

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE &
FOOD SYSTEMS FUNDERS



**How do we know what's different?
A Conversation about Food System Outcomes, Indicators, and Metrics**

Moderator:

Christine James, *program officer, The John Merck Fund, MA*

Speakers:

Kim Fortunato, *director, Healthy Communities, Campbell Soup Company, NY*

Alison Hastings, *manager, Office of Strategic Partnerships, Delaware Regional Planning Commission, PA*

Ellen Kahler, *executive director, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, VT*

Christine James

- John Merck Fund—based in Boston
 - o In 2011 decided to become a spend-out foundation—last grant to be given in 2021, will close in 2022
 - o Also expanding geography—all of New England
 - o Put more resources out in a shorter amount of time—make a larger impact
 - o 4 program areas—regional food systems program
 - Farm-to-institution supply chain strategy (hospitals, colleges, etc.)
 - o Original goals—thought they'd be reasonable/thoughtful in setting metrics/benchmarks...but have they been overly ambitious?
 - What is reasonable? Data available?
 - o Private distributors—important on a systems level but can we get info from them to assess progress?

Kim Fortunato

- Invest \$10 mil quarterly—what are best practices?
- Camden, NJ—headquarters
 - o 40% obesity rate for children, “most dangerous city in the nation,” food insecurity more than 65%
- Philanthropic commitment to childhood hunger 2 years ago—\$10 mil over 10 years
 - o Corporate dollars; act on a social philanthropy model. Office identifies organizations to invest in; currently 10 investee organizations on 5 sites

- Areas of focus: food access (77k people, 1 full-service grocery store, no city-wide public transport, 180 corner stores); physical activity/access, nutrition education (across the lifespan); public will
- Criteria to be a partner—4-month planning, logic model
 - o Meet monthly to share and be dynamic in logic models—discuss collectively; work synergistically
 - o If not working collaboratively not invited back
- System-wide change—promoting systems change within a program framework; less policy work now
- Mixed portfolio of sites (charter, public, preschool, etc.)
- Economy as the outcome—Camden needs jobs!
- Collaboration around funders in Camden—analysis of current food economy, recommendations for the future → collective work to leverage more funds
 - o Year 1—\$1 mil more than that which Campbell provided
- Work:
 - o Gardening as part of the food system; getting food into supply chain
 - o Healthy corner store initiative – 22 stores enrolled; target corner stores in close proximity to schools
- Food Trust helping with short-term incremental measurements; measure some incremental change but primarily output measures now (minutes of physical activity; some anecdotes of change (increased physical activity; children being able to tell their parents what to buy/how to shop—but what are longer term behavior changes?))
- Tough time getting data (BMI)—difficult and inconsistent data
- How to collect data? Tool created by the Food Trust on Campbell's behalf—quarterly reporting tool; some like soccer for success have their own reporting tools
- Implement 2 question set at intake—all hospitals in the city have agreed to do it; pilot of 900 patients over 6 weeks at a non-trauma hospital; found estimated 65% food insecurity
 - o Hospital response-what is our role in prevention and addressing this? Healthcare increasingly on board as a partner for future work

Alison Hastings

- Focus on indicators
- DVRPC—funders & planners; network of counties, cities, and stakeholders for implementation
- Greater Philadelphia: more than just stereotypes of ag: urban agriculture, Amish/Mennonite agriculture in a suburbanite area (plain sect community); large regional brands; specialty crops
- Food systems as a planning topic—food system study and plan (plan driven by indicators)
 - o Look at data first to understand the food system; understand social resources (people, capacity, etc.)
 - o Produce a study → look at values, produce a vision and a goal → look at indicators and create recommendations and an ultimate food system plan
- USDA ag census data (what's being produced?); can greater Philadelphia create enough food to feed itself? No—but people want to see proof of a planning assumption
 - o Not enough land to feed 5.5 million people within a 100 mile radius

- Looked at land needed; what would 100 mile foodshed produce; 30 million people live within foodshed—overlaps with NYC
 - Food system planning not about self-sufficiency
 - DVRPC does indicator-driven work as a gov't agency and a planning agency
 - Data, not politics should drive recommendations → objective standpoint
 - 3 rules for indicators:
 - Public data source (no primary data source)
 - Regularly updated every 2-5 years
 - Time series data that dates back to 2002 or older (baseline of 2000 or 2002—going forward, are recommendations being implemented?)
 - Tracking is important for an agency that doesn't do a lot of implementation
 - Compare work to other regions/national datasets—where does region stack up nationally?
 - US Bureau of Labor Statistics looks at non-farm labor production—food system as employment
 - Dashboard: uses judgment to decide where the food system is or isn't moving forward
 - Indicators drive recommendations (10 indicators drive 52 recommendations)
 - **DVRPC.org/food**
 - Need a finite number of indicators to update
 - Study vs. plan—wanted to become experts on food systems before providing recommendations; come from a place of knowledge informed by regional experts

