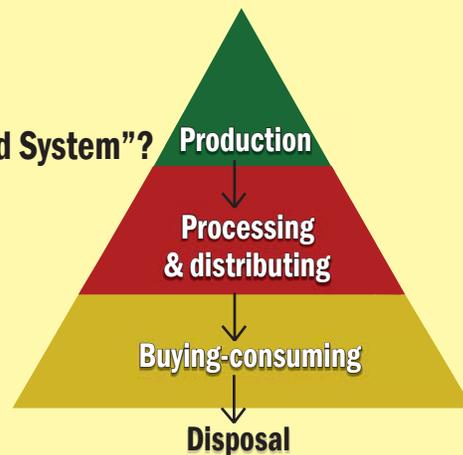


Food Systems at the University of Illinois



What is a “Food System”?



University of Illinois researchers and Extension personnel, along with our partners around the state, explore how foods are produced and how the food system, from the farm to the table, affects our environment, our social structure, our health and our economy. Food production research explores sustainable farming practices and developing foods with specific benefits (e.g. foods with enhanced cancer fighting compounds). Those working on processing, distribution and marketing issues identify ways to revitalize small scale local processing, provide alternative food distribution models and broaden marketing channels, particularly direct marketing venues. Others investigate the impact of food systems on human nutrition and health or the role of food systems in community and economic development in both urban and rural communities. Below are some highlights of our ongoing activities.

Resources and Activities

The Nutrition Analysis Tool (NAT), developed by the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition and supported by the Illinois Council for Food and Agricultural Research (C-FAR), is a web-based program that allows anyone to analyze the foods they eat for various different nutrients. Learn more at: www.ag.uiuc.edu/~food-lab/nat/

Extension resources addressing **Nutrition and Health** and the **Urban Programs Resource Network** can be found at: www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/nutrition/index.html

Farm Direct, produced within the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, is a statewide web-based directory of Illinois farmers who sell their products directly to consumers off the farm, on the web or at farmers markets. For more information go to: www.illinoisfarmdirect.org/

Market Maker™ is a collaboration between the University of Illinois Extension, the Illinois Department of Agriculture, and C-FAR. This interactive mapping system locates businesses and markets for agricultural products in Illinois. For more information see: <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/iidea/>

The Local Food Systems as Community and Economic Development Project in the Laboratory for Community and Economic Development (LCED) housed in the Department of Human and Community Development, poses the question: “Can local food systems create opportunities for community and economic development in rural communities in Central Illinois?” As part of this work they have surveyed customers at Dave’s Supermarket in Fairbury, Illinois, which includes a farmers’ market within the store that sells locally grown foods. They found 85 percent of Dave’s shoppers preferred to buy locally grown produce and that this was due, in part, to the high quality of those products.

A *food system* encompasses the farms where food is produced, the consumers who purchase and eat that food and all of the steps that get food from the farm to the table. At present, food travels an average distance of 1500-2500 miles from farm to consumer. There is growing interest in local, regional or community-based food systems, where foods are produced, processed and sold within a defined geographic region. Proposed benefits of local food systems include greater food security, stronger relationships between producers and consumers and more diversified farming operations and food businesses. Consumer interests in health and “knowing their farmer” are creating opportunities for more fresh foods, small scale farms and food-related businesses, while raising interesting questions about economic, social and environmental impacts of food systems.



Farm Direct and Market Maker™



Dave’s supermarket in Fairbury, IL, photo by Sarah Hultine



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Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Resources and Activities (continued)



Surveying consumers at the markets, photo by Maria Cox

Consumer Preferences and Segmentation of Illinois Farmers Markets. Researchers in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics are studying consumer behavior and preferences in urban, suburban, and downstate farmers markets in Illinois. Findings show that rural and mid-sized city consumers prefer local county farmer participation more than do urban consumers and that urban consumers spend more time and money at the markets.

The **Illinois Initiative for the Development of Entrepreneurs in Agriculture (IDEA)** is jointly sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension and C-FAR. Visit the web site at: <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/iddea/>

Education

Students can pursue related undergraduate and graduate studies through one of our off-campus opportunities or within ACES departments. Students can participate in classes on production, marketing, and food systems, including community supported agriculture, health and nutrition, and in summer research or farming efforts.



"Hands-on" experience, photo by Andy Larson

Students can get hands on experience at the **Diversified Farm** located at the University of Illinois' Allerton Park, near Monticello, Illinois. The farm, run by the Office of Continuing Education, gives student interns farming and marketing experience by producing a wide variety of vegetable crops used, in part, by the Allerton Conference Center. **Just Food** is a newly formed student organization with the objective of renovating the campus and community food system.



Soy products at Bevier Café, photo by Michelle Wander

Functional foods and **local foods** are used at **Bevier Café**. The café, which is a student-operated laboratory in Quantity Food Preparation and Service, is located in Bevier Hall on the UIUC campus. The café includes a store that features Illinois grown food products including soy products. Chef John Louis-Ledent is making a concerted effort to incorporate locally grown food into the café's daily menu. Go to: www.ag.uiuc.edu/~food-lab/bevier/menu.html

We can help you find out more about:

- production/harvesting
- processing/packaging
- distribution
- marketing
- consumer behavior
- purchase/consumption

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Student at the Diversified Farm, photo by Allerton C. Center

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