots of Change delivers roadmaps to victory for the food movement, which seeks a healthy, equitable and resilient food system.”

KEY STRATEGIES

- Using a collective impact framework to advance food policy in California
- Advising, funding, and providing support staff for the California Food Policy Council Network, but not controlling decision-making
- Providing a forum for California’s regions to create synergies and to speak to the Governor with one voice
- Developing frequent briefings on policy issues

EVALUATION INDICATORS

- The number of local food ordinances that are replicated from region to region
- The responsiveness and satisfaction of network members
- Media coverage of ROC policy issues
- The passage of policy

➤ LAUNCHED 2002

➤ CONTACT

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LESSONS LEARNED

- ROC “spent years creating context for the work to emerge, and now it has”.
- It is important to share best practices “so each region of the state doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel”.
- Food Policy Councils can be most effective over the long-term if they operate outside of the government structure.



➤ CENTRAL APPALACHIAN NETWORK (CAN)



“CAN’s mission is to work with individuals, community leaders, businesses, policy makers, nonprofit organizations and others to develop and deploy new economic strategies that create wealth and reduce poverty while restoring and conserving the environment.”

KEY STRATEGIES

- Using a wealth creation framework to measure multiple forms of economic and social capital
- Providing training and technical assistance to more than 1,000 family farmers and food producers annually, across 150 counties in five states
- Working with wholesale buyers to locate, purchase and market locally grown products
- Identifying and addressing gaps in the food system through infrastructure investments, business support, policy advocacy, and peer exchange
- Encouraging investors and funders to support regional food systems
- Timing the collection of economic data with the tax season to minimize the burden on farmers, businesses, and non-profits

EVALUATION INDICATORS

- Qualitative: expansion of local food infrastructure, increased relationships between producers and consumers, increased political attention and influence
- Increased access to markets, as shown in purchases by wholesale retailers and institutions
- Investments in local food systems by internal actors and external supporters
- Number of jobs in local food production
- Dollar amount of food sold by local farmers and producers

LESSONS LEARNED

- Tracking a large variety of indicators year after year can be challenging, and establishing a reasonable and sustainable data collection framework is crucial.
- Varying levels of capacity of partner organizations and turnover of food system actors can make tracking impact over the long-term challenging.

➤ **LAUNCHED 1992**

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- ⁴ This quote refers to the title of a book that influenced the Value Chain Partnership Network, which included the RFSWG of Iowa: Lencloni, P. 2004. *Death by meeting: A leadership fable about solving the most painful problems in business*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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- ⁸ O'Brien, J., Littlefield, J., and Goddard-Truitt, V. 2013. A matter of leadership: Connecting a grantmaker's investments in collaborative leadership development to community results. *Foundation Review* 5(1): 26-42.

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