Ellen Kahler

- 2009: VT legislature requested that a state-wide collective plan be established
- 5 conditions for collective impact—shapes the work they're engaged in VT (Campbell using same agenda)
 - 25 goals; 60 high-priority strategies/recommendations; network; finalizing indicators to measure progress; Food System Atlas to maintain communication; organization serving as backbone
- Farm-to-Plate network: 250 organizations (businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions, gov't)—working together collaboratively to address goals
 - Planning process creates shared understanding of the way the food system currently operates; what are the steps to where we want to get in 10 years?; measurement tools to determine whether you're doing what you need to be doing
- Idea that you have a plan, you implement it, you monitor it through indicators, and then you learn and adjust your plan
 - Food system space is dynamic—so we need to dynamically shift what we're implementing
- Quantitative vs. qualitative measures—how do you qualitatively measure the efficacy of the impact that networks are having?
 - Surveying 250+ members of the network—PPT image shows who's showing up at working group meetings (and how often). Should be more dots and larger network lines over time—if people are finding value then they'll show up and expand
 - Network should ideally get denser over time—look at outliers (folks who are less engaged) and draw them in over time
 - Increase new nodes AND increase density

- Network map analysis tools
- Impact measurement systems
 - State of VT enacting; go with this methodology
 - What are outcomes/indicators/benchmarks? (handout)
 - Population-based indicators & performance based indicators
 - Population-based:
 - How much did we do, how well did we do it, and is anyone better off? How have results shown up for the folks we're trying to assist in the work that we're doing?
 - National/regionally-collected data → population-level indicators
 - Numbers of indicators/data points that together can answer the question of who's better off
 - Many are nationally collected datasets
 - 7 key questions for population/community focus (PPT)
 - What are the quality of life conditions we want?
 - How will we recognize it?
 - How can we measure these conditions?
 - How are we doing now? (Need a baseline to see if things have changed over time)
 - Who are our partners?
 - What works to do better? (What are programs that really do work, and how do we deep-dive into them to accelerate the rate of change?)
 - What do we propose to do?
 - Performance accountability focus—can ask grantees to collect data and work in a partnership
 - Gets at what are we figuring out? Form follows function. What are the programs that will deliver what it is you're trying to accomplish?
 - Program performance measures – how much? How well? Is anyone better off?
 - Work with grantees to help establish data reporting—report back to determine whether change is occurring
 - Slides from Marlboro college—benchmarks for a better VT
 - **VTfoodatlas.com**
 - Have all things farm-to-plate in one place—communication for networks; getting to 2020 metrics
 - Results-based accountability; 25 goals
 - Collaboration among funders will have more chance of change occurring
 - Help people find things easier, focus on what's going on in VT
 - Different ways to depict indicators to tell a particular story about what you're trying to do
 - Transparency of indicators—make it easy to find data → show data sources & tables
 - *Question: will the website be open-source?* \$110k into website, \$50k to go → make replicable (license infrastructure?)
 - Website will be constantly updated over 10 years—everything archived over 10 years

Questions and Discussion

How are funders thinking about resourcing current/future data?

- Kim: some organizations they're funding (internal piece) collect data; but also want 3rd-party independent analysis so it's not prejudiced/biased
- Christine: Merck Fund has started to pilot data gathering worksheet to send to grantees— collaboratively developed and being sent out as they're proposing (be clear about what expectations will be; think about what you need to be doing while developing program); grantees' feedback will be taken into account— want to value time & money

Happiness with data sources or lack thereof?

- School data is difficult to access (esp. individual school data)
 - o Want to see impact of specific intervention— funders who have a relationship with the principal in NJ get data
- Ellen: CDC grant to look at metrics for farm-to-school—but haven't found a funder to fund the non-health related metrics
- Molly Anderson: those collecting the metrics need support— what does the public demand support for?

Are we using the right indicators?

- Being iterative—having a process in place to revisit indicators; without scoping that out it won't get done; having a dialogue (having rules for an indicator—originally didn't evaluate farmers' age but now want to start collecting that because of stakeholders' work with beginning farmers)
 - o 3 month work plan allows time for revisiting indicators
- Ellen—have to report back to VT gov't every year; need to settle on measurements to have comfortable baselines and revisit over 10 years
 - o Annual work plan—when and who will be collecting? And how do we make sense of it after? What's the story we're telling about why or why not we're making progress beyond a data point?
- Merck Fund—hard to get info from individual schools; incomplete information from distributor/food management service – need to rethink and get smarter about performance vs. population measures; the data source

Retrospective versus prospective indicator use?

- Start with indicator before the recommendation—engage about 200 stakeholders; limit conversation about the problem and discuss what you want to see
 - o Use indicators as a visionary tool; discuss what you want to change and how to change it
 - o Look at trends at a regional level—discuss influencers
- Molly: indicators can test your theory of change in a region—key leverage indicators will be ones that catalyze lots of other system changes; key outcomes will be ones that indicators are pointing to
 - o Develop what are the leverage and outcome indicators by working with the group, then see if you're achieving those outcomes (if not, something's wrong with your theory of change) → useful for a funder to understand what's happening

- Ellen: the *PATH* is the goal (the iterative process is constantly evolving; other forces at play)

Tension between boards and changes being made?

- Need to tease out difference between implementation and concrete changes
- Goals need to be measureable—economics of farming/purchasing vs. healthy eating (can't measure it)